Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-ethnic Chinese Context: Feasibility of Genred Task Instructional Approaches and Implications for Teacher Development

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CASE STUDY OF AN ENGLISH PROGRAM IN A MULTI-ETHNIC CHINESE CONTEXT: 
FEASIBILITY OF GENRED TASK INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES AND 
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

by

MERIDETH HOAGLAND

Under the Direction of Diane Belcher (PhD)

ABSTRACT
The current study examines the feasibility of task- and genre-based instruction in an English program located in an under-examined region of the People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.), a demographically diverse setting to the far west of the developed coastal region. The study investigates how and to what extent genred task instruction (GTI), an innovative construct harmonizing SLA and genre-pedagogical recommendations, is implemented in this setting, considering local stakeholders’ perspectives with respect to local dynamics. The study further attempts to determine the nature of the teacher support in the target context, considering what additional support might be necessary to sustain GTI in the target context. In the study, multiple sources of ethnographic data, collected over the course of an academic year, are examined via a
semi-inductive analytic process (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Katz, 2001), developing a case study of the target setting as an instance of GTI implementation in western China1. The data are synthesized and interpreted with reference to Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001; Roth & Lee, 2007). Findings from the study indicate that most local teachers resist implementing task-based methodologies, viewing them as unfeasible in light of immovable curricular constraints—especially the College English Test (CET), a condition of graduation—and what administrators, teachers, and students view as low student morale. One participant, a “foreign teacher” who is not held responsible for preparing students for the CET, is overcoming low morale with recourse to genred task methodologies which tap into students’ values for “practical” activity, as contrasted to the academic prestige valued by their teachers and indexed in test performance. Implications of these findings for pedagogy, teacher education, and research are discussed.

INDEX WORDS: Chinese learners, Task-based teaching (TBLT), Genre-based instruction, Western China, Genre pedagogy

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1 The term “western China” in this paper is operationalized as Chinese regions beyond the coastal provinces. Western China is commonly considered to be at a lower level of economic development, in part due to economic policies of previous decades that targeted eastern China; and to enjoy more linguistic and ethnic diversity (Goodman, 2004). This is, as Goodman (2004) points out, an oversimplification of a highly complex situation.
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DEDICATION

To my family

I am grateful to the many friends and family members who have enabled me to complete my graduate work. To my dear friends in the south Atlanta community, particularly Sharon, the Gibson family, Ant and Angel, Jana, and Brit—thank you for your unfailing care and inspiration. Special thanks to my Aunt Kathy for her kind support. Your generosity (and freezerfuls of homemade soup) kept my soul and body together during my MA studies, and you made it possible for me to conduct preparatory research during the summer of 2013.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been considered part of a positive “paradigm shift” (Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009) away from methods of language teaching which rely on drills, memorization, and other methods derived from behaviorist theory (cf. Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Shintani, 2013; Kim, 2015; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007; for a dissenting perspective, see Swan, 2005). It has gained credence for its alignment, not only with currents of thought in sociolinguistics and social-constructionist educational theory, but also for its firm connections between pedagogical practice and the relatively young, empirically-driven field of Second Language Acquisition (Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009; cf. Skehan, 2003).

TBLT has been adopted, at least at the level of educational policy, in many settings, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Adams & Newton, 2009; Butler, 2011; Candlin, 2013; Carless, 2007, 2009; Hu & Adamson, 2012). According to some observers, educational reforms toward TBLT have been welcomed by practitioners (e.g., Cheng, 2011). Yet the transition to more use of task-based approaches has not been smooth in many cases, with observers citing the difficulty of implementing tasks in classrooms where learners share a first language, contexts of language use are distant, traditional teacher roles are resistant to change, and an examination-oriented educational system constrains classroom practice (cf. Adams & Newton; Butler, 2005; Carless, 2007, 2009, 2010; Deng & Carless, 2010; Nunan, 2004). Carless’s (2012) chapter, for instance, summarizing an edited volume on TBLT across Asian settings including mainland China and Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan, notes the common difficulties of traditional
educational roles for students and teacher, and/or an examination orientation in these settings.

As a means of addressing these contextual constraints, some scholars have called for the implementation of a modified TBLT approach that is more test-oriented, allows for more grammar presentation (Carless, 2007), and, in more recent calls, supplies the missing ingredient of authentic context with reference to genre-based instruction (Carmichael, Wu, & Lee, 2013; Luk, 2009). In fact, with reference to the final point, precisely such a syllabus has been implemented at the primary level in Singapore (Lin, 2003).

But whether such adaptations make TBLT more effective in Asian and especially Chinese contexts is an open question. Much research on English use and education in the P.R.C., at least in English-medium outlets, has focused on relatively well-resourced institutions in the eastern part of the state (cf. Beckett & MacPherson, 2005; Yang, 2008). Butler’s (2011) comprehensive overview of TBLT’s uptake in the Asia-Pacific region, for instance, highlights classroom-based studies conducted in Guangdong and Shenzhen, both major urban centers on China’s eastern coast. Adams and Newton (2009), in their introduction to the special issue on TBLT in the Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, reference “a large body of research” on TBLT in Asia (p. 5); however, the classroom studies they cite in reference to Chinese contexts report on research conducted in Hong Kong (7 publications, highlighting the work of Carless 2004, 2007, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2009), Taiwan (2 publications), and Guangdong (2 publications)—again, all

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2 Although some work has been done into the possible intersections of task and genre, as will be discussed further below, not enough research into these intersections exists, particularly in EFL contexts (cf. Derewianka, 2003; Luk, 2009).
highly developed urban centers of China’s coastal region. In fact, relatively little is known about how TBLT is taken up in more remote regions of China, where different dynamics are at play to those of the highly developed cities.

In ground-breaking discussions of education (but not specifically TBLT) in western China, the edited volumes of Feng (2011), Feng and Adamson (2014), and Leibold and Cheng (2014) stress the relative inadequacy of English-language instruction to students in these regions. These authors point out the difficulty of language teaching in areas where qualified teachers are scarce, resources are limited, and Mandarin Chinese is the instructional priority for “minority” students. The term “minority” is an imperfect translation of the Mandarin term minzu, an emic designation of any ethnic group other than the “super-majority” Han, which constitutes over 91% of the population of China (Leibold & Chen, 2014, p. 7), and 40% of the population of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region, the site of the present study. Minzu students in Xinjiang typically speak other, typologically different languages as a first language—e.g., Turkic languages such as Kazakh, Mongolian, and Uyghur (see also Feng, 2013).

Partly as a response to the educational obstacles faced by minzu students, “preferential policies” allowing lower college admissions criteria, including the waiving of the English requirement, have been made available for these students (cf. Simayi, 2014; Sunuodula & Cao, 2014). Yet educational outcomes for such students remain disappointing, and “creating a culturally relevant, high quality, and practical curriculum remain key challenges [sic]” (Leibold & Chen, 2014, p. 7).

As Feng (2005) has noted, the current state of language educational policy at the pre-tertiary level in western China is a two-tracked bilingual model based on ethno-
linguistic identity. That is, for L1-Chinese students, the widely-used term “bilingual education” means language instruction in Mandarin and English, and English-medium instruction in some cases; while for speakers of other languages as L1, the same term means 1) language instruction in Mandarin, 2) no English instruction, 3) the L1 taught as the subject of a single course, and 4) Mandarin-medium instruction for all other subjects. *Minzu* students who opt to attend “Chinese schools,” where English instruction is available and resources and test outcomes are markedly higher than in *minzu* schools, do not have the option of studying the native language even as a school subject (Tsung, 2014). Given this state of affairs at the pre-college level, it is unsurprising that English education at the college level in western China produces significantly lower outcomes, as measured by national tests, than that of education in coastal regions (Yang, 2008).

Hu’s (2005) survey of practices among secondary-school English teachers pointed out nearly ten years ago that contextual factors have differential impacts on instructional approaches in various parts of China, with lower levels of economic development being associated with more traditional instructional approaches, but this line of research has not been widely taken up in the English-medium literature, and influential TBLT scholarship (e.g., Adams & Newton, 2009; Butler, 2011) continues to highlight research in coastal China while neglecting the interior, with the implication, at least, that the coastal area is representative of mainland China as a whole.

A few reports have emerged investigating practitioner development in China’s “hinterland” region (e.g., Gao, 2010; Gao & Xu, 2014; Li & Edwards, 2013), but much remains unknown; specifically, it is unclear whether and how practitioners in this region engage with TBLT, the nationally-prescribed approach to English teaching (Adams &
Newton, 2009). To what extent, then, TBLT approaches are being implemented in this region with its particular socio-linguistic, economic, and educational dynamics, and to what extent the instructional adaptations recommended for other Chinese settings might be appropriate here, are, again, open questions.

This dissertation study attempts to address these gaps in the field’s knowledge base by considering the feasibility of task and genre approaches, from the perspective of students, instructors, and administrators in an English department in a multi-ethnic region of western China. Ethnographic participation and observation in the target context over an 11-month period serve as the cornerstone of the data collected in the study. Supplementing this data are non-participant observation and interview data; instructional artifacts such as multimedia materials, textbooks; and questionnaires with students, instructors, and administrators. The data contribute to the construction of a case study of the target setting as an instance of task and genre implementation in diverse region of China. The goal of the project is to gain insight into the implementation of recommended teaching approaches in the target context, for use in that context, and with application to English-language programs in (Chinese) contexts where similar dynamics are at play.

The review of literature that follows overviews two broad strands of research. The first section of the review summarizes research on major constructs including task, form-focused instruction, pre-task planning, and genre, finally offering an operational definition of the focal construct, genred task instruction (GTI), which conflates SLA and genre-pedagogy recommendations into a single methodological approach. The second section considers models of collaborative teacher development grounded in Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT). Each section ends with a discussion of the focal constructs (GTI
and teacher development, respectively) in Chinese educational settings, in order to provide a backdrop against which the findings of the current study can be better understood.

1.1 Towards “Genred Task Instruction” (GTI): Harmonizing SLA and Genre Pedagogy Recommendations

As Long (2015) explains, task-based language teaching is a comprehensive and well-documented approach to instruction comprising needs analysis, syllabus and materials design, methodology, and testing—each component referred to tasks relevant to students’ activities in the “real world” (cf. Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009). In this approach, as Van den Branden (2016) has recently stressed, the teacher’s role, although largely overlooked in the TBLT literature, is “crucial,” not only for providing the types of interaction thought to be beneficial for language development, but at every phase of instruction, particularly the implementation of tasks at all stages. Widely promoted and accepted (Mackey, 2016; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2008), the approach nonetheless continues to meet with obstacles in implementation; “in resource-starved situations,” in particular, Long (2015) notes that “progress [in implementing TBLT] has inevitably been slow and limited in some respects” (p. 20).

Central to an understanding of task-based instruction is an adequate description of task. In the following section, I provide construct definitions of task from the subfield of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). To expand these definitions, I summarize research on the important sub-constructs form-focused instruction and pre-task planning, two areas of inquiry that converge on key constructs in a very different subfield—genre
As I will explain, scholars including Byrnes (2015) have argued that in order to specify the texts and contexts of TBLT more fully, and with greater theoretical depth, TBLT should be rooted in genre pedagogy. Accordingly, I next describe genre, consider intersections between task and genre, and finally present operational definitions of task, task-based teaching (TBLT), and a new construct harmonizing task and genre approaches, what I call “genred task instruction” (GTI). Finally, I contextualize these constructs in Asian EFL.

1.1.1 SLA Definitions of Task

Discussions of task-based language teaching typically begin with various compilations of task definitions, in particular those of prominent researchers such as Ellis (2003), Long (1985), Prabhu (1987), and Skehan (1996), among others (e.g., Ellis, 2003; Kim, 2015; Nunan, 2004). In light of Ellis’s (2003, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, etc.) notable contributions to the field, and his efforts as a researcher affiliated with institutions in China and Australia to contribute to English language teaching in the Asia-Pacific region, I provide his (2003) definition in full below, noting that it comprehensively synthesizes a number of prior definitions in the literature.

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms. A task is intended to result in language use that bears a resemblance, direct or indirect, to the way language is used in the real world. Like other language activities, a task
can engage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills and also various
cognitive processes. (p.16)³

In a more recent publication, Ellis and Shintani (2013) distill several criteria from
this definition: a task should be meaning- and outcome-focused, rather than focused on
the quality of linguistic output; should involve a gap of some kind, or “a need to convey
information”; and should depend on learners’ “own resources” for completion (p. 136).
These definitions and task criteria are helpful in their emphasis on meaning, as well as in
their clarification of the relationship between real-world and pedagogical tasks⁴, a
particularly important theme in this study (cf. also Nunan, 2006).

Intriguingly, TBLT research, emerging from the largely cognitivist field of SLA,
has converged on instructional features similar to those highlighted by the more social-
constructionist field of genre pedagogy; both strands of research center on meaning-
oriented, contextualized communicative events, intentionally fostered (or “scaffolded”)
through attention to content and form. Two major areas of inquiry in TBLT which
coincide with key constructs in genre pedagogy, and particularly Systemic Functional
Linguistic pedagogy (discussed below), include pre-task planning (Ellis, 2003) and form-
focused instruction (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Ellis,
Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). These constructs are discussed below in order to develop
the study’s operational definition of task as a component of genred task instruction.

1.1.1.1 Form-focused instruction. Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2001) observe
that a Form-focused instruction (FFI) approach posits that since learners cannot

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³ Tasks may include input as well as output tasks (cf. Ellis & Shintani, 2013). In line with the focus on
production quality in this review, I assume a focus on output tasks.
the classroom. Pedagogical tasks are those that occur in the classroom” (p. 14).
simultaneously process form and meaning, form must be explicitly attended to, in order that learners will have the opportunity to “notice” and thus acquire it, as Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis predicts (p. 409; cf also Ellis, 2005; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002; Muranoi, 2000). FFI is particularly important as a response to concerns that TBLT does not give sufficient attention to “discrete” (Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009) linguistic forms (cf. McDonough, 2015; Li, Ellis, & Zhu, 2016); under language acquisition theory, in fact, TBLT is thought preferable to form-driven approaches in that it is responsive to learners’ demonstrated needs; “it respects the learner’s internal syllabus” (Long, 2015, p. 8), providing explicit linguistic instruction “at moments likely to be optimal for acquisition because triggered by learners’ processing difficulties,” which are displayed in the act of task performance (Long, 2015, p. 7).

In pedagogical practice, form-focused instruction may take place at any phase of task, may comprise both planned and incidental episodes, may be either preemptive or reactive, and may be initiated by either teachers or students (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). Nunan (2004) suggests that FFI should be sequenced before free task performance. Other researchers, however, argue for more integrated FFI which occurs only once meaning-focused tasks are underway, or during a post-task phase (cf. Ellis, 2003, 2005; Muranoi, 2000; Nunan, 2006; Willis & Wills, 2007). Ellis and Shintani (2013) warn that if FFI takes place at the pre-task phase, learners may not engage in tasks communicatively (p. 141). In planned FFI, tasks are chosen deliberately to elicit particular structures, which are then attended to explicitly once the meaning-focused task is underway (cf. Ellis, 2003).
Ortega (1999) draws an explicit connection between form-focused instruction, and pre-task planning, relying on information-processing models of language use (see Ellis, 2003, 2005)\(^5\) to argue that planning allows learners to engage in precisely that attention to form which will facilitate acquisition.

1.1.1.2 Pre-task planning. Several scholars (Ellis, 2005; Robinson & Gilabert, 2013; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005) have noted that the task-implementation feature of planning in particular has received a great deal of attention from TBLT researchers (see, e.g., the edited volume of Ellis, 2005; Ellis, 2009b; Foster, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 2006; Ortega, 1999; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). Due to its correspondence to both information-processing theories—i.e., the “conceptualization” stage of language use (Ellis, 2005)—and SFL pedagogy—i.e., an emphasis on “building field” and “scaffolding” (cf. Martin, 2000; Rose & Martin, 2012; also McDonough, 2015)—I highlight it here. Although conceptualization and field building are recursive processes, and correspondingly planning at all phases of task (pre-, during, and post-task) are relevant to this discussion, I focus my review below on pre-task planning.

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\(^5\) Levelt’s (1989) model of speech production, an information-processing model, has been a particularly important model in task planning studies (Ellis, 2003, 2005; see also Bygate, 1996, cited in Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 2009b; Robinson, 2011; Sangarun, 2005; Skehan, 2009; Yuan & Ellis, 2003). This theoretical model posits three mechanisms contributing to speech: conceptualization, formulation, and articulation. The model converges well with task-based pedagogy, with the three mechanisms theoretically accounting for various outcomes in terms of various features of task (Ellis, 2005). Ellis (2005) explains that the conceptualization stage of Levelt’s model involves setting communicative goals and selecting corresponding speech acts, which constitute the “pre-verbal message.” The formulation stage involves mapping this pre-verbal message onto language. In this phase, lexis is retrieved first, and necessary syntax triggered by the lexis (see p. 12). The selected lexis and syntax are then encoded phonologically, but not pronounced until the articulation stage, in which phonological encodings of speech chunks are transferred to the articulatory muscles. Ellis (2005), building on the arguments of De Bot (1992), contends that for first language users, conceptualization is thought to be a controlled process, while formulation and articulation are automatic; however, all three processes are likely controlled for second language users (cf. p. 13).
Ellis (2005, 2009) distinguishes among two main types of planning, each with two subtypes: pre-task and within-task planning (also called “online planning” in some studies, e.g., Yuan & Ellis, 2003; see also Ellis & Yuan, 2005). Ellis (2003) defines pre-task planning as “the process by which learners plan what they are going to say or write before commencing a task,” by “attend[ing] to propositional content, or to the organization of information, or to the choice of language” (p. 348). Pre-task planning comprises two subtypes: strategic planning and rehearsal. As their names indicate, strategic planning offers learners opportunity to decide “what content to express and what language to use” (Ellis, 2009b, p. 474), while rehearsal offers them opportunities to practice performing the task “before the ‘main performance’” (Ellis, 2005, p. 3). Yuan and Ellis (2003) define on-line planning (or ‘within-task’ planning) as “the process by which speakers attend carefully to the formulation stage [discussed below] during speech planning and engage in pre-production and post-production monitoring of their speech acts” (p. 6).

1.1.1.3 Pre-task planning conditions and production quality outcomes. The fact that pre-task planning has beneficial effects on oral performance versus no planning, most consistently on the fluency of performance, but also fairly clearly on complexity (especially syntactic), is clear from several extensive surveys of planning literature, including the synthetic reviews compiled by Ellis (2005), Ellis (2009), Ortega, (1999),

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6 Ellis (2005) states that pre-task planning differs from “pre-task activity” (e.g., modeling the task, activating schema and providing vocabulary input, performing a similar task), in that pre-task planning contributes to the actual task learners have to perform (cf. Ellis, 2003). As such, pre-task planning is distinct from the Teaching-Learning Cycle in Systemic Functional Linguistics pedagogy (discussed below), which directs learners to construct similar texts successively, not rehearse actual tasks (Rose & Martin, 2009).

7 See footnote, above.
and Yuan and Ellis (2003). Generally speaking, Ellis (2009b) observes, strategic planning appears to benefit fluency quite consistently, while effects on complexity and accuracy are less conclusive. Overall, there appears to be a tradeoff between complexity and accuracy (Ellis, 2009b; cf. also Ortega, 1999). Results for written tasks are inconclusive; however, so far results point to the value of (online or careful) planning for written accuracy, and for writing in general in terms of greater accuracy and complexity of production (Ellis & Yuan, 2004, 2005). More specifically, as Kim (2015) has implied, findings regarding guided planning, although mixed, seem promising; several of the studies reviewed in her paper found a guided planning condition to be more beneficial than an unguided condition. In line with Kim’s (2015) observations, it appears that production quality improves when strategic planning is 1) more detailed (Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan & Foster, 2005), 2) provides more linguistic input (Kawauchi, 2005), and 3) provides more focused attention to meaning and form (Sangarun, 2005). The findings from these studies provide some experimental rationale for the notion of scaffolding learners’ performance as in one school of genre instruction (Rose & Martin, 2012; cf. also Kim, 2013). This instructional approach and its potential intersections with TBLT are examined in the following sections.

1.1.2 Genre

Genre has been defined in various ways, with definitions in general clustering around a few prominent schools of genre theory (Hyon, 1996; Martin, 2009): as a “staged[,] goal-oriented social process” (Rose & Martin, 2012, p. 1; Martin, 2009); as “a class of communicative events” sharing a purpose across a discourse community, which

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8 This section focuses on pre-planning effects in monologic tasks; for a review of pre-planning effects in interactive tasks, see Kim (2015).
purpose in turn “shapes the schematic structure …[,] content[,] and style” of these communicative events (Swales, 1990, p. 58); or, as in another prominent view derived from L1 composition studies, a “socio-cognitive concept stored in the schemas of expert writers” (Johns, 2009, p. 44). Common to all these definitions is a view of language as eminently meaningful—a view which genre approaches share with TBLT. Unlike TBLT, however, these approaches highlight the schematic or discoursal shape of texts that emerges processually in response to their purposes in authentic contexts of use. A particular contribution of the third definition is its premium on developing schematic knowledge, not just of discrete lexicogrammatical items, but of whole communicative events.

In terms of instructional approaches, one genre-based framework is organized with attention to the ways that content area, along with its related lexicogrammar, or field (Martin, 2009; Rose & Martin, 2012), is carefully built up through explicit modeling, joint teacher-learner genre construction, and finally independent construction in a unit of instruction called the Teaching-Learning Cycle (Martin, 2000; Rose & Martin, 2012; compare the SFL-influenced TBLT work of Nunan, 2004). Such Systemic-Functional Linguistic (SFL) approaches, which have been widely adopted at the national curricular level in the Asia-Pacific region (Cruickshank, 2009; Derewianka 2003; Lin, 2003), specify 1) target pedagogical texts in reference to their social purpose, along with the 2)

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9In reference to operationalizations of context, an important distinction should be made between two orientations to genre, that of the Systemic-Functional Linguistic (SFL) school (Martin, 2009; Rose & Martin, 2012) and the ESP school (Swales, 1990). For SFL, since it was designed for a primary-school literacy setting (Martin, 2009), authentic contexts of use are those defined by school subjects; building context around language tasks involves building subject-matter content and language knowledge, such as knowledge of history (Martin, 2000; Rose & Martin, 2012). For ESP, genre contexts correspond to (professional or academic) discourse communities (defined in Swales, 1990, pp. 24-27).
lexicogrammar and move-structure stages that realize those purposes (for instance, historical narrative genres, often realized through nominalization; Martin, 2000; Rose & Martin, 2012).

1.1.3 Genre-TBLT Intersections

One potential intersection between task and genre has been noted above: i.e., the potential overlap between the major parameter of planning, in the SLA literature, and the commitment to scaffolding learners’ production as in the Teaching-Learning Cycle, in the SFL literature. Several scholars have observed or explicitly advocated other intersections between genre and task-based approaches (e.g., Byrnes, 2015; Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006; Luk, 2009; Nunan, 2006; Paltridge, 2001; Swales, 1990; cf. Cruickshank, 2009). Taken together, their contributions point to the potential for genre approaches to supplement a TBLT approach by helping practitioners specify and explicate the contextual purposes, text types, and linguistic features that are relevant to target language tasks.

Ellis (2003) acknowledges the difficulty establishing with any definiteness the authenticity, or real-world correspondence (“direct or indirect,” p. 16) of tasks (see pp. 305-306, in reference to task assessment; cf. Skehan, 2003). Ellis (2003) elsewhere states that tasks can be authentic in their simulation of real-world contexts, or in their “interactional authenticity,” e.g., their use of a real-world-like information exchange (p. 6; see also Ellis & Shintani, 2013), but there is little indication in Ellis’s (2003) work of

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10 Ellis (2005) states that pre-task planning differs from “pre-task activity” (e.g., modeling the task, activating schema and providing vocabulary input, performing a similar task), in that pre-task planning contributes to the actual task learners have to perform (cf. Ellis, 2003). As such, pre-task planning is somewhat distinct from scaffolding activity in the SFL teaching-learning cycle (Rose & Martin, 2009). Whether learner-directed (SLA) or instructor-directed (SFL) planning is implemented, however, the two approaches share a common goal of extending and enriching production through intentional preparation.
how authenticity may be achieved with reference to real-world contexts. In fact Ellis (2003) cites Swales’ (1990) observation that TBLT is influenced by SLA findings on the one hand but not enough by real-world contextual constraints on the other (p. 69). This is precisely a point at which genre theory is relevant to a TBLT approach.

Swales’ (1990) and Ellis’s (2003) admissions are borne out by Luk’s (2009) study of an unsuccessful TBLT class in Hong Kong. Luk (2009) found that the pre-task work on a debate task failed to take into account generic and discourse features of debates and that both students and the instructor were unsatisfied with the class—this although pre-task planning had included form-focused instruction, as prescribed in the TBLT literature. It seems clear that with their emphasis on contextual purposes for language use, genre approaches are uniquely suited to enhance the tasks promoted in a TBLT approach.

As to text types, secondly, Ellis (2003) argues that a rhetorical syllabus (i.e., organized according to specific rhetorical modes such as narratives and descriptions, and language functions such as defining, classifying, and giving examples) may have benefits from a language-acquisition perspective, since SLA research has demonstrated that “discourse domain” influences negotiation of meaning and production quality (p. 212). Such a syllabus is precisely the syllabus promoted in a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach such as that which Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, and Sprang (2006) argue for. The task-based curriculum they propose is supplemented with an SFL approach in specifying sequences of genres and their respective lexicogrammatical features. Byrnes (2015) argues not only that a genre approach to TBLT is beneficial, but that such an approach to
TBLT is necessary for supplying the “curricular framing” that can ensure its “succeeding in the way it deserves to succeed” (p. 194).

When taken into consideration along with the influence of genre theory or genre-related constructs in curricular documents in Asia (Cruickshank, 2009; Derewianka 2003; Hoagland, Barron Serrano, & Geng, in preparation; Lin, 2003), the scholarship reviewed here appears to warrant an embedded focus on genre in a study of TBLT in the target research setting. Genre is acknowledged to be an important component of a well-developed task-based approach (Byrnes, 2015; Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006), even if it is a component that is overlooked in most SLA literature (cf. Byrnes, 2015, Bygate & Samuda, 2005; Plonsky & Kim, 2016).

1.1.4 Operational Definitions: Task, TBLT, and GTI

An operational definition of task, for the purposes of this study, is as follows: A task is a carefully scaffolded, contextualized, meaning-focused instructional unit, comprised of pre-, during-, and post-performance phases, in which learners may rely on previously learned and/or new linguistic input (provided in the pre-performance phase), in order to convey meaning (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Rose & Martin, 2012; Swales, 1990). Task-based teaching, or TBLT, is an approach to instruction that relies on the implementation of tasks as thus defined.11 Genre-informed TBLT, or what I call “genred task instruction” (GTI), implements tasks with explicit attention to, and pedagogical support for an understanding of, the interlinked contexts, purposes, text types and

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11 Task-supported teaching (TST) uses task as supplemental to another kind of syllabus, i.e. a linguistic, especially a grammar-based one. In a recent study, Li, Ellis, and Zhu (2016) found that TST was more effective than TBLT for the acquisition of a single grammatical feature, the passive verb construction. However, the “distinction” between TBLT and TST “is not ... watertight,” since even practitioners who implement a task-based syllabus may also include and systematically present linguistic material, as in a linguistic syllabus (Ellis, 2014, p. 103); the more familiar acronym, TBLT, is used throughout this dissertation to comprise both TBLT and TST.
linguistic features relevant to varied tasks. It may also (as per Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006) organize instruction at the curricular level to give comprehensive coverage of text types and features. Along with task-based teaching, genred task instruction is a subset of communicative language teaching (cf. Nunan, 2006).

As a complex, multi-faceted construct, GTI encompasses a diversity of activity types. Within each activity, one or more aspects of task or genre (e.g., the need to convey information, the modeling of a target generic structure) may be foregrounded while others recede. Taken together, however, *the sum of activity in a classroom implementing GTI constitutes a focus on meaningful, context-embedded, scaffolded communication*. In line with Byrnes (2015), it fosters language development, where such development is defined as “the ability to use a continuously expanding range of text or discourse types, oral and written, where these text types are understood as instantiating ways of doing, knowing, and being in cultural contexts” (p. 213).

### 1.1.5 GTI Contextualized

#### 1.1.5.1 Implementing TBLT in Asia

As discussed in the opening section, implementing a task-based syllabus in an Asian context is not a straightforward undertaking. Regardless of top-down curriculum recommendations for TBLT at the policy level, TBLT is not always implemented effectively in classrooms (Butler, 2011; cf. also Adams & Newton, 2009; Hu & Adamson, 2012). This is attributed to multiple factors, such as “traditional teacher roles” (Deng & Carless, 2010), a misunderstanding of communicative language teaching (which includes TBLT; for a discussion of this relationship, see Nunan, 2006) on the part of teachers; a lack of relevant, authentic materials or natural contexts of English use; and above all an exam-dominated culture that constrains what teachers are able to do in the
classroom (Adams & Newton, 2009; Butler, 2011; see also Carless, 2007, 2012; Deng & Carless, 2010). Although some observers also attribute the lack of TBLT’s success in some cases to students’ passive behavior (cf. Adams & Newton, 2009), other researchers concur that this is a stereotype that is not borne out in observation of actual Asian classrooms (Butler, 2011).

The implementation of TBLT may be even more complex in western China, where there is the added complication of trilingual education (i.e., L1 indigenous language, L2 Mandarin, and L3 English; Sunuodula & Cao, 2014; Sunuodula & Feng, 2011), and English oral proficiency rates as measured by the high-stakes CET exam (discussed below) are considerably lower than in the rest of the country (Jin & Yang, 2006). Again, however, most research into Chinese settings has focused on the highly developed eastern regions of the country (e.g., in Hong Kong); little is known about the implementation of TBLT in other parts of China (Carless, 2012).

As to the first two difficulties highlighted above, teacher roles and uptake of TBLT, Carless (2012) recommends increased investment in teacher development and support for TBLT (cf. also Adams & Newton, 2009; Butler, 2011). In addressing the lack of relevant, authentic materials or natural contexts of English use, a genre/task framework (e.g., Nunan, 2006; Paltridge, 2001; Swales, 1990; cf. Cruickshank, 2009) that organizes tasks around real-world and content-area knowledge seems promising (cf. Hu, 2013).

But further investigation is needed as to whether these modifications are appropriate in Chinese contexts beyond those typically researched. In particular, as regards the intensive examination culture so frequently invoked in discussions of Chinese education, it is important to consider the extent to which examinations actually shape
teacher practice and student behavior in settings where pass rates are low. Deng and Carless (2010) argue that in “assessment-dominated” and especially “Confucian-heritage” contexts, “achievement in examinations becomes a de facto aim of schooling,” and that in order to promote CLT\textsuperscript{12}, policymakers should implement assessments that require learners to use language communicatively (pp. 300-301). Their comments overlook the many thousands of students in the Chinese education system who have not performed well on tests. It is unclear whether a more intensive examination focus is an appropriate modification of TBLT for such students.

1.1.5.2 Implementing Genre Approaches in Chinese Contexts

A significant number of Mandarin-medium publications over the past fifteen years has considered genre in Chinese EFL, mostly tertiary, contexts. In a comprehensive survey of 14 Chinese-medium journals, Liang and Qin (2009) conclude that the ESP genre approaches discussed in the studies “not only help students realize the communicative nature of reading and writing, but also help them master fixed and reliable discourse patterns” (p. 47, translation). Other studies published in Mandarin have argued for the implementation of genre approaches in Chinese settings (S. Wang, 2001); noted the gap between genre theory and pedagogical practices in tertiary contexts (Cai, 2005; Lu, 2008) and documented the success of these approaches in Chinese universities (Huang & Li, 2012; Zhao, 2004). Taken together, these studies suggest that genre approaches are welcomed in some Chinese EFL tertiary settings. Moves analysis figures prominently in two of the studies, but it is unclear that this approach is taken up with attention to context and purpose; it may be used as a tool for approximating

\textsuperscript{12} Again, for the relationship between TBLT and CLT, see Nunan (2006).
“correct” structure in line with an uncritical “genre-acquisition” orientation (cf. Johns, 2015). It is possible, further, that given the constraints of well-documented washback effects (e.g., Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005; Zheng & Cheng, 2008), existing approaches may focus narrowly on a restricted number of test-oriented text types, perhaps referring these to “cultural contexts” (Byrnes, 2015) in limited ways.

1.1.6 GTI in the Current Study

The foregoing review has offered an operational definition of task-based teaching informed by genre pedagogy. It suggests the new term, genred task instruction (GTI), to index the intersecting approaches to scaffolded, meaning-oriented language instruction that have emerged as prominent recommendations in the SLA and genre pedagogy literatures. The current study examines the extent to which stakeholders in the research context engage with various components of task and genre as defined above, in order to determine the feasibility of GTI in the target context.

1.2 SCT-Informed Approaches to Teacher Development in Asian Contexts

In line with the study’s focus on teacher development, the following section surveys approaches to capturing and facilitating development that are implemented in the current study, grounding them in Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), currently the field’s prominent conceptual framework for investigating teacher development.

Having studied English language teaching in the greater China region since the 1990’s, Carless (2012) thoughtfully articulates the complexity of providing “in-depth” teacher support for task-based instruction in this region. Of special relevance to the current study, Carless (2012) notes the inadequacy of “mass centralized short-term training programs” for TBLT in light of the P.R.C.’s enormous diversity and “the
disparity between the mainly advanced metropolitan and coastal areas versus the rural hinterland” (p. 353). The typical modes of teacher support for TBLT in China, he implies, are unlikely to equip teachers to effectively implement the nationally mandated English teaching approach in their respective contexts. Carless’s (2012) comments allow for the potential of other, more integrative approaches to teacher development, including those grounded in Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), in the context of the current study.

The following section surveys models of teacher development compatible with SCT. First, an operational definition of teacher development is offered, and some constructs of interest within this domain are described. Next, SCT and its “cognate theory,” (Cultural-Historical) Activity Theory, or CHAT (Cross, 2010), are described. These constitute a conceptual base for a discussion of L2 teacher development. In a final section, English language teacher development practices in Chinese EFL contexts are addressed, and, in light of these, the feasibility of SCT-informed approaches to investigating professional development in such contexts.

1.2.1 An Operational Definition of Teacher Development

Contemporary scholarship sees second-language (L2) teacher development as a longitudinal process of growth that takes root in teachers’ lived experiences as learners and teachers, is nurtured through ongoing, mutually supportive cycles of reflection and interaction in social contexts, and results in expanded capacity for action and conceptualizations of self, others, and the complex, context-embedded activity of language teaching (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 1998; Gu, 2007; Johnson, 2006; 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Kubanyiova, 2012; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007). From a field originally fixated on efficient skills-
and knowledge-transmission in a positivist/behaviorist paradigm, the domain of L2 teacher development has matured to comprehend objectives of enhanced levels of self-understanding, professional identity, socialization, and classroom quality of life, among other foci (Allwright, 2003; Barkhuizen, 2009; Cross, 2010; Freeman, 2009; Johnson, 2006; 2009; Kubanyiova, 2012). The field has shifted, further, to consider L2 teacher development as primarily *agentive*, not “something that is done to L2 teachers” (Borg & Liu, 2013, p. 250; see also Johnson, 2009, p. 95), but, far more powerfully, something that takes place within teachers themselves through what Kubanyiova (2012) calls “deep-level cognitive engagement” (p. 57).

### 1.2.2 What Develops? Constructs of Interest in Teacher Development

Key constructs of interest in contemporary L2 teacher development include teachers’ cognition—i.e., their “beliefs, knowledge, and thoughts”—and their practice, and the alignment or (apparent) misalignment between these (Borg, 2009; cf. Tasker, Johnson, & Davis, 2010). Focusing more closely on teacher knowledge, constructs of interest include *knowledge about language* (Bartels, 2009; Johnson, 2009), *knowledge of students* (Chen & Goh, 2014), *pedagogical content knowledge* (Chen & Goh, 2014), and *personal practical knowledge* (Golombek, 2009). These knowledge domains are thought to be organized by experience; for instance, teachers’ *personal practical knowledge*, Golombek (2009) indicates, consists of a kind of conceptual lens made up of the storied past experience through which teachers view and respond to present classroom realities. Unsurprisingly given their experientially informed nature, these and other knowledge domains are thought to develop in tandem with the expansion of teachers’ *praxis*—that is, the single category of professional capacity comprising the mutuality of theory and
practice (cf. Johnson, 2006, following Freire, 1970; Roth & Lee, 2007). The goal of teacher development efforts, thus, becomes the cultivation of teachers as “adaptive experts” or perhaps more realistically adaptive specialists who know the state of the art in the field of language teaching and are able to employ their knowledge perceptively in response to the demands of their own teaching context.

1.2.3 Conceptual Underpinnings of Teacher Development

A compelling source of insight into L2 teacher development processes over the past decade has been a sociocultural theory (SCT) of development, a framework first articulated by educational philosopher L. Vygotsky and refined and expanded by his followers including Leont’ev, Kozulin, and Gal’perin (Roth & Lee, 2007). Vygotskyan SCT has been posited as a theoretical lens wide enough to comprehend the expanded focus in L2 teacher development on (not merely the decontextualized behaviors of idealized teachers, but also) the agentive thinking and doing of whole persons enmeshed in social contexts (Cross, 2010; Roth & Lee, 2007; Johnson & Golombek, 2003). Crucially to this paper’s focus on development, the framework comprehends change over time in a “genetic-analytical orientation” (Cross, 2010, p. 439; see also John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), allowing not just a freeze-frame approach to analysis, as it were, but a videographic approach that captures change and growth along a narrative line.

1.2.3.1 An operational definition of SCT. As stated above, SCT is a theory of psychological growth that posits above all that social activity furnishes learners (here, teachers as learners of teaching, Johnson, 2009) with tools—in particular, the meaning-making tool of language—which constitute means of understanding action in context, and of constructing "more complex and creative activities" within that context (John-
Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Johnson & Golombek, 2003, p. 731; Johnson, 2009). In other
words, SCT suggests that it is through social interaction (not merely insular experience,
or natural ability, or solitary reflection) that learners gain the tools, and especially the
language, that can help them to expand their understanding and, in turn, innovate fresh
ways of thinking and acting (see also Johnson, 2009)—that is, to grow. In that it focuses
“not on the product of development but on the very process by which higher forms are
established” (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), the framework is
uniquely suited to an analysis of L2 teacher development.

Closely allied to and expanding somewhat from SCT is what Roth and Lee (2007)
call Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), an “integrative roadmap for educational
research and practice” (p. 188) incipient in Vygotsky’s thought and developed in the
writings of Vygotsky’s followers Leont’ev and Kozulin. Whereas Vygotsky’s theoretical
focus was language as a meaning-making tool, these “second-generation” theorists
focused less on the tool itself and more on the human act of wielding it—i.e., on “object-
related practical activity” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 189, emphasis added; cf. Cross, 2010,
who calls SCT and activity theory “cognate theories”). Engeström (n.d.) clarifies the
difference between activity in its everyday sense as bounded individual actions, and in its
sense as a construct within activity theory as the system of agent, mediations, objects,
community context, division of labor, and rules focused on (a set of) outcomes (see also
Roth & Lee, 2007).

This system of agent, tools, and other components, has been schematized in the
“activity theory triangle,” a flexible analytic instrument allowing inquiry into a situation
from the perspective of multiple subjects operating within the same context and under the
same sets of rules—for instance, from the perspectives of an administrator and a teacher at the same school (see figure, below; Engeström, n.d.; Cross, 2010).

![Activity theory triangle](image)

*Figure Activity theory triangle (Langemeyer, 2006)*

Although typical diagrams are two dimensional, the activity triangle may be best visualized in 3-D, since as Cross (2010) notes, each constituent of the system has its own historical trajectory.

Ahn’s (2011) study of a teacher’s (Bohee’s) attempted enactment of curricular reform in Korea illustrates the value of activity theory to elucidate the nature of, and the complex interplay of factors affecting, teacher development. By mapping Bohee’s classroom onto Engeström’s activity system model from the perspective of the developing teacher as the agent/subject, Ahn (2011) was able to identify tensions in the system working against the accomplishment of Bohee’s objectives, and impeding her development.
In reference to developmental processes, distinguishing features and constructs of an SCT/CHAT framework of development include a focus on *contradiction*, *externalization*, and tool *appropriation* as accessory to *internalization*, which in turn is a precursor to *transformation*. These components are described below, and their affordances for the developing teacher are illustrated, in order to provide a conceptual framework for investigating the nature of teacher development in the context of this study.

A distinctive component of an SCT/CHAT framework is its focus on internalization. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996), following Leont’ev, define internalization as a process of *carving out conceptual space* through the use of socially available tools; as such internalization involves *transformation* of the mental functioning, not merely the filling of a knowledge reservoir. Johnson & Golombek (2003), following Vygotsky, appear to see internalization as a somewhat more transmissive process “in which a person's activity is initially mediated by other people or cultural artifacts but later comes to be controlled by the person as he or she *appropriates* resources to regulate his or her own activities” (p. 731, emphasis added). Their view of internalization specifies the relationship between tools, the mind, and mental development: a learner develops as he appropriates and controls tools for his own use (see also Johnson, 2009, p. 22). When the developing teacher mentioned above, for instance, takes up the conceptual tool of “sequencing” offered in the social context of a teacher development course, and uses it to refine her subsequent lesson planning activity (see John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), she has appropriated the tool in the process of expanding her own conceptual understanding and

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13 This organizational principle (but not the list of components or their descriptions) follows Cross (2010) and Johnson and Golombek (2003).
consequent capacity for action. In another instance of appropriation, Johnson and Golombek (2003) illustrate how participants in a study by Ball (2000) take up “alternative ways of thinking about ... literacy instruction” presented in course readings in a teacher development course (cited p. 732).

Along with the process of appropriation, the awareness of contradiction within the activity system is thought in SCT/CHAT to facilitate internalization (see Roth & Lee, 2007).14 Engeström distinguishes several types of tension, including tension within single components of the system (e.g., self-contradictory beliefs in the subject himself), tension between system components (e.g., between subject and rules), and tension between separate systems (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Roth & Lee, 2007). Poehner’s (2011) discussion of the internal “dissonance” within an in-service developing teacher named Anna illustrates the way inner contradictions may make development possible. In Poehner’s (2011) study, Anna’s inability to reconcile her perceptions of a student with the student’s behavior prepared Anna to reconceptualize the contradictory situation—i.e., to reshape conceptual space—with the mediation of peer developers, to account for her student’s behavior. Poehner (2011) demonstrates that Anna’s changed thinking led to changed action; her practice was transformed as she implemented her new understanding in her classroom practice. Anna’s change illustrates that internalization leads, ideally, to transformation as learners move beyond superficial troubleshooting orientations to expanded possibilities for thinking and doing (Roth & Lee, 2007; see Johnson & Golombek, 2003).

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14 Besides facilitating individual development, contradiction, as Johnson (2009) notes, also functions to illuminate possible sites of intervention for teacher developers (p. 82).
Related to the notion of contradiction is Vygotsky’s dialectical method, a departure from the binary logic of classical thought, which conceives of conventional dualisms (such as the individual versus society, and speech versus thought) as single categories (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 195; Roth & Lee, 2007). Conceptualized this way, apparent dichotomies are productive, yielding unique insights as their integral tensions and interplay are explored (cf. John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).

1.2.3.2 Affordances of an SCT/CHAT framework for teacher development research. As indicated in the foregoing discussion, the benefits of an SCT/CHAT framework consist above all in the analytic and conceptual tools that it furnishes the researcher who wishes to elucidate the nature of teacher development. That is, SCT/CHAT allows “invisible” procedures to take conceptual shape, “amenable to reflection” (Roth & Lee, 2007; see Johnson & Golombek, 2003). Through its powerful conceptual resources, SCT/CHAT allows the researcher to visualize and map developmental processes in metaphorical space—to see teacher learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2003). An SCT framework allowed Poehner (2011), for instance, to see Anna’s expanded capacity as a teacher in terms of an initial state of inner contradiction, followed by processes of mediation and externalization, which led to internalization and in turn, transformed practice. An activity theory framework allowed Ahn (2011) to shed light on the tensions obstructing Bohee’s development. When researchers converge on the use of SCT/CHAT, as Cross (2010) notes, an otherwise diffuse body of research is organized under a common conceptual apparatus, allowing researchers to talk productively to one another and achieve a greater collective understanding of the nature of teacher development.
More significant than the SCT/CHAT framework’s benefit to researchers, however, is its potential and demonstrated benefit to teachers. In that it not only illuminates but also *facilitates* teacher growth (Roth & Lee, 2007), an SCT/CHAT framework has the potential to be an eminently ethical approach to research. Both Roth and Lee (2007) and Johnson (2009), for instance, describe the massively transformative efforts of teachers in Helsinki (Engeström, Engeström, & Suntio, 2002) to reconceptualize their understanding of student performance in a “dysfunctional school” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 211) using the activity systems triangle as a mediational artefact. With their own positive perceptions of students as the system object, the teachers’ resulting thinking and actions (implementing “a major student project” that tapped students’ “potential”) catalyzed “improvement in [the] school climate” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 211).

1.2.4 *English-Language Teacher Development (ELTD) in China*

Observers note that Chinese teachers of English face increasing institutionalized demands, with advanced degrees, research, and continuing education as prerequisites for promotion or tenure, at least at tertiary levels (Borg & Liu, 2013; Gao & Xu, 2014; Wang, 2010; Wu & Wurenbilige, 2012). With educational reform in China around the turn of the millennium, and its increased emphasis on developing communicative competence in English, Chinese teachers may have likewise faced increasing pressures to develop spoken proficiency (cf. Johnson, 2006). These pressures come in addition to the already heavy societal obligations teachers face in their roles as students’ moral guide and friend (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011).
How does teacher development take place under such conditions? This is not a trivial question; an estimated 60,000 college English teachers currently practice in China, with 600,000 more at the secondary-school level (Borg & Liu, 2013; Gao, 2010). With English language teaching (ELT) activity on such a vast scale, in such a diverse context, generalizations are hardly safe (Carless, 2012). Yet several of the studies reviewed in this section assume a monolithic Chinese context, lumping together participants from urban and rural schools, with high- and low-scoring students (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2009; Borg & Liu, 2013; Chen & Goh, 2014). This is problematic since, again, it is acknowledged that Chinese educational contexts differ dramatically in terms of student demographics and first language, resources, and teacher preparation (cf. Carless, 2012; Gao, 2010; Leibold & Chen, 2014; Li & Edwards, 2013). Although the research on ELTD in China has made strides, the implications of China’s diversity for ELTD, as for TBLT, have yet to be adequately addressed in the English-medium literature (Carless, 2012; Gao & Xu, 2014; see also Borg & Liu, 2013, p. 271; Borg, 2007, cited in Barkhuizen, 2009, p. 114).

In spite of the fact that higher education for English teachers is on the rise, with increasing numbers of teachers holding advanced degrees (Wang, 2010) and participating in teacher development programs (cf. Borg & Liu, 2013; Dong, 2006), including in English-dominant countries (Chen & Goh, 2014; Li & Edwards, 2013), ELTD in China is often perceived as inadequate (Gao, 2010; Wang, 2010; Yan, 2005). Teacher-conducted research is, as stated above, widely encouraged at official levels; yet, discouragingly, Borg and Liu (2013) note that practitioner research focused on self or colleagues is “not recognized as real research” (p. 287). Teacher research interest appears to center on a concern to improve students’ oral English or implement a communicative approach.
understandable emphases given the national reforms underway toward increasing students’ oral competence (Cheng, 2011). Still, notable efforts to promote more reflective or collaborative teacher-centered approaches have been documented (Barkhuizen, 2009; Dong, 2006; Gu, 2007; Thorne & Qiang, 1996; Wang & Seth, 1998).

1.2.4.1 The need for ELTD. Gao (2010) and Gao & Xu (2014) point to the need for ELTD in under-resourced western Chinese regions, in particular, observing that secondary-school teachers are in a paradoxical situation: pressured to pursue master’s degrees and simultaneously restricted from taking time off from their teaching jobs. Pursuing professional advancement, thus, means abandoning the schools where they are so sorely needed. Retaining excellent teachers under “extremely deprived conditions” requires, Gao and Xu (2014) claim, administrative support that takes teachers’ value systems, including their desire for continuing development, into account. Gao & Xu (2014) suggest that fostering professional collaboration, including through online technology, in teacher development programs is key to this end: “If [teachers in under-resourced areas] are well placed in networks or communities of teachers …, these teachers may find it easier to overcome this sense of loneliness and strengthen their professional commitment in these deprived situations.” (Gao & Xu, 2014, p. 167).

1.2.4.2 Obstacles to ELTD. Borg and Liu (2013) document college English teacher perceptions of and engagement in research, finding that instrumental orientations toward research (i.e., to get promotions) may have hindered collaboration by fostering competition for advancement through research. Further, teachers surveyed felt a discrepancy between the research they were expected to conduct and the institutional
support they received for this research. Borg & Liu (2013) conclude that compulsory engagement in teacher research, or attempts to implement it without adequate preparation and support, are unlikely to result in the benefits that are (at times, too optimistically) attributed to practitioner research (cf. also Wu & Wurenbilige, 2012, who describe increasing pressure on teachers to engage in research).

Chinese ELT teachers in a 10-day teacher development program documented by Barkhuizen (2009) asked teachers to describe a “problem they had encountered in their work environments,” reflect on this problem in light of teacher development research (p. 114), then describe their own research interests in light of these problems (e.g., exploring student motivation). The teachers expressed a lack of confidence in their qualifications to conduct research, and cited a lack of time and heavy workload as being constraints to actually conducting the research.

1.2.4.3 Successful ELTD practice. The discouraging reports of Borg & Liu (2013) and Barkhuizen (2009) are contrasted by reports from Dong (2006), Gu (2007), Thorne and Qiang (1996), and Wang and Seth (1998), who describe highly successful teacher development programs in university settings. Dong (2006) describes a 5-year professional development program initiated in China (not a western institution) in which university “leadership placed emphasis on … teaching innovations …, offering every possible support” (p. 27). Teachers were encouraged to be involved in collaborative lesson preparation, “peer coaching, peer observation, teaching reflection, team teaching, action research, … and mentoring” (p. 29). At the end of the 5-year program, teachers overall felt “that they [had] greatly benefited from the … program,” developing a sense

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15 Gu’s (2007) and Thorne and Qiang’s (1996) document collaborative development efforts between British and Chinese specialists.
of the value of “frank” collaboration and cooperation, and narrowing the “gap between knowing and doing” (p. 34).

Wang and Seth (1998), in another Chinese university setting, reported on a well-received implementation of Edge’s (1992) framework for cooperative development. In this program, teachers’ negative perceptions of the classroom observation experience was fundamentally changed: teachers learned to take mutually supportive roles as “Speakers” and non-judgmental “Understanders” as they worked out self-identified areas for growth. Teachers’ response to this development opportunity was overwhelmingly positive, fostering teacher agency as well as a climate of collaboration and “enquiry” in the department overall.

These encouraging findings make sense in light of claims (contrasting with Borg & Liu’s, 2013) that the Chinese professional ELT climate is in many places already conducive to collaborative activity (Wang, 2010; Li & Edwards, 2013).

1.2.5 Teacher Development in the Current Study

The foregoing section has offered an operational definition of teacher development grounded in Socio-Cultural Theory/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and highlighted the potential of collaborative approaches as especially powerful means of fostering development. Although not widely implemented in Chinese contexts, such methods have apparently met with some success there. The literature surveyed here provides a rationale for further investigation of teacher-development practice in the target research setting.
1.3 GTI and Teacher Development in Western China: A Warrant for the Dissertation Study

Lin, Wang, Akamatsu, and Riazi (2005) noted over ten years ago that “mainstream TESOL methodologies are still mainly informed by studies and experiences situated in Anglo-societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, or Britain.” They continue:

This Anglo-centric knowledge base constitutes the canons of the discipline and often gets exported to periphery countries as pedagogical expertise to be followed by local education workers. (p. 210, emphasis added)

Although this state of affairs is changing for the better, my review of the literature, in particular of the challenges to implementing TBLT under conditions in Asia, indicated that Lin et al.’s (2005) assessment still holds in China; Chinese “education workers” are now being held to standards (i.e., for implementing task-based teaching) devised in “Anglo-centric” contexts, with inconsistent results (cf. also Van den Branden, 2016). As the following chapter explains, my dissertation study asks how these pedagogical “exports” fare in a more remote part of China, and how, given perceptions of these and other pedagogical recommendations, teachers may more effectively be supported.

For me, as for Lin et al. (2005), this inquiry must not be a “single-minded pursuit of the most effective technology of teaching English” without attention to “issues of agency, identity, creative appropriation, and resistance of local social actors when they are confronted with the task of learning English in their specific local contexts” (p. 217). In posing the research questions stated below, my concern above all is that my
participants have a forum for talking back to the influential discourses of our field, supporting and/or challenging its consensus and expanding its relevance in a diverse global community.
2 METHODOLOGY

Under the rubric of an inductive organizational case study (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013), this study relied on ethnographic methods, the development of insider categories of focal phenomena through observation and member checking (Duff, 2008; Gobo, 2011), using journaling (Casanave, 2011), interviewing (Spradley, 1979; cf. Johnson, 2009; Tasker, Johnson, & Davis, 2010), and document analysis, but depending most vitally on the researcher’s presence within the research site (Gobo, 2011). Below I justify my use of these methodologies.

The researcher’s presence within the site of research allows her insights that can move past superficial accounts into participant observation, i.e. “direct relationship with the social actors … in their natural environment” in order to “observ[e] and describ[e] their social actions” (Gobo, 2011, p. 17). The participant-observer is able to “interact … and participate in [the social actors’] everyday ceremonials and rituals[,] learning their code (or at least parts of it) in order to understand the meaning of their actions” (p. 26). Gobo (2011) argues for the heightened value of observation methodologies at a moment in which an “opinion society” has given way to an observation society, and reliance on self-report to reliance on data such as video (Gobo, 2011, pp. 25-26). That said, in an interactionist tradition (Schwandt, 2000) which privileges insider understandings through close contact and naturalistic inquiry, self-report data including interview and questionnaire data are still crucial. These data allow the researcher to acquire the language insiders use to make sense of their environments, and to present data findings as far as possible in insiders’ own words.
From a sensitivity to the self as researcher “and the way in which the researcher’s positioning impacts on the research process” (Gobo, 2011, p. 22), participant observers develop a reflexive orientation. At its core, this stance is an acknowledgement that researcher comes to the research as a human agent with a personal history, worldview, and set of abilities and limitations that shape the findings (cf. Duff, 2008; Holliday, 2010). To present an account of the self as researcher is to undergird the credibility of the endeavor (Hammersley, 2008) and provide the users of the research product insights that can allow them to weigh findings in light of researcher agency. Further undergirding credibility and trustworthiness in research are commitments to “transparency of method” and “submission” to the data such that “the unexpected is allowed to emerge and perhaps change the direction of the research” (Holliday, 2010, pp. 100-101).

Under the broad rubric of ethnographic participant engagement, the current study is conceptualized as a case study of an English program in a Chinese context, with teachers’ development with respect to genre/task-based instruction at the center of analytic focus, and contextual factors impacting on this main focal phenomenon (cf. Duff, 2008; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The study aims for an in-depth description of the target English program through the use of multiple data collection procedures over the course of one year, with formal procedures conducted over one semester. To justify my focus on genre/task approaches, I refer to the fact that curricular documents issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education allow for the use of genre approaches at all levels and advocate explicitly a task-based approach to English language teaching at the secondary level (Hoagland, Barron Serrano, & Geng, in preparation; Adams & Newton, 2009); other research has indicated the value of task-
based approaches at college levels as well (Song, Yang, & Lei, 2006). This chapter describes the research context, instruments, participants, data collection procedures, and approaches to data analysis.

### 2.1 Research Context

The dissertation study was conducted at a teachers’ college (hereafter called “Oasis City Normal College”), in an autonomous prefecture in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), P.R.C., where I was on faculty as an English instructor from August 2014 to August 2015.

My responsibilities were to provide instruction in spoken English to first-year bachelor’s degree students and to second-year vocational school students, all English majors, at Oasis City Normal College (ONC), the only tertiary institution in a mid-size city in XUAR. Due to funding cuts in previous years, the English department at the college housed a for-profit Language Training Center, and as part of my agreement with the college I was required to provide instruction there, two to four hours a week, to children from the community.

All students who had attended Chinese-medium secondary schools were required to take English and pass a national English proficiency test (at an adjusted score, as described below) as a prerequisite for graduation (the College English Test or CET; see Cheng & Wang, 2012, pp. 28-29). Students who had attended “bilingual schools” were not offered English instruction formally. For non-majors, classes were organized by major (e.g., several humanities majors in a single English class; math majors in a different class) and score on the English section of the National College Entrance Examination, with the highest-performing students in so-called “A-level” classes, and the
lowest-performing (many of them P.E. or arts majors) in “C-level” classes. One elective English course was open to students of any major in the semester that I conducted observations.

The English department chair at the college and the state-affiliated publicity office on campus reviewed the study procedures gave their approval to conduct the study. The study was also approved by Georgia State’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). During the course of the approved data collection procedure, four amendments to the original proposal were submitted to and approved by the IRB; only one of these exceeded the permission originally granted by local officials and required additional formal approval from them. Securing approval from these entities, although a labor-intensive and time-consuming task, was in harmony with my commitment to transparency in research. In hindsight, securing local approval was also extremely helpful in promoting the confidence of potential participants that my project was officially sanctioned.

2.1.1 Participants and recruitment procedures. Students, teachers, and administrators in the English program at The Teacher’s College were recruited to participate in the study. I recruited all participants except my own students, who were recruited by a colleague unaffiliated with the study in order to mitigate the possibility of coercion. To recruit the teacher participants for interviews and classroom observations, I addressed my colleagues in an already-scheduled teachers’ meeting for the entire foreign language department, as per IRB-approved procedures. Colleagues who showed interest were provided with the consent form to read in private. I contacted them at least 24 hours later to ask whether they were interested in participating. To recruit the student participants for classroom observations and questionnaire completion, I requested
permission from participating teachers to present the study in their classes. Students were given a consent form to read in private, which I then collected from participating students at my first formal observation session in their classes. Student participants for interviews were recruited (by me or a colleague, in the case of my own students) individually, after I had reviewed questionnaire results for demographic information. Student participants received a small gift as token of appreciation for their help with the study; teacher participants were treated to a meal following the final focus group, at the end of the data-collection period.

2.2 Research Instruments

The goal of the project is to produce a detailed account of English teaching and learning, and the constraints on these, in the target setting, in hopes that this account will contribute to enhanced understandings of, and more appropriate recommendations for, Chinese learners and other stakeholders in English language education in China. To accomplish this goal, I designed the research questions and research instruments described in the following sections.

Before discussing these instruments, I provide below a brief account of my motivations for the project and role with respect to the research context and participants. As human agent in the research process, the researcher shapes the project at every stage, defining areas of inquiry, articulating research questions, choosing data sources, interacting with data and participants, selecting analytic approaches, analyzing data, and interpreting and presenting findings. To allow users of my research additional tools in interpreting these findings, I describe my personal impetus for the study and the values that have impacted on its completion.
2.2.1 The researcher. From the first moments in 2012 that I began to consider the possibility of the current study, my goal was to investigate the nature of English education in a region of China often overlooked by Anglophone applied linguistics researchers, ultimately in order to contribute to improved educational conditions for learners in the region. I had worked as an English instructor, or waijiao, in China for two years in the period leading up to the Beijing Olympics, and at that time had befriended and been befriended by Chinese learners from a variety of backgrounds. I knew first-language speakers of Mandarin and first-language speakers of other languages. I met learners from privileged as well as extremely impoverished circumstances, some of whom had travelled for several days from western China to reach the university where I taught. Returning to the U.S. and beginning my studies in applied linguistics, I was struck by the lack of research representing diversity in accounts of Chinese learners’ experience. I became convinced that, as others (Beckett & MacPherson, 2005; Carless, 2012; Feng, 2011; Feng & Adamson, 2014; Leibold & Chen, 2014) have observed, China’s vastness and diversity severely limit claims of research transferability between the coast and the interior, and that on-site investigation into English-teaching conditions in more ethnolinguistically diverse regions of China was sorely needed. I embarked on doctoral studies with the express goal of taking up this investigation, which informed my entire PhD experience.

From a personal commitment to research that benefits rather than exploits the community researched (cf. Ortega, 2005; Tarone, 2012), I was drawn to design a project that would have potential to nurture growth at the same time that it investigates its nature. That is (in what I now recognize as my own naïveté), I wanted to undertake research with
the potential to transform. But as I discovered during the data collection period, perceptions and practices, rooted as they are in inflexible institutional realities, are resistant to change. Further, I discovered, crossing borders (Tarone, 2012) to undertake ethnographic research involves a significant personal cost. As I began to experience the scope of this cost, I drew support from the very ones I had come to serve, particularly neighbors and colleagues. They welcomed me to their tables, answered my questions, taught me local languages, helped me navigate local policy, and simply walked alongside me in the months that our paths ran parallel to one another. Removed from my usual social network and distanced from past experience, I was in a place where I could gain perspective on both. My host community consistently supported me as I dealt with this frequently painful shift, graciously present and responsive as I grew beyond my past and into a new phase of expanded spiritual and professional capacity. Tarone’s (2012) reflections capture the essence of this two-way interaction; to repurpose her words, it was my unforeseen privilege, during my year of field research, not only to attempt very imperfectly “to heal,” but also, and in far more profound ways, “to be healed.”

Personal values shaping the research process included, besides those just described, a commitment to ethical and transparent practice; a concern that participants truly participate in and shape the research process; a concern to approach participants on a level plane as significant and agentive human actors; and a commitment to operating from a position of self- and other-awareness, willing to watch, wait, and inquire rather than to prescribe—in short, a commitment to cultural humility in research (Duff, 2008; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2010). Designed to explore the existing situation naturalistically in the target context, the study is in itself an attempt to understand rather than advise.
2.2.2 Research questions. The questions below served as a starting point for my design of the research instruments and analytic procedures described below. I developed these questions through four years of graduate-level coursework, experience within and reflection on English education in Chinese contexts, and research guided by colleagues and dissertation committee members. The questions are as follows:

1. What is the feasibility of genre-informed, task-supported teaching in the target context?
   a) What are instructors’ understandings of genre and task?
   b) (How) are task and genre activities enacted? Where there is limited or no evidence of task- or genre-related instruction, what may account for this?

2. What are considerations for teacher development and support in this context, given this instructional emphasis?
   a) What are considerations for teacher development and support for local instructors?
   b) What are considerations for teacher development and support for non-Chinese instructors (waijiao)?

2.2.3 Questionnaires. To gain a broad sense of the value of genre and task approaches from stakeholders’ points of view, I designed and administered 2 sets of questionnaires, one for teachers and one for students (see Appendix F). The teachers’ questionnaires also attempted to capture the nature of professional support and development in the target context. The instruments were informed both by my study proposal, with its research questions and the literature underpinning these, and by my
growing awareness of the context as a participant-observer. In total, 12 teachers and more than 400 students agreed to complete questionnaires. Student questionnaires were administered in Chinese; teachers completed questionnaires in English.

In the first section of both sets of questionnaires, participants report demographic information including ethnic self-identification, educational background, and linguistic background, including their perceived abilities in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the languages they use, and they typical contexts of their use of each language. Teachers additionally report on their professional background and the courses they have taught.

In the second section, students report on their motivations for English learning. Chen, Warden, and Chang (2005) claimed in the *TESOL Quarterly* that in China intense social and family pressure to succeed on exams constitutes a “Chinese Imperative” which, in contrast to “Western” instrumental motivations, impels students to use memory strategies to achieve the kind of competence required to do well on English exams, apart from gaining communicative mastery of the language. The present study attempts to determine to what extent this social pressure holds in the target context, with its multilingualism, remoteness from the educational policy center, and substantially lower English proficiency as measured by those very exams thought to motivate investment in English. Other dynamics that distinguish participants in the current study from those of Chen et al.’s (2005) study include, ten years on, a shifting economic environment in which exam success is no longer the exclusive pathway to socially valued attainment (see Li [2015], Premier Li Keqiang’s *Economist* editorial celebrating entrepreneurialism), and a shifting geopolitical environment which has motivated revised policies for English
education (Hoagland, Barrón-Serrano, & Geng, in preparation; Pan, 2014). Several years after the nationwide push for English proficiency in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and a downturn in the U.S. economy and globally, observers have noted some cooling in official promotion of English learning coinciding with an expanded promotion of Mandarin-language education globally through Confucius Institutes (Pan, 2014).

Also in the second section, students report in open-ended items on their perceptions of traditional, lecture-based methods vis-à-vis task-based methods, illustrated with two straightforward examples of tasks that meet Ellis’s (2003) criteria: “the teacher might ask students to order at a restaurant, or decide in a group which movie they want to watch.” Students are asked to report on how useful for English proficiency, how interesting, and how useful for passing exams they find these approaches or a combination of the two.

The next several questions attempt to capture students’ learning of genres, asking them to identify text types they have studied and to list the parts of those texts, and to report on their ability to perform the texts. In the final questions, students report on difficulties they think their English teachers face, and their own English study habits and typical time investment in English learning.

For teachers, the second and third sections of the questionnaire explore professional development and teaching methods. Teachers are asked to define and illustrate their understandings of professional development, and to describe their professional time commitments. In the third section, teachers are asked to define communicative and task-based approaches, to discuss their views on whether these approaches “work” at Local College and what modifications need to be made to these approaches.
approaches in context, and to describe how (if at all) they set up tasks in their classes. The next questions investigate teachers’ understandings of genre and genre-based teaching methods.

2.2.4 Interviews. Looking more closely at stakeholders’ perceptions of feasible English teaching and learning in the context, I conducted interviews with students, teachers, and administrators. After reviewing the demographic data of all questionnaires, I selected a subset of students to recruit for interviews. My goal in selecting interview participants was to draw from a diverse group in terms of ethnicity and language background.

I conducted all but 4 of the student interviews in Mandarin or English and recorded them for later analysis. These 4 interviews, with my own students, were conducted by a multilingual colleague and co-researcher in Chinese, Uyghur, or English, depending on the student’s preference. Later, a Chinese-speaking colleague translated the Chinese-medium interviews to English so that I could analyze them more fully. In total, my colleague and I conducted 50 interviews. Interview protocols are included in Appendix D & E.

Each interview built on rapport developed over several months with students and colleagues and proceeded along the lines of a “friendly conversation” (Spradley, 1979). Interviews were held in campus housing or classroom buildings. In the interviews I expanded on questionnaire items, encouraging students to elaborate their opinions about and experiences with English learning, particularly their views of teaching approaches and the value of test success. Interviews with teachers and administrators encouraged them to describe their initial interest in English as a subject, their educational and
professional backgrounds, and their ideas about several key constructs: “an effective teacher,” “professional development,” and communicative and task-based teaching. Teachers were asked to “walk the interviewer through” her or his materials, including the textbook and PowerPoint slides, describing how these were typically used in class. During a brief stimulated recall episode, included in some interviews, teachers viewed or listened to recordings of their own classes and reported on their thoughts about the recording. During interviews, I consistently engaged in member checking, both by paraphrasing what I had just heard from interviewees for their confirmation or clarification, and by articulating to them my emerging understandings and requesting their feedback. This is a source of extra trustworthiness in the data.

2.2.5 Observations, performance data and document collection. I visited 10 participating colleagues’ classrooms to observe and document classroom practice using field notes, audio/video recording, and photographs (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). I visited each participating classroom up to three times per semester. Once I had determined which colleague was employing task and genre approaches, I focused my observation on her classrooms, selecting two classes at different proficiency levels. I observed her classrooms 15 times over a period of two months. Within her classes, as well as in two of my own classes, I collected audio and video data from students performing tasks or genre. To catalogue classroom activity in my field notes, I used an observation rubric developed with input from my dissertation committee members. I additionally recorded observations and reflections in a researcher’s journal, both in written form and in the form of audio files recorded as I went about daily activities.
2.2.6 Focus group. Near the end of my data-collection period, I decided to conduct a focus group with participating teachers, principally to conduct member checking by inviting feedback on preliminary findings from my study. I relied on a subset (about 10%) of the questionnaire data that I had already had translated, and my very recent experiences as interviewer, observer, and teacher to construct a focus group protocol that was subsequently approved by the IRB as an amendment. (Since this was a procedure not covered by the original consent letter, I also got official permission in writing from the department chair and on-campus publicity office.) Nine of eleven teacher participants attended the focus group meeting and presentation of my preliminary findings. I invited my colleagues to stop the presentation at any point to address my findings, and I questioned them specifically at the end of the presentation to gauge their perceptions of my research. Finally, I asked my colleagues to discuss the presentation and their perceptions in small groups. All of these procedures were audio recorded, and a colleague additionally took notes to provide a backup record of the meeting.

2.3 Data Analysis

I condensed and synthesized my data through iterative processes of review, reflection, theme generation, and the interrelation of themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), recording major or unforeseen analytic decisions in a data analysis log. I reviewed data segments with reference to my research questions in procedures drawn from analytic induction (Belcher, 2009; Katz, 2001) and directed content analysis (cf. Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). That is, I conducted a partly inductive analysis that began from my research questions to construct an account of the factors contributing to my focal phenomena—genred task methodology and teacher support. I continuously revised
my account to accommodate additional data, until I determined that the account was acceptably explanatory and complete (Katz, 2001).

A tool in this analytic process was the software package NVivo (Version 10.2.2). Using this tool, I reviewed and labeled segments of data with thematic codes. As coding progressed, I condensed the codes, eliminating overlapping codes and nesting related codes under broader codes. The figure below displays a sample of the interface containing my data records. I describe this sample to offer a sense of the ways in which the software interacted with (but did not replace) my own analytic processes.

![Sample NVivo interface](Image)

Figure 2.1: Sample NVivo interface
Near the top left portion of the figure, a partial list of codes is visible, including the parent node T-G [TASK/GENRE] FEASIBILITY, corresponding to my first research question, and the child nodes CONTEXT, CR [CLASSROOM] AND CAMPUS, and finally TEACHER MORALE. In the bottom portion of the figure, results are visible of a query displaying all data segments labeled for the child node TEACHER MORALE. The query returned 22 segments, including the following two interview excerpts, the first from a teacher, and the second from an administrator:

*If I do it [task-based teaching] and then I get very good result, maybe the dean will say, “Oh you did a good job” and he will give me some prize or something like that—and then, I will [implement TBLT]. But so far, the common atmosphere is, "just do it." (flatly) "just finish it [the textbook]” (Emma, Interview on 7.27.2015).*

*I just want to ... make the responsibility clear. Right? That’s your responsibility .... Please do not [blame] the others (Jun Xiu, Interview on 5.26.2015).*

In the first segment, Emma is explaining why she feels she has no incentive to implement the task-based teaching methodology that she learned during a recent semester-long professional development session in eastern China. In the second segment, the English department head (the dean Emma refers to) is justifying his recent curricular decision that had proved unpopular with teachers. By juxtaposing these two segments, an insight that I had developed over time through participation in the research site became clear to me: an administrative discourse that laid all responsibility for students’ (test) performance on teachers, while ignoring actual classroom practice, undercut the
resources (including skills gained via an expensive professional development experience in eastern China) Emma and her colleagues brought into their classrooms. This process of data juxtaposition both crystallized my existing understandings of contextual dynamics, and yielded new insights, which I report on below.

Concurrently with transcription and coding, I composed memos to flesh out, synthesize, and interrelate themes I observed in the data, in all generating more than 30,000 words in memos. Below is a sample excerpt of a longer memo composed 1.2.2016 that synthesizes and expands themes from my interview with Emma on 7.27.2015:

Although Emma was one of the privileged few (the only one in the department, the entire year) who had been approved for a semester’s leave of teacher training in Eastern City, she was unable to implement what she had learned due to institutional realities: her teaching schedule, and the lack of recognition from the department. [She said,] “...I should say that I've learned a lot [in Eastern City]. If you give me enough time, ... then (with a confident, matter-of-fact tone) I can do it. I can set up activities just like what you saw last time. I can do it. I can [make] my normal teaching like this. But (1.2) it's too much work. ... If it is too much work, it's unfair. This teacher is just reading PPTs, and I do so many activities, I did so many preparations for ev'ry lesson. That is unfair. But we are treated the same.” In this excerpt Emma reflects on the complex way she engages with her training: She has gained knowledge about teaching standards, and the skills to realize them, which she would be willing to implement only under other circumstances than she finds herself in at the college. The existing system trains her [to use TBLT] but does not make it feasible—or even, in her view,
...ethical—for her to implement her training.

As I began the process of writing up my findings and revising this write up, analysis continued. I ran queries within NVivo and reviewed query results, repeatedly revisited full transcripts, and (most importantly) continued to abstract from and interrelate my raw data through writing memos.

2.3.1 Document analysis. I reviewed the textbooks and other materials used in the courses I observed in light of my focal constructs, genre and task. Also, I arranged to have key excerpts of China’s Ministry of Education curricular documents, relevant to the teaching of English, translated. I then identified references in these documents to task- or genre-informed approaches to determine the extent of official promotion of these methods. Finally, I used materials provided by one of my participating instructors, and online listening materials, to take a practice College English Test Band 4 under the test’s timing conditions. Following this, I wrote up a memo on each section of the test (writing, listening, and reading).

2.3.2 Interview and observation analysis. Data analysis began during my data collection period. In line with my ethnographic stance, I allowed questions related to my broad research questions to refine my use of my interview protocol, for instance questioning teacher participants on their choices in classes I observed, bringing an interviewee’s comments into later interviews, and checking emerging understandings in informal conversations which I later recorded in my researcher’s journal (cf. Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

As a first step in formal analysis, I selected, reviewed, and transcribed portions of the interview data (Gibbs, 2007; Silverman, 2006). As transcription proceeded, I settled
on a level of detail that captured participants’ words and eliminated most fillers. When pauses seemed to indicate hesitation or otherwise contribute to meaning, I recorded the length of the pause. I saw the transcription process as an opportunity to reflect on my participants’ thoughts and begin to relate them into a meaningful whole through memoing. I composed narrative partial transcriptions of classroom observations based on video data and field notes, describing classroom activity and supplementing the narrative with video screenshots.

I aimed to examine individual teacher participants’ classrooms in succession in order to gain a sense of each teacher’s overall approach. In general, I transcribed and coded one focal teacher’s interviews, composing memos along the way to synthesize his or her interview data, and then constructed a narrative report of the classroom observations for that teacher, before proceeding to the next focal participant.

2.3.4 Performance data. I selected 3 genred tasks for analysis: a cooking demonstration, a picture narration task, and a news report. For each task, I reviewed video and audio data of the class periods in which the task was embedded, and wrote up a narrative and partial transcription of the classes. I transcribed students’ genred task performances and iteratively reviewed both these and the class narratives in terms of my focal construct, genred task instruction.

2.3.5 Focus group data. I returned to the focus group data at the end of the data analysis period to supplement my understanding of my second main research question on teacher development. I used audio records, along with handwritten notes taken during the session, to compose a summary and partial transcription of the two-hour session.
2.4 Summary

The data collected for the current study are displayed in summary form in the table below.

*Table 1 Data types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data types</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews &amp; Stimulated recalls</td>
<td>50 semi-structured interviews conducted in English/Chinese/Uyghur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>40+ hours of observation completed (up to 3x/semester for each of 11 participating classrooms; focal participant observed 15 times over 10 weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>400+ questionnaires administered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Syllabi, textbooks, PowerPoints, and other class-related material collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner performance</td>
<td>Students’ homework and in-class work collected and recorded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>2-hour session conducted with 9 teacher participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For me, the process of selecting from and analyzing the data above was a process of distillation (cf. Bong, 2002). From participation in the research context over 11 months, I had built up a tentative understanding of local dynamics impacting English
teaching and learning. These understandings were clarified and contradicted, expanded and problematized as I returned to my data after leaving the research site. Coding the data within the NVivo interface helped focus my analysis, allowing me to consider how data excerpts related to my research questions. More productive than the coding process, however, was my writing in response to coding sessions. The act of writing summative memos allowed me to consolidate my understandings and generate fresh insights with respect to my research questions, especially as I drew connections across participants and classrooms. In other words, memoing allowed me to zoom out from the immersive and intense coding process to make sense of my data in relation to my research questions.
3 FINDINGS: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES

"The most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their own specificity." - M. Bakhtin, Response to a question from Novy Mir

Ethnographic case studies aim for ethical practice through “prolonged engagement” that promotes relationships in which researcher and participants are mutually valued, understood, and served (Duff, 2008; Ortega, 2005; Starfield, 2010; Tarone, 2012). Through meaningful interaction with the researcher over time, participants have the opportunity to develop a sense of the researcher’s integrity and an understanding of her or his project’s goals and thus equipped to provide or decline consent that is more fully informed.

Over the course of a year, I worked alongside the teachers and administrators I describe below, and most closely with my focal participant, Meg, developing collegial relationships which I valued for their own sake. From these relationships grew, on my potential participants’ part, curiosity about my research questions, and on my own part, a sense of how my project design and research instruments should be shaped by my potential participants’ context and concerns. Thus grounded in the social context it sought to explore, the study’s formal data collection process began halfway through my year of on-site participant observation. Through that process, which 11 of my colleagues and more than 400 students agreed to contribute to, I developed stronger relationships with participants and a heightened awareness of their perceptions and practices surrounding English teaching and learning.
In the sections that follow, I present accounts of these perceptions and practices in my research context. The goal of this presentation is to build up an expansively descriptive report that can allow the researcher and reader to draw conclusions as to the feasibility of genred task approaches. I begin with a description of the research site, the English department of Oasis City Normal College in Xinjiang, China. I then present a case study of a College English classroom in that context, describing in detail the perceptions and practices of a focal teacher participant, Adelina\textsuperscript{16}, and offering an interpretation of this account with reference to the theoretical model I describe below. This is followed by more general accounts of three other teacher participants enacting “traditional” instruction. I situate accounts of all four teacher participants in administrative discourse by next presenting an administrator’s perspectives. Then, I present a second, contrasting case study, describing in depth the perceptions and practices of my second focal teacher participant, “Meg.” I illustrate student participants’ perceptions of and engagement with genred activity in Meg’s course for English majors with reference to analyses of students’ performance and their statements in interviews. I next present a synthesis of students’ perceptions of the College English program, based on survey and interview data. This is followed by an account, grounded in interview, observation, and focus group data, of the nature of teacher support and development in the college.

3.1 Epistemological and theoretical groundings

My epistemological/ontological stance is broadly interpretivist and partly aligned with philosophical hermeneutics (Schwandt, 2000). That is, I hold that there exist

\textsuperscript{16} Like all other names in this study, this is a pseudonym.
complex and dynamic, yet partly knowable, socially-enacted realities that I as participant-observer can perceive and describe in my contribution to the knowledge base of the field. The complexity and inter-subjectivity of these social realities, and my own role as finite, interpreting participant-observer make this description a contingent, rather than a comprehensive or “naively” objective one (Schwandt, 2000). I acknowledge that, as an interpreting observer, I offer representations as filtered through my senses, experiences, and worldview (cf. Holliday, 2010). My argument for authenticity is not grounded in my own stance, however, but in the method, described above, by which I have examined my target construct and positioned myself with respect to my data. In my contributions to an applied field, constituted by stakeholders in the largely outcomes-oriented ELT profession, I present this account as a working hypothesis for the use of these stakeholders, open to dialogic responses from them and others.

In my analysis, I rely on a theoretical model informed by cultural-historical activity theory (Roth & Lee, 2007) and a construct of feasibility adapted from health education and business studies. In this model, feasibility is defined as “the quantity of resource units under control or available for use” (Klein, 1990), and comprises three interdependent components: acceptability, practicality, and integration (Bowen et al., 2010). Acceptability indexes stakeholder responses to the target intervention—here, task-oriented approaches to English instruction. Practicality “explores the extent to which [task approaches] can be delivered” given existing constraints, e.g., of curriculum, teacher knowledge, and student behavior. Integration “assesses the level of system change needed to integrate [the target approaches] into an existing infrastructure” (Bowen et al., 2010). These components are described with reference to stakeholders’
perceptions and practices. Perceptions are accessed via self-report data and include both instructors’ understandings of genre and task approaches (research question 1a), and their beliefs about the usefulness of those approaches. Instructors’ understandings and beliefs both directly affect the implementation of focal approaches and point to contextual factors that may also be impacting implementation (research question 1b). Practices, accessed via observation and document data, supplement perceptions in an argument for feasibility: as they align and misalign with perceptions, practices illuminate the reach of perceptions, illustrating how deeply they are held and to what extent they can be enacted under existing constraints (research question 1b).

The feasibility argument just describes relies on the description of a contextual infrastructure under which (teacher) stakeholders operate and which may either limit or promote optimal practice. With reference again to teachers’ perceptions and practice, I spotlight points in the infrastructure at which more support is needed (research questions 2, 2a, and 2b).

I have attempted to achieve emic understandings by way of iterative and ongoing interviewing, observation, reflection, member checking, coding, review, and revision. I include in this presentation near-verbatim data excerpts that succinctly illustrate what I believe to be my participants’ key perceptions vis-à-vis ELT. By thus featuring their voices, I seek to allow my participants’ word choices, alongside my own interpretive syntheses and self-reflexive statement (see Methodology, Section 2.2.1, above), to mediate readers’ conclusions. These representations, the product of two years’ experience and thought, constitute my endeavor to represent fairly the voices of my participants.
Self-report data is in many senses performative, impacted by multiple forces including participants’ wish to say what they believe the researcher wants to hear (Spradley, 1979). To strengthen my claims for trustworthiness (Starfield, 2010) and to offset the performative nature of self-report data, I took measures to elicit understandings that would contradict my own preconceptions. In several cases, particularly with older colleagues, I positioned myself as a student of their context, desiring to learn from their broader understanding. At the same time, I remained mindful of the boundaries set by the regulatory entities governing my research (see Methodology, above). The excerpt below, from an interview with focal student participant Lizzie, is a fair representation of the way I sought to maintain trustworthiness in the interview process:

*Interviewer (Merideth):* So Lizzie, thank you very much for coming today.

*Lizzie:* [It’s] nothing.

*M:* You know that I am interested in understanding English teaching methods

*Lizzie:* Yeah

*M:* at Oasis City Normal College?

*Lizzie:* Yeah.

*M:* So, from the student’s perspective, from your perspective as a student.

*Lizzie:* Yeah:

*M:* So feel free to just share your real opinions. Don’t hold back what you really think. Um: don’t say what you think I want

*Lizzie:* [as if coming to a realization] [Yeah::

*M:* [to hear

*Lizzie:* Yeah:
M: but just really what you think.

Lizzie: [decisively] OK.

M: What do students think about the waijiao::, what do they think about teaching at this college: in general. ... I won’t judge you—like I won’t say, ‘oh::, she’s not a good student, or she’s a good student’—I just want to hear what you think. [Without

Lizzie: [Yeah.

M: any judgment, you know?

Lizzie: Yeah.

M: Um:: [1.5] Of course, we are in China—

Lizzie: Yeah!

M: Right?

Lizzie: [Yeah:

M: [So we need to always remember we are in China, [so

Lizzie: [Yeah:: we, we can’t talk about some

M: some things, right?

Lizzie: Yeah.

M: Um, but besides that just say whatever you want to say, OK?

Lizzie: Yeah, OK.

Having argued for the authenticity of the analysis I present here, I acknowledge that what I have seen and the ways I report this are shaped by my experience as a non-Chinese outsider, a Western researcher in a context where people like me have exploited the people they purport to serve. In fact the genre of ethnographic description is so deeply
implicated in colonialist discourses that it is difficult to enact without falling prey to its essentializing, othering conventions. The places described become exotic backdrops for impressive exploits (the researcher’s); the research participants are flattened and catalogued—so many butterflies stuck with pins—their human complexity degraded to the level of a coffee-table conversation piece. These ideological dangers implicit in enacting ethnographic case study research were frequently on my mind as I designed and carried out the study.

There were two reasons that I persisted in conducting the study notwithstanding these dangers, the second of them, as I have realized upon my return, at best naïve if not actually misguided. I was curious, and I wanted to help. I imagined that the challenges facing students in western China amounted simply to a lack of adequate instruction; with my background, I assumed, I could address this need (to the enduring gratitude of my students and colleagues) and at the same time satisfy my own curiosity about western China. The realities I encountered were, of course, far more complex than I had expected, and the gratitude, it turned out, flowed in the opposite direction. The only value left in this equation is whatever may lie in this account. During data collection, I worked hard to listen well to my participants and to understand what I heard. As I have constructed my analysis, I have tried to present my participants’ voices in the way that, to the best of the knowledge of them I gained during the months that we worked and lived as colleagues and neighbors, they would want their own voices to be presented. I hope that the conversation on education in Asia will have been enriched by these efforts.
3.2 Research Context

My home is an apartment on the fifth floor of an aging building just inside the campus walls. Into my open window floats the discord of the city beyond them—streets over-populated with vehicles, farmers peddling fruit or recycled electronics, construction workers, clusters of bored college students returning to campus with their shopping. My Mandarin is good enough to carry me through most daily transactions here, even to win me friendships among the more sympathetic of my neighbors, but not to decode most of the hanzi on shop signs I see from my window, or on the white-hot video billboard at the city’s busiest intersection. My Turkic language ability is weaker—after several months of study spared from my work of research and teaching and survival here, I can decode some Arabic script and exchange a few sentences with my multilingual neighbors—but most of what I hear or read of the local languages remains inscrutable. I do, however, understand the English brand name, “Shanghai City,” of the new apartment complex arising opposite campus; more easily still I gloss the brash imagery on its cardboard construction fences: professional types sip wine, shopping bags slung breezily over their shoulders; from decorative fountains, instead of water, spill hundred-dollar US bills.

As soon as you step past the uniformed guards onto campus, you notice its trees. Pillar-like poplars line nearly every road, huge red banners bearing slogans strung between them. The campus is an island of stillness in the city’s commercial intensity. On the hottest days, student workers fill basins with water and sprinkle the roads to cool the air. My Canadian colleague Meg tells me that campus stays 2 degrees cooler than the rest of the city. News and music blares from loudspeakers in the mornings, when students
have required exercises, and in the afternoons, when they troop to one of the several campus dining halls, two of them *halal*.

The main buildings on campus were built in European style in the fifties. Other buildings came later in stark utilitarian style—four-square dormitories in ceramic brick, the dining halls, a main classroom building. There was a futuristic-looking music building on the enormous ceramic-tile square at the center of campus, and a pond with a pagoda. Inside, the classrooms are spartan—desks in rows on bare concrete—but flooded with sunlight from tall barred windows. From the top floor of the main classroom building, we can see the mountains, but only on clear days. I am never sure if the haze is desert dust or pollution from the nearby chemical factory.

The Foreign Language department, of which the English department is a part, is made up of around 50 teachers, most of them local, and three “foreign”—a Canadian English teacher, an American English teacher (me), and a Russian teacher from a Central Asian state. Several teachers in the department teach local minority languages; one of my English teacher colleagues is also fluent in an obscure minority language and teaches courses in that language. The department chair holds a mandatory meeting every week in a large, airless conference room on the top floor of the main teaching building, relaying policy regulations for an hour or two. I was exempt from these meetings but attended twice—once to be introduced to everyone, and again to recruit colleagues for my study. Under the department chair is the deputy chair of the English department, an efficient and experienced female with a newly minted PhD from a well-reputed school in eastern China. Reporting to them are the director of the English major program (a new PhD with an interest in trilingualism) and the head of the College English program, a compulsory
1- to 2-year course for all non-majors. Of these four administrators, three agreed to take part in my study.

In the English department, each year group was assigned to classes based on test performance, with the highest-performing students grouped together in one class. In the College English program, classes were assigned by major and proficiency, again according to test performance: the highest-performing students were in “class A,” lower-performing students in “class B,” and the lowest-performing students in “class C.” At the end of each year of their College English program, all students were required to sit the national exam for English proficiency, the College English Test Band 4. Given the special conditions of the college, an adjusted passing score of 380 of 710 (53%) had been issued. By their second year of college English study, students had to pass the CET at that minimum score or they would not be allowed to graduate.

Every year, a committee of administrators selected the College English textbooks from a menu of texts approved by the Ministry of Education. These textbooks were used in all College English classes regardless of level. During the year I worked at the college, two textbooks had been assigned: a reading/writing textbook called New Horizon (Zheng, 2008), published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and a speaking/listening textbook called Viewing (Rost, Robbins, & MacNeill, 2012), republished in 2012 jointly by Pearson and China’s Higher Education Press. Each textbook had 4 versions, one for each semester of the two-year program.

The New Horizon textbook is a reading textbook with each unit built around a focal “passage” that is closely analyzed for meaning, generic structure and discourse strategies, and vocabulary and lexicogrammatical constructions. These features are
further drilled in sentence-level exercises. At the end of each unit is a short (120-word) composition assignment that mirrors the discourse strategies of the passage analyzed in that unit. There is a teacher’s book which provides translations of all activities and guidelines for analyzing the text, and an accompanying PowerPoint (see Figure 1, below) which supports the text analysis and exercise review. This textbook is the one teachers rely on most heavily.

Figure 1 PowerPoint slide for text analysis for New Horizons textbook

The Viewing textbook, used for (speaking and) listening instruction in the College English program, is organized by topical units (e.g., personality, nationalities, and family). The units contain a series of progressively longer and more complex listening tasks, each of which 1) has particular generic parameters such as a radio interview or a conversation, 2) requires learners to interact with the content by identifying key information, and 3) is followed by a speaking activity which requires students to respond
in some way to the listening task. Each unit also includes two video viewing tasks and a final “interaction” activity which is clearly task-based.

The unit on nationalities, for instance, begins with a “warm up” (see figure below), a series of short statements from young people who have recently traveled. Students listen along, completing a cloze exercise beside the picture of each speaker. As a follow-up, they are to ask a partner whether they have visited a foreign country.

![Figure 2 Warm up from the Viewing textbook](image)

The second module is a “listening task” based on two conversations about recent travel experiences to Amsterdam and Mexico. The module begins with a schema-building picture task, comprehension questions for the “first listening,” and more detailed
questions for the “second listening” and “third listening.” At the end of the module, students are to discuss the places in the listening task: “Which of these places sounds interesting to you? Are the cultures the same as yours or different? Ask your partner.”

The third module, a “real world listening” module (see figure below), centers on two interviews, one with a South African man named Leath, and the other with a woman named Hannah of unidentified (apparently North American) nationality. Both of them discuss travels in Zambia but have very different views. The students are to respond to the question, “What would a visitor think of your country? Why?”

![Figure 3 Listening task from the Viewing textbook](image)

The final module in the unit is a “travel survey.” Students are to circulate amongst their classmates and collect answers to questions on travel (“Have you ever been to a foreign country? Do you like to travel alone or with a friend?”). They are then to create a chart reporting on answers to the questions and present their chart to the class (Figure 4).
The textbooks in the College English program have some alignment with genred-task pedagogy. Although focal “passages” in the reading/writing textbook are not contextualized in terms of their real-world purpose, the book is nonetheless oriented toward an analysis of discourse structure intended to build comprehension of meaning and skills in producing discourse. The speaking/listening textbook is still more closely aligned with a genred task approach. Each activity is purposeful and meaning-oriented; the spoken texts are embedded in well-specified contexts and involve clear relational roles. Speaking prompts encourage students to interact with topics in meaningful ways. The final activity in each unit is a clearly goal-oriented activity which constitutes a task as defined in this study.
3.3 Case Study 1: Traditional Instruction in Adelina’s Classroom

3.3.1 Adelina’s perceptions. Adelina and I would talk between classes, I walking my bicycle beside her on her way home or to the campus convenience store. She had chosen an Italian name for herself, a badge of her fascination with the Italian language and the distant contexts where she imagined it used. She was delicately spoken and carefully, even artistically attired, in her own words “mild” and “introverted,” and she was solicitous of her students. “These days it’s quite cold,” she observed to her students one day in a parenthesis of her steady text explication. “Take good care of yourselves. Put on warm clothes.” But she had few expectations of her students, whom she consistently, in our conversations, cast as “lazy.”

3.3.1.1 Personal history vis-à-vis English learning and teaching. Adelina had been interested in English from her early teenage years, when she was “usually number one in the class in English.” On the gaokao (or National College Entrance Examination, China’s rigorous and high-stakes version of the SAT), however, in spite of her strong performance in English she had received a disappointing overall score and, apparently without attending college, found work in the rural frontier county where she was born, teaching English to lower-secondary school students. For ten years she had taught there until, ambitious of “cadre” status and having decided that university-level teaching would be less taxing on her introverted personality (“I ... don’t need to discipline [university] students very much”), she studied for and passed an English proficiency test, then a national entrance exam for adults pursuing college education. She was admitted to a university in a large city on China’s east coast. After graduating, she moved to Oasis City, a larger community than her birthplace, again teaching secondary students until
being hired two years later as an instructor at Oasis City Normal College, where she finally arrived at cadre status. Only two years after this hire, she was off seeking still more education, this time choosing to study Italian in another large coastal city. By 2010 she had passed a postgraduate entrance exam demonstrating knowledge of politics and proficiency in English and Italian, and completed a master’s degree in applied linguistics. “In the [postgraduate entrance] test my Italian score was 87 [of 100],” she said. “I remember it well.” During her master’s studies she had developed interest in discourse patterns in English texts, which interest she displayed in conversation with me and during her lectures.

3.3.1.2 Perceptions of teacher and student roles. Adelina was concerned to model scholarly conscientiousness for her students—in the classes I observed, they were majors in Chinese history, Mandarin, and minority language—and to inspire their imitation of her. “To be a good teacher,” she reflected, “besides mastering some knowledge, if you have a good, a beautiful personality, it will influence students a lot.” She recited poems for students and “encouraged them to learn English well” by referencing her personal journey to academic success: “I told them, ‘I learned Italian for only one year, but I [scored] 87 in the examination for post-graduate students.’ ... So nothing is difficult if you put your heart into it. Where there is a will there is a way.”

Her students disappointed her in their failure to aspire to her scholarly values, forcing her to resort to “rules” and punishment, including a strict system of vocabulary dictation in which students were fined 1 yuan for each wrong word. She guessed that only a few in each class of about 30 could pass the state-mandated College English Test Band 4, or CET-4 (Zheng & Cheng, 2008). “They are very lazy.... If they can’t pass [the CET-4
at the adjusted institutional passing score of 380 [of 710], they can’t get their bachelor’s degree. They all want to pass the test, but they are too lazy, and they have no confidence in themselves…. The teacher has to push them…. No pressure, no… motivation. So I push them very hard. But once they get used to it, they will benefit a lot from that.”

3.3.1.3 Teaching approaches: Text- and test-driven instruction. Adelina was intent to convey to me her belief in the importance of balanced attention to language “input” and “output,” or receptive and productive use of English, alluding to this belief in all three of our interviews. She had, in fact, written a thesis advocating greater attention to middle school students’ spoken English. But her students’ low proficiency level compelled her, she indicated, to focus on input, translating English reading passages “sentence by sentence.” Opportunities to produce English occurred only under highly structured circumstances: when Adelina called on individual students to combine vocabulary displayed on PowerPoint slides using a target sentence “pattern” she had just presented (see “Adelina’s classroom,” section 3.3.2, below). At the beginning or end of class, Adelina asked students simple conversational questions, or invited students to perform English songs. Twice per semester, Adelina also assigned “compositions” in preparation for the CET-4. She required students to submit their compositions to a website that automatically scored their writing, saving her, she told me, a great deal of time. She appeared to be very happy with the site, but did not describe what kind of feedback it gave.

I have shared the website of writing with my colleagues. Most of them have used the software…. They think it’s excellent, marvelous. They can give students
written homework and they don’t need to correct them by themselves. Otherwise students, teachers are too busy to assign writing assignments.

The following interview excerpt brings to light the tension between the beliefs about the importance of English output which Adelina articulated so consistently to me, and the contextual constraints which led her, apparently, to violate those beliefs.

1. **Adelina:** You can’t learn English well only by reciting some new words, knowing some grammatical rules, patterns—it’s not enough. [English is] a tool. If you want to learn [to use] a tool, the best way is to practice. Just as if you want to learn to ride a bicycle well or to swim well, the only way is to practice.

2. **Merideth:** [circling back to an apparently contradictory point Adelina had made earlier in the same interview, when she stated that “Unfortunately, students seldom use English ... in and out of class”] But the students don’t practice.

3. **A:** Yes [agreeing].

4. **M:** I wonder if you could give them some chances to practice in class?

5. **A:** Yes. But it’s not enough, and the time is limited.

6. **M:** Why is the time limited?

7. **A:** Because we only have ... 200 minutes every week. If you spend too much time in oral English or listening, something like that, you can’t fulfill your teaching task.

8. **M:** So your teaching task is to finish these units in the textbook, right?
9. *A:* Yes, and I also ask students to do some test papers, *College English Test Band 4*…. I have to check the answers, explain [to] them the techniques, the skills, how to do some kinds or types of exercises. So time is very limited.

Although Adelina here as elsewhere in the data voices a belief in the importance of English practice and use (turn 1), she does not on the basis of this belief question or move away from what she sees as her “teaching task” (turn 7) of explicating the textbook and preparing students to pass the CET (turn 9). In her view, it is students’ responsibility to find time and means to practice and use English on their own—perhaps as she herself had done: “I listened to Special English, BBC, VOA,” she said in an earlier interview, describing her own years as a late-entering college student. “I stuck [to it] every morning or every night before going to sleep…. After a semester, on the listening test I got 89, ranked number 2 in the class. And I recited some patterns—everyday English, Crazy English … quite useful. And I took part in English corner [informal meetings for conversational English practice], and listened to English lectures given by native speakers. And I tried to write an English diary…. And my foreign teacher required us to read one English book, novel or whatever you chose, one [per] week and write a report…. It helped me a lot. I benefited a lot from this. So after 2 years I could, I dared, speak to native speakers when I met them.”

In sum, Adelina implemented text- and test-driven approaches—“pushing” students to memorize vocabulary, explicating test papers, translating texts line by line—because she perceived it as her “teaching task” to ensure that students thoroughly understood the passages in the textbook, and that they could pass the CET-4 at the school’s adjusted score of 53%. English practice was important, but it was not within the
scope of her teaching responsibilities to provide students with this practice. In her view, it was passing the CET that would secure for students a “bright future,” opening doors for them to professional opportunities, as her own test successes had done for her.

3.3.1.4 Perceptions of teaching methodology: Task-based teaching. Adelina seemed to conceptualize task-based teaching methodology as an approach in which teachers set goals for students’ knowledge, using questions and answers to expand that knowledge. “Every class should have some object, some task,” she said, explaining her understanding of task-oriented teaching. “First we should set the aim, the object of this class. Then we have to accomplish the task. If the students can accomplish the task, they can learn something from the class.”

Adelina appeared to construe such a task as an activity in which, through receptive English use and reflection, students arrive at a deeper understanding of a target knowledge area, particularly the “world” of the cultural other. Students demonstrate this deeper understanding by selecting “properly” on a test-like multiple-choice question. During an interview, I tried to clarify the nature of an activity she described as an instance of task-oriented instruction. “What will you ask the students to do?” I asked. Adelina replied, “Ask students to do? According to PPT there are some [choices]—[I] let them choose what they think is proper. ... English is a medium, is a carrier of culture. Through … listening, reading, you can learn another world.” Adelina’s description here accords with her understanding of her responsibility as teacher to help students thoroughly grasp text content.

Referencing a genred task laid out in her listening-speaking textbook, a cooking demonstration based on a recipe, I asked Adelina whether she thought such tasks would
“work” in her classroom. She thought not. “The content is too simple. If students just listen to this [recipe], they can’t get a high mark in the test. The College English Test Band 4—the listening part is quite hard for students. And the listening part occupies about 35 percent, that means 247 [points], very high. The same as the reading part. And composition, 15 percent. Translation, 15 percent. The total mark is 710 [points].” In Adelina’s view, classroom activity should not detract from students’ main responsibility, to master the skills tested on the CET.

3.3.2 Adelina’s Classroom

Like other classrooms in our building, Adelina’s classroom was crammed with desks—about 50—in rows facing the teacher’s platform. Towards the front, students sat up straight and raised their hands; toward the back, students carried on conversations at a tolerated volume. Although it was punishable by fining, a few swiped discreetly at their phones.

I observed Adelina’s class on three occasions during the spring semester. In her classroom, Adelina offered praise for providing the “right answer” and gently shamed students for inadequate responses. Students stood when she called on them. She would smile and delicately applaud students who could answer acceptably and issue a subtly dismissive “Sit down, please” to students who could not. The class monitor, an attentive male student who frequently answered questions (and, she relayed to me, had scored, impressively, over 500 on a practice CET-4 exam), was her clear favorite. She called him her “son.”

The sessions I observed were distinctly word-focused, geared toward expanding lexical knowledge. Class sessions began with a “dictation,” or vocabulary quiz. Adelina
then carefully led students in stocking their lexical store through meticulous cycles of presentation and practice, meanwhile coaching students for memory development: “Try to memorize it,” she gently urged after presenting a target phrase or sentence. “Learn it by heart. It’s very helpful for your composition.” She continued to coach students as they made note of the target construction. “Try to recite.... Memorize the sentence.” Adelina’s painstaking attention to word, phrase, and sentence memory aligned with her belief that “new words [are] like bricks; if you want to build a building, [they’re] very basic.”

Adelina’s class sessions were also firmly anchored in the “passage” from the required text, New Horizons. The New Horizons passages served as a matrix for all new lexical items and syntactic structures—“patterns,” Adelina called them. The first session I observed focused on the explication of an essay titled “Time-Conscious Americans,” which in its opening paragraph read as follows: “The U.S. is definitely a telephone country…. This is due partly to the fact that the telephone service is superb here, whereas the postal service is less efficient.” Students, most of whom used smart phones to consume media and stay socially connected via messaging apps, seemed restless as Adelina explicated this text, some talking among themselves.

Adelina used PowerPoint and an audio file to first present a paragraph from the text. She then isolated target structures by clicking on hyperlinked phrases to advance to slides which explicated the phrases in more detail, providing Chinese translations and sample sentences. She relied on questioning to elicit from students the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences, supplying these meanings where students could not. After presenting target structures, Adelina called on individual students to translate a Chinese sentence into English using the target items and other provided phrases (see Figure 3.5.
and explanation, below). Once a paragraph had been translated and its target “patterns” isolated for learning and memory, Adelina continued to the next paragraph, until the entire text had been covered. The figure below displays a sample slide prompting translation of the target phrase “have something to do with.” Students were to translate the Chinese sentence (displayed in the upper left of the slide) using the provided phrases “family background” and “one’s achievements in career.”

![Figure 5 Translation slide with linguistic scaffolding](image)

1. Adelina: Who can put it into English? [A student on the front row stands.]
2. Student: He family back—
3. Adelina: He is or his?
4. Several students: His.
5. Student: [resuming] His family background have noth—
6. Adelina: Have or has?
7. Student: Has noth—has noth—has nothing to do [.5] his
8. Adelina: —With—
10. Adelina: With his ah [hovering mouse arrow over the target phrase “achievements in career”]

11. Many students: Achievements in career. [Adelina begins clapping and the student sits; a few students join her applause. She then advances to the slide displaying the expected answer, reading aloud:]

12. “‘His family background has no bearing on,’ or has nothing to do with, has no bearing on ‘his achievements in career.’”

In this episode, lexicogrammatical correctness is the clear priority (turns 3-4, 5-6, and 10); the teacher praises the student (applauding, line 11) for persisting to the end of the (highly scaffolded) sentence. In a contrasting episode, where no praise was offered, Adelina called on a student to stand, supplied her the Chinese for “be due to,” and asked her to translate a phrase into English. The student stood, looking uncomfortable. “Look at the screen,” Adelina said. The student mumbled something unclear. Adelina supplied the answer, then prompted the student to translate another phrase from Chinese. Other students chimed in with the answer, and Adelina completed the cycle, saying without applauding to the still-standing student, “Thank you. Sit down please.”

Although heavily emphasizing the word/phrase, Adelina’s classes did not focus exclusively at that level of text. Again, once the passage had been translated, Adelina moved to the text-structure level, discussing text type (argument), stages, and what she (following her textbook) called “writing skills” like “coming straight to the point,” or providing a topic sentence. She guided students first in identifying topic sentences throughout the passage, then in seeing how these sentences were supported by details in
each paragraph (lines 1-8). In lines 12 and following, she begins to refer this skill to the students’ own production in “compositions.”

1. Adelina: The author gives some details to support ... the main idea, ‘the US is
2. definitely a telephone country,’ because everyone uses telephone to, to what?
3. To do what. To many kinds of things, to do many kinds of things. ‘To conduct
4. business, to chat with friends [Adelina looks down at her book, reading], to
5. make or break social appointments,
6. One or two students: [joining in] [appointments.
7. Adelina: ... to shop and to obtain all kinds of information.’ [Adelina reads
8. aloud from the text, asking questions to demonstrate the logical coherence of
9. each sentence.] ...Why? ‘This is due partly to the fact that the telephone
10. service is superb here, whereas the postal service is less efficient.’ [Students
11. join in the reading, finishing the sentence with her aloud.] You can use the
12. same writing skills in your composition. If you want to express a main idea,
13. you can express it ... at the end of or at the beginning of your composition?
14. [3.2] Where should you present your main idea? [.5] At the beginning, in the
15. middle, or at the end of your composition? [She looks hopefully at the class
16. monitor, who is looking down. All other students have their heads down.]
18. beginning. You can present your main idea at the beginning. Then you can
19. give some details or reason, examples, to support your main idea. Is it clear?
20. [Students still have their heads down.] [1.0] Yes or no.
21. A few students: Yes.
For homework, students were asked to submit compositions to an online grading site. A sample composition and guidelines for this assignment were provided in the *New Horizons* text, with the following instructions:

Have a look at the outline and the sample paragraph below which starts with a general statement followed by details.... Write a paragraph which starts with a general statement followed by details on one of the following topics. One topic has been given a detailed outline that you can follow. (p. 16)

These instructions, along with Adelina’s encouragement to “use the same writing skills in your composition,” clearly approximate a *genred* orientation to instruction, with an emphasis on whole-text modeling and lexicogrammatical scaffolding; specifying the context of students’ genre output, it appeared that the purpose for their writing was the looming test: “If you want to pass CET-4, you’d better practice more compositions,” Adelina advised students.

In the set of lessons I observed, instruction revolved around the written text, relying on thorough word-, phrase-, and sentence-level translation, and using tight cycles of questioning and response, to prompt students’ participation in the “brick by brick” construction of a complete understanding of the passage and to stock their vocabulary for the coming test. There was an emphasis on word translation and memory, with an opening dictation and, in closing, a review of test-like exercises. Students were encouraged to memorize, not just words, but sentences and even an entire “passage.” Yet there was, too, a clear emphasis on text at the structural level, in alignment with genre pedagogical attention to text structure and discourse; there was attention to the meaning of the text as a whole, of its component paragraphs, and of its discoursal strategies. In
fact the encouragement to memorize a text as a whole could be considered part of this alignment with genre pedagogy; memorization of a text could (ideally) be a means of scaffolding genre construction, of grasping the meaning of a target text deeply and comprehensively, and making it available for use as a resource in future independent construction.

Circling back to the main research questions of this study, Adelina construed *task* as a teacher-directed, knowledge-oriented activity. In a possibly confounding, but also telling choice of words, she considered her “teaching task” to comprise 1) covering text thoroughly and 2) preparing students to pass a high-stakes English exam. The activity of Adelina’s classroom was consistent with her conception of her role as facilitator in students’ knowledge acquisition (through text explication), and display of that acquisition (through the test). In this classroom context, a genred task as operationalized in this study (i.e., as a carefully scaffolded, contextualized, meaning-focused instructional unit in which learners may rely on previously learned and/or new linguistic input in order to convey meaning) seemed irrelevant, and Adelina rejected it as such during her interviews. At the same time, her actual practice revealed attention to important components of genre pedagogy: meticulous lexicogrammatical instruction, embedded in the analysis of a focal text; and genre modeling.

### 3.4 Additional Teacher Participants: Hua Lao Shi, Wang Fang, and Jill

#### 3.4.1 Teachers’ Perceptions

Besides Adelina, 11 additional teachers agreed to take part in observations and interviews. Below I present findings from three of these teachers, those from whom I was able to gather the greatest amount of relevant data. These three teachers serve as
additional focal participants, their beliefs and practices illustrating the approaches to English instruction common at Oasis City Normal College. As above, I present biographical and personal information relevant to English learning and teaching. These are followed by more interpretive, thematic accounts of teachers’ perceptions and classroom practices.

3.4.1.1 Personal history vis-à-vis English learning and teaching. My colleague Hua was a cheery, carefully-spoken female teacher, sensitive and scholarly, having completed her doctor’s degree in English language and literature a few years before (to my knowledge, the only non-administrator teacher on the faculty to have done so). Since she was many years my senior, I always addressed her respectfully as Hua Lao Shi—Teacher Hua. She had first developed interest in English in the 1970s, learning a few words and sentences from a radio broadcast. After China’s Reform and Opening Policy was implemented in 1979, she studied English formally for the first time from an elderly Shanghai native who had been sent to Xinjiang in the tumultuous years before the Reform and found work as an English teacher in Hua Lao Shi’s high school. “But his pronunciation was not very good, you see.... He could just teach us simple words and sentences.” After a disappointing mix-up on the gaokao had relegated her to a third-tier college, Hua Lao Shi had gone on to study English, and had worked hard there to catch up with her classmates.

“I have a good memory, you see, and in one morning I can memorize 60 words, no problem. But I couldn’t speak it! ... So I felt ... very shamed before the other students .... But after a semester I caught up with them.... I practiced more in my spare time. I read, I recited, I memorized words, and every text—I memorized it.
It’s very easy for me to do that. So at the end of the first semester I was in the top 3 in the class, you see, so it gave me great confidence to do better.”

Two decades after graduation from college, Hua obtained her master’s degree and then her doctorate. She had been teaching for over ten years at OCC.

My colleague Wang Fang, an energetic and well-liked male teacher, was in addition to his teaching duties a junior administrator over the College English curriculum for all non-English majors. He was keenly observant and spoke and moved quickly. He had simply “liked” and been “good at” English in comparison with other subjects, so he chose it as his college major, and continued on to a teaching college in a provincial capital for his master’s degree in English. He had been teaching English for seven years, all at Oasis City Normal College.

Jill was warm and relaxed, with a reputation among students for friendliness. She had received a master’s degree in teaching methodology from a second-tier teaching university in eastern China, and had been teaching at OCC for nine years. For her precisely nuanced English pronunciation, she had been awarded the (doubtful) privilege of judging an English competition and accompanying the winner to a regional competition as coach. All three teachers, along with the administrator, identified as Han. All taught non-English majors in the classes I observed, although they also (either concurrently or previously) taught English majors and spoke at times to the contrast between the groups of students.

3.4.1.2 Perceptions of students: Critically unengaged. Teachers seemed to perceive students’ attitudes and behavior as a worsening crisis in the face of which they had few real options. At the beginning of his career just eight years before, Wang Fang
had assumed that his students, like himself as a college student, bore “the responsibility to study well” as “their duty—for their families, their parents, and themselves.” It never occurred to him, then, to “urge the students to learn… I just taught the students what I knew and what was in the textbook. But now I think that the students are very lazy.” He paused, perhaps catching a hint of a question in my face, and quietly insisted: “It's true, yeah. Very lazy, so I have to, to push them. Because it's my duty as a teacher.... I have a responsibility to find some ways or some methods to push them, to motivate them to study.... Students are different,” he said, “each year.” And “the difference lies not just in the language skills or the language proficiency,” he said; “it’s also the study attitude—mm, there’s something about the attitude.”

Hua repeatedly voiced complaints about the inability of her students to learn on their own, to think deeply, or to express themselves meaningfully, in spite of superior opportunities: “I always ask students [to] follow my advice. But few would like to do it, so I always feel, ah! it’s very sad. … [I’m] very worried about it, you see. ... They learn English for more years than we you see, but the ability—I don’t know, maybe in other aspects they are better than we [i.e., her own generation], but the understanding and the ability to write something is not good. ... You don’t know what they want to convey. The information they give you has little value. You don’t know what they want to express. So that’s a problem.”

“I don’t think [students] like to communicate in English,” Jill said; “their only purpose is to ... pass the final exam.” She made distinctions among types of students: poorly motivated students showed up to class, even if they didn’t pay attention once there, just so that they wouldn’t be penalized; students with better “discipline” had some
personal drive to learn “more new words, or ... grammar, just [to] help them improve their English.” But whether they were motivated by fear of losing points or a desire to learn, “I don’t think most of them like to communicate in English. Most of the students just focus on writing, to finish the exam, the exercise. They don’t like to speak in English.” Based on prior experience with “C-level” students, she expected that most would fail their English exams. “Their attitude sometimes is just, ‘Let it be; I am already like this, so I don’t care.’” She was at a loss in the face of this attitude. “For [C level students], the teacher really [clicks tongue] ah, doesn’t know what to do with them.... We cannot control them. They know nothing. So we don’t know what to do with them.”

3.4.1.3 Perceptions of normative teaching approaches: Text explication for deep learning or test success. Instructors seemed to take for granted that text explication made up the substance of normal instruction. Each instructor had a unique take on this basic approach. For scholarly Hua Lao Shi, the ideal of English teaching was a deep and mindful accumulation of knowledge by means of a thorough synthesis of new and prior learning, with the purpose of becoming a more enlightened person. Methodology was incidental to this process.

“The best [method], the effective one is the [one in which] student can learn. I have told you my experience of learning English. And at that time, the teacher used the translation method. ... The teacher may have [had] no idea about the communicative approach, or the task-based language, but we learned. We learned. So in my point of view, a good method ... can help the learners to learn.”

As administrator over the college’s English program for non-majors, Wang Fang took a more pragmatic and systemic view, sharing insights about the forces shaping the
enterprise of English learning at the college. Administrators took great interest in CET score reports every year, he said, since these scores were important for the school’s ranking. Wang Fang related that instruction across the program focused “more on reading” than on other skills “because there is a high proportion of reading on the CET,” pointing out as Adelina had done exactly what percentage each test section contributed to the total CET score. He personally would have liked to be able to develop his own materials on topics more interesting to students and use different methods than text explication, but didn’t “dare” to go beyond the enforced coverage requirements of 2 weeks per required textbook unit. In his account, these coverage requirements could not be modified, because CET standards, which were, as he explained, uniform across China, could not be changed.

Jill’s approach to normative instruction seemed more social, oriented toward students’ reception of it; it was important to her to be “kind” yet “strict” with students. In recent years, she said, she had tried to “finish the book earlier” so that she could discuss other topics with students. She used discussion questions frequently, she reported, and was often amused by her students’ interesting responses. But like Wang Fang, she was stymied by the test and curricular regulations. “Often when I teach,” Jill said, “I can feel that students are very [clicks tongue]—feel very bored, when I explain language points or grammar. I really don’t want to teach that actually but yeah, [click] (1.2) we have to finish that. ... We have to explain the exercises and we have to explain the text sentence by sentence in case they don't understand.”

3.4.1.4 Perceptions of communicative, task-informed, and genre approaches:

Unconventional and inadequate for learning. Teachers understood tasks in terms of an
atypical directionality of knowledge-sharing: rather than knowledge flowing from teacher to student, as teachers considered normative, in task approaches as these teachers understood them, knowledge and ideas were gathered (often from texts) and presented by students. Each teacher’s perceptions are described in more detail below.

Like Adelina, Hua illustrated her concept of tasks in terms of attaining target knowledge. She implemented “tasks” in which students were asked to conduct research and present “background knowledge” on a given text, in order to develop students’ “ability to choose, ... to judge the useful information.” She remained the arbiter of acceptable knowledge: “If there is something wrong, I'll correct them. And then maybe I'll say something more about it; ... if they don't mention something but I think it's very important for them to know, yeah, I'll explain it.”

Once I had explained my own understanding of tasks, she expressed skepticism as to their value:

“Yeah we do it but [1.0] :mm [0.5] I don’t think it works. ...Today I asked the students to talk about fame.... But not not many students like to talk about this topic. They think, “Oh it’s not interesting, it’s not necessary.” ...There’s no ... how to say the bian lun, the discussion?... They just say their own point of view but no ... debating.”

For Hua, large class sizes, rigid curriculum requirements, low proficiency, and low student motivation made unconventional approaches impossible:

“You see we have so many students in one class. How do you use the communicative approach? We a have definite time for a period, we have definite content you are required to finish in a definite time. How can you use that? How
can you use the communicative approach to have the interaction with each student? You can't do it. You see? You can't do it. ... And also [to use CLT] the students [must] have a certain level of English, at least they can understand what you say, and also they're interested, they are willing to do what you ask them to do. Otherwise I don't think it's a good method, you see.”

Still, like Wang Fang and Jill, Hua was concerned about how she might engage her disaffected students, and by the end of her second interview was musing that communicative or task-informed approaches might foster their engagement: “I heard that most students say they feel that the English class is boring. So they want the teacher to make [it] more interesting. So I think maybe the communicative teaching is the better way to ... keep the students in high spirits for learning.”

In Wang Fang’s view, tasks were, again, oriented toward accumulating knowledge: “Task-based teaching means that the teacher provides some tasks for the [students] and these tasks must … contain the knowledge or the skills that the students have to master.” As an example, he offered that “if I want the students to learn the reading skills maybe I give them some time to read the whole text and then ask them to find out some of the ideas in the text. ... And I will teach them maybe how to find the major information in the text.” He used these kinds of activities in class because he could “supervise” students and be sure that they completed the work he set for them; “after class,” he said, “they never look at the books.”

Wang Fang did, then, use individual and reading-focused tasks, but for him, genred performances such as “conversations and presentations” were not useful to his students, “at least in such kind of region,” i.e., in the remote west of China, where
students “have very little chance to communicate in English.” He indicated that because of impoverished “family conditions” some students were unable even to take advantage of student exchange opportunities with universities in neighboring Central Asian countries, just a short flight away. Since the possibility of studying abroad was so remote, approaches emphasizing the communicative use of English had little relevance to his classes, he believed. He thought that few students would have opportunity to use English in their future professions, for instance in a joint-venture international corporation. He thought it laughably unlikely that students would choose to use English simply for personal learning or enrichment in their future.

Jill was insecure about her ability to define communicative and task methodologies:

“I think I don’t have a very academic definition about that. ... But ... for me, communicative teaching method [means that whether in] the reading class or speaking/listening class, I will always choose to let the students have discussion. And um: [1.5] although, right, they don’t like that, I will force them. I think communicative method [means] that the teacher is just a guide, provides students something.”

In Jill’s view, in comparison to Adelina’s, Hua’s, and Wang Fang’s, these non-traditional approaches took a view of knowledge as more unfinalized: “[Students] can have their own thoughts and their own opinions and share it with the class. Teachers need to respect students’ ideas, not just teach them what the teachers think is right.” She was unsure about the nature of task-oriented methods: “We have learned it in [Second-Tier Teacher’s University], but I really didn’t focus too much on the definition [of] the task-
based teaching method. Um, I think from its name we can have our own understanding that the teaching will be based on some tasks; the students need to finish the tasks.”

Between our second and third interviews, Jill tried out a genred task in a class I observed, following the speaking/listening textbook in asking students to generate recipes for simple dishes and then present cooking instructions to the class. She was happy about the positive atmosphere and “active” student engagement she had witnessed during the task cycle, but was dubious overall about the benefit of such approaches as a regular classroom diet, citing (again) large classes, a lack of student motivation, and the irrelevance of the approaches to testing.

“Maybe [students] have learned some new words [during the task] if they are trying to remember them. But I don't think they can learn a lot from this task. ... But at least I think they tried to speak some English and look for some new words, and they can imitate [the pronunciation of these new words] from the mobile phone. ... I think they liked it. They ... thought it was funny [i.e., entertaining]. And they were glad to cooperate with me. And they tried to finish the task” (emphasis added).

What is clearest from this quotation is that, in Jill’s view, the use of tasks does not efficiently advance what she appears to consider the essential goal of English class: to accumulate “new words.” She felt that tasks were difficult to design—in her MA on teaching methodology she had learned nothing about running a task-oriented lesson—and difficult to control. She thought that the students themselves did not find them valuable.

“[The genred task is] not like other tasks [in which students] just maybe listen and write or fill in the blanks, ... very easy to control and students think they
can learn something. But from this task? … [Students] think, ‘After class I forgot everything. I didn't write anything. And I just said something funny and I cannot learn [1.0] a lot.’ Especially for the exams or to improve their English level. Because we don't have the speaking test. … But [1.2] [above] all I think a big problem is that students don't like talking … so I will not devote my time in designing such tasks. [1.2] Maybe that's the [main] reason.”

### 3.4.1.5 Discussion: Teacher perceptions vis-à-vis administrative discourse.

To sum up, teachers understood task-related instruction somewhat differently than the way operationalized in this study; that is, they tended to see such instruction in terms of teacher-directed acquisition and display of pre-determined knowledge; Jill, who saw tasks as opportunities for students to express their own views, was an exception.

Operationalizing the feasibility of genred task instruction as “the quantity of resource units”—i.e., curriculum—“under control or available for use” (Klein, 1990), GTI can then be said to be not under the control of stakeholders. Although tasks are present in the curriculum, teachers do not have a clear idea of how they should be enacted.

All teachers rejected task and related methodologies as unfeasible in their context, consistently citing the exigencies of the CET; under pressure from administrators to help their students score above 53% on a national standardized English exam, and sensing additional pressure (from an undefined source) to thoroughly parse all assigned textbook passages, teachers had no time for tasks. Other obstacles to task included students’ low proficiency, which made task performance very difficult; students’ very low motivation to engage in the effortful reasoning of debates or discussions; and even, in Jill’s case, the perception that students would reject tasks as an invalid classroom activity. Teachers
cited as well the difficulty of controlling very large classes if tasks were implemented, and of engaging interest in activities with no actual relevance to the “real world” of the students, the majority of whom had no plausible outlet for English beyond passing the CET. Jill, who held an MA in teaching methodology from a well-regarded school, additionally mentioned that tasks were difficult to design. A task approach was thus considered *impractical* given existing constraints (poor student engagement, low proficiency), impossible to *integrate* given the existing infrastructure (the mandated curriculum and standardized English exam), and thus on the whole *unacceptable* in their context.

In contrast to their low view of tasks, teachers considered text explication, with the goal of word learning and ultimately test success (or, in the more idealized views of Teacher Hua and Adelina, deepened understanding), to be an appropriate approach. At the same time, all were aware that their students were unengaged by this approach or, less flatteringly, too “lazy” to invest in the practices necessary to ensure the expected results: successful display of knowledge.

Their beliefs about teaching approaches echoed the priorities of the English department head, Director Xiu, who likewise laid emphasis on text coverage and test scores. “At one side, you [teachers] should just finish your teaching plan,” i.e., the syllabus submitted at the beginning of the semester stating which textbook units would be covered. “You should finish your teaching task. Right? ... On the other side, you can just ... make *efforts* to help students to do some preparation for their CET.”

The year that I joined the teaching staff, Director Xiu had redistributed teaching assignments in a way that intensified the pressure for passing CET scores. Each teacher
was now assigned a single group of students to whom he or she taught all skills, rather than, as in the past, teaching one or more preferred skills to multiple classes of students. This policy had resulted in a much heavier workload on the part of each teacher, who now had to prepare classes for all skills, and was generally unpopular with teachers. The change, the director explained, was motivated by a desire to assign responsibility for students’ test results to individual teachers. Under the former scheme, “if the students’ achievement was very bad, ... nobody accepts that that’s his or her responsibility.” He continued,

> They just—reading teachers [say], ‘That’s the listening teacher’s problem.’ ... So that’s why I just changed this kind of situation. Now these students, [the] whole class, they are ... controlled by you. Only you.... I don’t care about your teaching plan. I want the result. ... Now you control the whole class. If there are any problems with the students, if they get some bad achievements in examination, that’s your responsibility.

From an activity-theory perspective, this assignment of responsibility sheds light on teachers’ sense of crisis—of being caught between inflexible curricular requirements on the one hand, and their students’ resistance of these requirements on the other.

### 3.4.2 Jill’s Classroom

The social and responsive orientation to traditional instruction Jill indicated in her interviews seemed apparent in the class I observed, a course for “A-level” pre-school education majors. Jill displayed an easy rapport with students, engaging them in a relaxed, friendly pedagogical conversation around the meaning of the focal text. Like Adelina, Jill was focused on word memory and helping students arrive at the right answer
to her comprehension questions; sometimes she playfully shamed them for not being able to respond. Jill stayed closely attuned to students’ responses, and students in turn were attentive to her, not just in the first one or two rows but throughout the classroom. In the episode narrated below, Jill opens her class with light conversation and review:

It is 10 AM Beijing time, 8 AM local time. Jill settles her things on her desk and smiles warmly at her students. She opens her PowerPoint slides, supplied by the publisher of the approved textbook. There is a menu: “A: Lead-in. B: Pre-reading activities. C: Text study. D: Summary. E: Paragraph writing.” She clicks on option C. She speaks in Chinese in a low-key way about absent students, then announces, again in a relaxed tone, a dictation, smiling when a few students groan. She switches to English and formally begins the class.

1. Jill: Good morning, everyone.

2. Students [in chorus]: Good morning, Teacher.

3. J [smiling]: How would you describe the weather today?

4. A student: How amazing!

5. J: Horrible! [2.5] Very bad. Terrible. Anything else? It snowed, right? ... So this morning you didn’t have morning exercise [continuing to smile at her students].


7. J: So what time did you get up?

8. A student [almost immediately]: Seven o’clock.

9. J [continues chatting a minute longer, then asks]: ... OK, are you ready? In the last class we stopped at paragraph nine, right? You still remember the topic. The topic of this unit is ... [looking at her book] Olympic standard for love. ... And we
said that the coach has set the standard for love. And in which paragraph can we find his standard for Olympic love...?

10. Students [indistinctly]: Nine.

11. J: Nine? That’s right, yes. We can find some very important words which are “consistent humor,” “quiet gratitude,” and “perceptivity,” ... right? ... These are very important words to remember. ... OK and today I think we will finish the rest of the text.

Following a basic text-explication approach—“today we will finish the rest of the text” (turn 11)—Jill’s lesson flowed smoothly; vocabulary instruction, rather than consisting of uncontextualized words and phrases, was integrated into the text and its meaning (turns 1-3, “outgoing”; turn 4, “persistent,” “humorous”). The content of text itself seemed to engage students’ interest, and students responded readily to Jill’s frequent meaning-focused questions:

1. Jill: We have talked about the personality of the coach, right? Do you remember?
   Personality, shenme? ... Personality. What is personality? [turning toward the chalkboard and writing the word; students respond in Chinese.]

2. J: If I say I am very ah [1.2] outgoing, this is a word that describes my personality, right?

3. A student: Kexin.

4. J: Yeah. Kexin, xinge. Right? And last class we have talked about the coach’s personality. We said that he is very hardworking, right? And he is very persistent. You remember the word persistent? ... [Chinese translation], right. And also he, yes, he has humor, right? He is humorous.
Beyond text-explication, Jill employed discussions, as she had stated in an interview. In the following excerpt, she follows up from a discussion on travel based on the listening/speaking text. This excerpt illustrates Jill’s belief in the value of eliciting students’ opinions; it indicates, too, that students appeared comfortable sharing their ideas with her. Here she welcomes and validates students’ responses (turns 3, 5, 7, and 11), completely at home with their references to pop culture:

1.  J: So just now I asked you to have a discussion on the topic on page 37, right? About traveling. Now would anyone like to answer one of the questions? ... If you could go anywhere in the world—OK, [gesturing for a volunteer to stand] please.

2.  S: Mm, I want to go to Korea.

3.  J: Go to Korea, yes, why?

4.  S: [in a monotone voice] Because I’m interested in hip hop. Yeah—

5.  J: Hip hop, right?

6.  S: And I am cuh-crazy about [unclear] so I want to taste the Korean food. But the most important thing is I want to see my oppa [Korean word for an older brother or romantic interest].

7.  J: [laughing] Oppa! [Students laugh.] See your oppa, who is your oppa?

8.  S: so so I want to: [1.5]

9.  J: Very good! ... Who is it?

10. S: Exo. [a Korean band that performs in Mandarin and Korean]

11. J: Exo, right? Uh-huh, OK.... Yes, so you may want to go to Korea. Yes, good. I think you gave us a lot of reasons.
Moving on to the textbook’s listening exercises, Jill employed, again, text-explication methods, here highlighting the words that would facilitate students’ overall understanding. In the excerpt below, students are trying to identify the answer to a comprehension question about a listening exercise, in which two apparently North American speakers are debriefing about one of the speaker’s recent trip abroad. Students are to identify the location of the trip:

1.  
   J: I’m sure that you just missed the answer right now [smiling]. K? I want to mention, pay attention to the first two sentences, especially. K? Now I will play it again. [plays audio a second time]

2.  
   A few students: No. [I.e., they cannot identify the answer]

3.  
   J: No, OK, it doesn’t matter, again. [tolerantly plays the first part of the audio for a third time]... So ... actually the answer is in the first sentence, right? ...
   
   Just listen carefully, this time. ‘How was’ where?

4.  
   Recording [playing for the fourth time]: “Julia, how was Amsterdam?”

5.  
   J [quietly]: What’s the place? [A student is looking up at Jill. Jill laughs pleasantly and indicates this student with her arm.] What’s your answer?

6.  
   Student [very quietly]: Amsterdam.

7.  

8.  
   Recording: “Julia, how was Amsterdam?” [Students repeat quietly.]

9.  
   J: Got it? Yes! Am-ster-dam. If you have never used this word, right—[turns to write it on board] Am—ster—dam. You know this city, right? A mu si ke dan. What’s the city? Where is it? [Students murmur indistinctly.] America?
[Students look at each other. Jill is grinning at them.] This is a test of your general knowledge. [1.8] It’s the—

10. S: Capitol.

11. J: Capitol of where? [1.0]

12. S: [unclear]

13. J: Holland. He lan, shiba? [“Holland, right?” Students relax, laughing with Jill, and emit a collective “Ah!” of understanding.] It’s in America?

14. Ss: No!

As indicated above, Jill playfully quizzed students’ on their “general knowledge” (turns 5, 9), but not by assigning blame when they could not answer. During a stimulated recall after this lesson, Jill indicated that she had empathized with students during this episode, sensing and responding to their difficulty in grasping the listening content: “I am also poor in [geography],” she confessed. “I [had] just checked it, actually [laughs].... Without any hint I didn’t think they could find the answer, especially a name they have never heard, Amsterdam.”

I was curious about Jill’s attitude toward students, and asked about it. She responded,

It’s not a good choice to embarrass the students. You can choose to encourage them, and if ... the mistakes are too easy, I think [you can] joke with them, kid with them, and then they will just feel—relaxed?... You need to have good relationship I think with the students.

What my observations indicated, in addition to what I had learned from Jill’s interviews, was the way in which Jill’s relational values played out within a ‘traditional’
text-explication approach. Via sensitive question/response sequences, Jill guided her students into an understanding of the text. This was done in a relaxed, inviting way—not shaming but almost teasing students for any missteps. Jill employed approaches beyond text explication, as well: the discussion activity approximated a task as operationalized here, with a workplan (to discuss a set of questions), a focus on meaning and real-world-like use of language, and a goal (to express answers to the questions).

3.4.3 Wang Fang’s Classroom

Wang Fang ran his class at an efficient pace, quickly assessing students’ preparedness and setting them activities to facilitate their understanding of the target material. Following a two-minute “lead-in” activity (eliciting adjectives to describe personality) and a PowerPoint-based lecture providing background information to the text, Wang Fang directed his students, all pre-school education majors, to a reading passage on the life and work of Charlie Chaplin. Wang Fang first checked whether students had “previewed” the text—an expected practice in Chinese education, in which students familiarize themselves with upcoming material (cf. Xiao, 2015). They had not done so, so he quickly directed them to read the text in class, issuing his instructions first in English, then Chinese. “So I’d like you to read the whole text in 10 to 15 minutes, OK? ... And find out the main idea of the text and especially the main idea of each paragraph, ... the structure of the text.” After students had had time to work on their own, Wang Fang guided them in identifying the main idea of each paragraph. Students were responsive and attentive during this process.

They remained responsive, as well, in a later class period as Wang Fang worked closely to the textbook, eliciting their responses to textbook exercises.
1. *WF [reading]*: ‘During that period, there was a redistribution away from

2. laborers and’ ah—[He waits for students to supply the cloze answer, then

3. breaks the sentence down into more manageable parts]. ‘During that period—

4. ’ [He looks up at students, who translate this phrase into Chinese. Wang Fang

5. repeats their translation and continues] ‘There was a redistribution.’ Re-,

6. shiba. R-E. What does distribution mean? [A student supplies a Chinese

7. word.] [2.5] Distribution. ... [Wang Fang supplies a translation, then starts

8. translating the whole sentence again] Zai nage shiqi ... away from laborers

9. toward landowners, shiba? Cong laozhu dao dizhu. ... Capitalists. Jia “S” ba,


Wang Fang led students toward the right answer—identification of accurate
lexicogrammar at the level of the morpheme (lines 5-7, 9-10), word (line 6), and phrase
(lines 3-5) through rapid code-switching, alertly moving between English and Chinese to
support students’ grasp of a target form. Students seemed behaviorally engaged, calling
out the answers even from the very back of the classroom—and even though their visual
stimulus during the class consisted of a nearly-stationary instructor looking at his book,
using translation and a piece of chalk.
Wang Fang’s essential approach was, again, to explicate text and exercises via tight translation-oriented question/response sequences. As in Jill’s case, students were responsive to his methodology and followed his lead. In two cases he departed from this approach to elicit student responses, once with a brief warm-up and again with a goal-oriented task in which students were asked to identify the main idea of a text.

3.4.4 Hua Lao Shi’s Classroom

Teacher Hua had been hesitant to allow me to visit her “C-level” class, a course for Chinese, history, and minority language majors. In the class period that I observed, Teacher Hua was covering a unit on world travel (the same one covered by Jill, above) with the following aim stated in the teacher’s book: “Students can learn from these stories of intercultural contact and have a more positive experience themselves when they travel.” Hua arrived at the classroom early, adjusting her microphone headset, cuing up
her supporting media, and writing target expressions on the board. She opened the class pleasantly:

> Good morning, class! ... Where would you like to go if you have a chance? [She repeats the question in Chinese. A tall student enters late and Hua glares at him, but he doesn’t notice. Students call out responses in English.] Have you ever traveled in China? Where have you been to? [Again, she repeats these questions in Chinese. Two students have studied at boarding schools in eastern China, and Hua asks one of them to describe her experience. She answers in Chinese, and Hua translates her response.] Oh, they [people in eastern China] have never heard of minority students.... Oh, you told them you went to school by donkey, and they believed it, right? [Hua and her students share the joke]... If you have a chance, you can tell others that now Xinjiang is good.

Hua transitioned into listening exercises in which Americans report on trips to Amsterdam and Mexico. Silence met her question, “Where did each student travel?” She repeated it, finally supplying the answer herself reproachfully. “Amsterdam. ... Do you know where it is?” A few students ventured, “Europe.” Students were unsure about the location of Mexico.

Hua moved through a line-by-line translation of the listening passage, interacting with students to check their understanding. She targeted a segment of text, asked a question about it or began to translate it, and waited for students to respond. When they could, she registered pleasure, smiling or praising students. When they couldn’t, she supplied the right answer for them.
As the lesson progressed, students became overtly unengaged. Hua did not move beyond translation to elicit the deeper understandings that in her interviews she had placed such a high premium on. Although she had touched on themes of “intercultural contact” during the first few minutes of the class (ratifying students’ experiences of interaction with eastern Chinese residents who stereotyped the western Chinese) she did not bring these themes back into play when they reappeared in the listening texts—for instance in an interview of a North American “diplomatic wife” who reported with obvious prejudice on a trip to Zambia.

In a stimulated recall interview session after this lesson, Hua seemed defeated. In fact, she admitted, the content of the lesson had been difficult even for her to relate to, since the most experience she had ever had with foreign travel was to work in a local foreign affairs office. “But for the students—they have no idea about traveling abroad.” Hua guessed that many of them had never left their hometowns before making the journey to Oasis City to attend college. This meant that the genred task laid out for that unit—a whole-class survey on domestic and global travel, inquiring in part whether students preferred “budget” or “luxury” travel—was absurdly irrelevant. “So we don’t ask this kind of question, and just skip this part.”

Hua related that her teaching schedule left her no time to adjust the mandated content to students’ level, other than by dropping assignments such as compositions altogether for class C (“I don’t ask them to do it. They can’t do it.”). Under the revised teaching schedule, she taught 16 hours per week, using four different textbooks, to around 160 students at four different proficiency levels. She was required to set all students a vocabulary quiz every class period, which meant that, aside from any
homework she assigned, she had to handle about 320 quizzes each week. She ruefully confessed that it was all she could do just to keep going.

“I guess every teacher knows the textbook is a little difficult for class C ... , but— [3.0] we can’t do anything about it. ... We just follow the teaching plan. We don’t have enough time to pay attention to the result of teaching. See? We just teach. ... So that’s the problem.”

Like Adelina, Jill, and Wang Fang, Hua’s basic approach consisted of a line-by-line translation of the target text. Although she was clearly displeased with students’ uptake of this methodology, in this case largely because the content was so far removed from students’ lives, she saw no way around the curricular regulations that necessitated it.

### 3.5 Traditional Instruction: Discussion

Teachers’ normative approach was to use continual questioning to scaffold students’ comprehension of target reading or listening texts. “Warm up” conversations or discussion activities served merely as preparation for or respite from the core activity of the class, text explication. Where students were responsive, as in Jill’s and Wang Fang’s classes, this approach followed a steady rhythm: teacher question, class response, and teacher confirmation. In other classes, however, the rhythm of the class faltered as teachers waited in vain for students to respond or were forced to answer their own questions; students held private conversations, napped, or looked at their phones; some students did not have books on their desks at all.

As they narrated their academic journeys in interviews, teachers took evident pride in the effortful habits that had yielded them high class rankings and led them into teaching careers, and expressed frustration with the students who failed to imitate their
own behavior. Teachers reported that they “pushed” students, sometimes “forcing” them to participate in official systems of academic capital, including by fining students monetarily for wrong answers. It is possible that teachers’ values had become, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in a pedagogical approach that held out the attainment of knowledge as an unquestioned standard, and dismissed or shamed as deficient—even immoral or “lazy”—the students who did not attain the knowledge they were offering.

Teachers’ attitudes reinforced the legitimacy of the test-based educational system, beginning with the gaokao and continuing through to the CET, the benchmark for success in the College English program. Several teachers explained to me that since Oasis City was not a “good school,” students admitted here were by definition bad students. Wang Fang, for instance, stated,

Our college ranks at the third level of all the colleges in China. So the good students, they all come to the good universities such as Tsinghua University, ... Beijing University or some other good universities, ranking in the first level.... So that means that the students [who] come to our college, (3.0) they are not very good students in senior middle school. So their learning motivation or their attitude towards learning is not … very high, [as high] as the students in good universities.

Wang Fang dismissed the idea that their gaokao results could be a matter of ability, rather than diligence: “As they were growing up maybe they have formed a kind of attitude towards learning; it's very hard to change.” He pointed out that even among students from poor backgrounds, a few were hard-working and “resourceful for their
family.” But diligent students were rare at Oasis City; there was an unhealthy culture, he felt, of underachievement and apathy.

These teachers’ attitudes may be partly understood with reference to a so-called “Chinese Imperative” to succeed in English study, not (as western EFL stakeholders had assumed) in order to communicate, but in order to accrue social and familial honor by studying diligently and achieving high test scores (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005). This, in fact, is very nearly the view that Wang Fang expressed in an interview:

[As a student] I thought that to study is the… task of the students. I mean that the students ... have the responsibility to study well. Yeah, it’s their duty, for their families, [their] parents, and themselves. So I [didn’t] think that the teachers should ... urge the students to learn.

Faced with increasing apathy in his student population year by year, he had shifted his approach:

But now I think that the students are very, are very lazy. It's true, yeah. Very lazy, so I have to, to push them. Because it's my duty as a teacher. ... I have a responsibility to find some ways or some methods to push them, to motivate them to study.

In its examination of “object-related practical activity,” Cultural-Historical Activity Theory asks how human stakeholders wield the tools afforded them for achieving the goals they are set. Within what kind of system—i.e., with what community members and rules, and with what division of labor—do they wield these tools? It seeks to determine how social environment shapes thinking, and how the agentive mind in turn acts upon its social realities. The goal of using CHAT is to identify tensions within the
activity system among its constituent parts, and between activity systems, ultimately in order to innovate ways of easing these tensions.

The figure below displays my account of the activity system of the College English Program at Oasis City Normal College. Here, teachers are agents or subjects; they are regulated by rules which are upheld by their community, achieved through a particular division of labor (which I account for in the paragraph below), in the service of a particular object, students’ competence in English. This object, in turn, serves a particular outcome: a globally-savvy cohort of Chinese college graduates.

Pan (2014) points out that in China, a “top-down” foreign-language education policy (FLEP) operates whereby “[t]he state organises research institutions ... for policy making.” Pan (2014) continues, “FLEPs in China are the outcome of the state’s definition of the value and functions of English according to its own needs”; ‘ELT [i]s ... localised to meet the need of state development’” (p. 81). The Ministry of Education document regulating the College English curriculum for all majors spells out these needs as follows:

[The] College English teaching aim is to develop students’ English application ability, especially their listening and speaking ability, so that they can use English to communicate effectively in their future study, work and social interactions. Meanwhile they can enhance their self-study ability [and] improve their overall literacy to meet the needs of China’s social development and international exchanges. (MOE, 2007, translation, emphasis added)

Here, English competence—“especially listening and speaking”—promotes global competence in order to “meet the needs of China’s social development.” In the
system below, this competence is measured using the CET-4 (Cheng & Wang, 2012), a powerful tool that (fittingly) sits at the top of the system.
Figure 7 Activity System of ONC’s College English Program: Teachers as subjects
In interviews, teachers directed their concern toward several points in the activity system diagrammed above. First, they saw students as not bearing their weight in the division of labor—as “bad” or “lazy” with reference to their responsibility to master the curriculum handed down to them. Second, they were concerned with the nature of one tool or “sub-tool,” the textbook—but, importantly, not with the CET-4, whose validity they assumed. The historical underpinnings of this widespread assumption have been thoroughly discussed in Cheng and Curtis’s (2010) edited volume, English Language Assessment and the Chinese Learner; very briefly, the contributors to this volume tie current attitudes toward English language testing to centuries-old practices of social selection through memory-intensive testing in China.

As stated above, teachers perceived the College English program at Oasis City Normal College to be in the midst of a crisis. Required materials were thought to be too difficult or unengaging for many students; yet teachers’ schedules left them no time to adapt these materials, and they saw no pathway for designing or securing other, more appropriate ones. Even in classes where students were relatively more responsive, they sometimes appeared to be doing little more than enduring, and would come alive only after the bell rang and their social activities could be resumed. Most worryingly, the program was failing dramatically to meet its own standard for success, with only between 7 and 20 percent (according to different estimates) passing the CET.

Turning the analytic lens of feasibility with its component constructs (acceptability, practicality, and integration; see above) on the approaches in use at Oasis City, it seems clear that teachers accepted current approaches as normative, appropriately integrated with an exam-dominated system, but struggled to control them in practice where student engagement was low.

As I framed my study before arriving on site at Oasis City in 2014, I was well aware of the push for English competence, including communicative competence, across the Chinese
educational system. I did not, of course, know how approaches intended to foster such competence might be functioning in my future research site. The critical state of student engagement and teacher morale at Oasis City, under the normative approaches described above, does seem to establish further warrant for exploring the feasibility of alternative approaches, including genred task approaches. This warrant for the current study was one I did not know in advance, but can now provide after having done research at the site.

In following sections, I explore the extent to which students internalized their teachers’ attitudes, accepting the identities available to them as “bad students,” and taking up or rejecting teachers’ values for high test scores. First, however, I present the contrasting case of a Canadian instructor who used genred task instruction in a course for second-year English major students.

3.6 Case Study 2: Meg

On the first day I arrived at the college, I was ushered into the office of my new supervisor and seated in a chair so low that I had to look up to make eye contact. I addressed the man on the other side of the desk at first as Xiu Laoshi, Teacher Xiu, but was later informed that his proper title was Xiu Zhuren, Director Xiu. He was the head of the Foreign Language Department, whose main foreign language was English, and he had done a PhD in English literature specializing in British drama at a university in eastern China. In that first meeting, Director Xiu began praising the work Meg had done at the school over the years of his tenure and held her up as an example to me. Just at that moment, she knocked on his door, having been summoned to meet me, and entered with a self-mocking joke about eavesdroppers hearing good about themselves. Unlike the majority of her colleagues, who were Chinese nationals, Meg was a native of Canada and a “foreign teacher,” or waijiao—from the Chinese word meaning “outside.” Like other foreign teachers who had come and gone over the past several years at
Oasis City Normal College, Meg had been responsible for the spoken English curriculum. From the day of my arrival, Meg proved generous with her time and resources, integrating me into her network of colleagues, helping me make my way around the campus and the city, and sharing her teaching materials. She was confident and energetic, meeting life in Oasis City with tenacity and a ready sense of humor, as well as a fluent and literate command of Mandarin.

Meg had trained as a nutritionist and then gone on to take a Cambridge certificate in English language teaching (CELTA), which she had found “incredibly useful” in her work with Chinese learners first at a university in southeastern China and later at Oasis City. The CELTA course had not fully prepared her for a new challenge, however: teaching primary-age children. This responsibility was a major part of her life in Oasis City, and she devoted a great deal of time and creativity to it.

To make ends meet after federal funding was cut due to poor job-placement figures, Oasis City Normal College’s English department had a few years previously begun holding for-profit Saturday courses for children in the community. As one of the few “foreigners” in the city, Meg had been in high demand with wealthy parents seeking an educational edge for their only children, and was “thrown into the classroom” with no training, oversight, or proper materials. The new assignment had been very challenging—“the steepest learning curve of my whole life”—and after a semester or two which Meg described as disastrous, she had taken time off from the children’s classes to begin reading extensively on her own, researching young learners and building a personal library of resources for teaching them. By the time I arrived, the Saturday school had grown to at least a hundred students placed at 7 proficiency/developmental levels, employing five teachers (including, I discovered, myself) who planned lessons together around a genre-based multi-media curriculum that Meg had had shipped from Canada. The
classes for very young learners that Meg co-taught with her colleague Li Yan were highly sought after in the community and enrolled at and beyond maximum capacity.

Meg’s investments in the children’s school had helped her forge strong friendships with her colleagues, in particular her co-teacher Li Yan, and her reputation as a teacher had won her the respect of influential community members—the wealthy doctors and bankers whose children she taught and with whom she maintained contact in Mandarin, often via China’s main social media platform, WeiXin. In part through her efforts in launching the children’s school, Meg had moved somewhat beyond the category of waijiao—“foreign” or “outside teacher”—to become an integral, “inside” member of her community. Still, she complained to me, no matter how well-regarded her work was, she would always be labeled an outsider.

3.6.1 Perceptions of Students

Like Wang Fang, Meg perceived a college-wide culture of passive resistance to academic investment among the university students at Oasis City. Rather than attributing this resistance entirely to laziness, however, she perceived social and developmental factors at play:

[Students here have the mindset that] “it’s not cool to be a nerd,” you know; “it’s not cool to work hard,” and I think something like that is just really contagious in a classroom…. I think teenagers do mature later in China…. What kids in Canada would be doing when they’re thirteen or fourteen, [Chinese students do at] nineteen and twenty. It’s the first time they’ve ever had to assert their independence, so [they think,]

“Nothing’s really going to happen to me if I don’t do my homework.” … They would … probably have been shamed horribly in their high school if they didn’t work hard, or their parents are breathing down their necks; suddenly they’re not …. You know, sometimes I feel like I’m working in a middle school, not a university. (Interview, April 1, 2015)
Meg made a distinction, though, between motivation levels in her “better class,” a group made up of the highest-scoring second-year English major students, and the three other classes of second-year English majors she taught. In the “better class,” students were “enthusiastic,” ready to “get into” the activities Meg assigned. In other classes, students complied with Meg’s directions but less eagerly, “feeling very uncomfortable about the English they know anyway, and then [1.2] not wanting to appear to be taking something seriously, because that’s not cool.” Meg compared the two categories of students in their participation in a holiday-themed role play task. In the task, one partner was to impersonate a U.S. exchange student in China during Spring Festival, and the other his or her Chinese neighbor, a student at China’s prestigious Tsinghua University who had invited the exchange student over for dinner.

Obviously with the better class, they got into [the role play] a lot more, just because they generally do. You know, they saw the fun element of it: ... “Okay, we can pretend to be really, really Chinese, and you can pretend to be really, really American”—you know, they kind of exaggerated the roles.... The classroom was very loud; everyone was laughing; the Americans are like [angrily], “Why do I need slippers?” [laughs]. With the other classes ... there wasn’t quite the same atmosphere, but they did it, and they got the language practice from it.

3.6.2 Perceptions of Teaching Approaches and Materials

Given what she saw as students’ reluctance to invest in academic work, or to draw the mockery of their peers by betraying interest in it, Meg was strategic about the ways she managed instruction, first by preparing activities that she guessed students would see as relevant to their lives outside the classroom. She intended these tasks to engage students almost in spite of themselves:
I think it’s very important that [students] have some idea of how they can use [a given activity]. Because your less-motivated students aren’t going to really get into it. Somehow I think you have to sort of trick them into, you know, getting them out of their shyness.... Before they realize it they’re getting into an activity even though they don’t want to.

Unless students ‘bought in’ to an activity, they would not participate, Meg knew. “So first of all I need to let them kind of see the point in it.” Meg facilitated buy-in by giving students planning time, for instance in the holiday role play described above, by having students “write down all the questions they’re going to ask, so that they’re already starting to think, ‘Well, actually, yeah, this is a good thing; one day I might meet an American who might actually have these questions.’”

Taking on roles was in itself a powerful means of fostering engagement, she believed: by moving into character, students were given a reason to communicate—an “info gap” where none would otherwise have existed among students who, living in extremely close quarters, already “know everything about each others’ lives.” Crucially, too, assuming roles allowed students to transcend the limitations of their own, self- and other-imposed identity labels:

They can hide behind the façade of ... “I’m a student from Tsinghua. So I’m not a student from Oasis City Normal College with terrible English. I’m a student from Tsinghua; I’m the cleverest student in the whole of China. My English is brilliant.” ... And they like that, you know.... That’s why I put that whole Tsinghua University thing in.

With this underlying rationale of cultivating engagement, Meg prepared a detailed curriculum, mostly using materials of her own design but also including published materials. She had been developing this curriculum over several years, adjusting it each year based on her own
perceptions and updating it to include more recent content. Again, Meg prepared these materials with a view to building on students’ existing knowledge and appealing to their interests as Chinese young people:

A lot of [oral English] textbooks are ... very sort of European-based, stuff that you know a German teenager would find interesting but just of no relevance to a Chinese person’s life. There’s a lot of stuff in [my materials] that is very specific to China, which I haven’t seen in other textbooks. So the students hopefully have something to say. ... For a lot of the students, it’s not so much that their English is awful; they just have nothing to say about some German pop star or some [laughs] quaint thing in English history that they know nothing about.

Before the start of each semester, she compiled a student textbook and had it printed and bound, ready for students in the first week of classes. Although she continued to adapt the materials in class in response to unpredicted needs, she prepared her lessons as much as possible in advance simply in order to stay sustainable as a teacher (“I think if you’re not careful it just totally swamps you, you know, the amount of work”). Meg’s textbook laid out a syllabus as well as guidelines and grading rubrics for major assignments, with the bulk of the textbook consisting of themed units. In each unit, photos, language presentation, instructions for activities, and planning space anchored and sequenced classroom activity. Each unit built systematically from word, to sentence, to generic level, toward a culminating activity on the focal topic. In the lesson on Spring Festival, for instance, students were directed to work in groups to complete three vocabulary exercises (a brainstorming exercise, an image-to-word matching exercise, and a cloze exercise) and a question-formation exercise on the topic of Spring Festival before beginning the culminating activity, the role play between the Chinese and U.S. students. The role play itself, as
indicated above, involved pre-activity planning—writing out questions students might ask about Spring Festival if they were U.S. Americans—so that “by the time they then do the [role play], they’re already in that mindset.” To accompany the textbook, Meg had prepared a set of PowerPoint slides for each unit which she felt was essential to her class running well. I observed in my visits to her classroom that these slides—which included photos to illustrate target themes and vocabulary, the answers to in-class and homework exercises for quick review, and simplified task instructions—served to visually reinforce Meg’s oral instruction and further anchor the activity of the classroom.

It was important to Meg that students be equipped with most of the linguistic resources they would need before engaging the final activity of each unit, but also that they be mentally prepared to engage it. More fundamentally, she was concerned that students have a sense that engaging in the activities would benefit them at a personal level in their lives outside the classroom. In a unit on news and current events, for instance, she was “trying to get [students] to be unbiased and think about issues from different sides, so that they don’t come across as bigoted or ignorant.” She continued:

I hope that students would see that that’s valuable, that they might actually have this conversation [about Chinese territories] with someone in the future. I mean with [one of her four classes] I even found them talking about it in Chinese, which makes me mad [laughs], but ... it wasn’t that they didn’t want to do it…. I think if they’re so desperate to talk about it that they’re resorting to Chinese, then, well, you’re halfway there. You’ve got yourself a good discussion question.
My account of Meg’s activity within the framework of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, in her environment in the English Major Program (EMP), is displayed in the figure below.
Figure 8 Activity System of ONC’s English Major Program: Meg as subject
Synthesizing Meg’s experience under the framework of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory yields insights, particularly, into the ways Meg’s activity diverged from that of her colleagues in the College English Program. First, Meg was oriented to a different object from that of her colleagues: her target was oral English competence (not general competence) for a specific segment of the population, prospective English teachers. Also, she was regulated by a different set of rules. Her administrators expected her to deliver an oral English curriculum of her own design, not to use one handed down to her. Given this relative freedom, Meg regulated herself by her students’ and her own expectations to develop students’ oral competence and their global civic awareness, aligned respectively with the system outcome and object; and she developed her own tools with reference to her rules and object. Thus, in contrast to her colleagues, she did not operate under constraints to use a high-stakes proficiency test as a tool to measure English competence; she relied on self-published materials in an attempt to directly promote that competence. As the subsequent chapters illustrate, the tools Meg developed for use within this activity system evidenced a clear orientation to GTI as I define it in this study.

Since Meg was the only one of my teacher participants who was regularly implementing genred task pedagogy, I observed in whole or in part 15 of her two-hour lessons over the course of ten weeks. I completed 9 observations with the class made up of students with the highest scores in their year-group (hereafter class A), and 6 with a smaller class of lower-scoring students in that year group (class B). To illustrate the activity of Meg’s classroom, below I describe and analyze class sessions before moving to a theorization of Meg’s approaches. Taking what Van den Branden (2016) calls a “descriptive” approach to task (and, by extension, genred task) pedagogy research (p. 177), this narrative and analysis addresses research question 1B, “(How) are task and genre activities enacted?” Since GTI involves not just word- or sentence-
level instruction, but engages with whole texts and embeds these in richly specified “fields,” the extent of this account is necessary in order to establish that genred task instruction as operationalized in this study was being implemented by Meg—i.e., to establish the “construct validity” of her course, or its correspondence to operational definitions (cf. Long, 2015, p. 17). I do this more generally in this chapter, and explicitly and theoretically in Chapter 4.

3.6.3 Meg’s Classroom

Diffused light from overcast skies filters in through tall barred windows. The classroom is chilly. Well-worn desks discreetly scarred with graffiti stand in rows atop concrete floors. At the head of the classroom is a wide teacher’s platform, and above that a chalkboard with panels that slide apart to reveal, incongruously, a sleek touch-screen computer about a meter wide. The device is new this year and fiercely guarded by the building’s computer technician, who may appear at any moment to defend it from misuse, real or imagined. Above the chalkboard in red characters is a four-word motto extolling the virtues of knowledge and good character.

After a student-led news presentation (for an example, see section 4.5), Meg steps onto the platform and gets her lesson underway. It is the fifth week of the semester, and students are working today with the theme “Global Threats and Natural Disasters.” She directs students’ attention to the textbook she has written and published at the neighborhood copy shop. The first question of today’s unit reads, “Which of the following things do you think is the biggest threat to people’s lives around the world? Why?” Ten options are listed, including war, floods, earthquakes, AIDS, pollution, and global warming. Meg directs students’ attention to the screen, where photographs are displayed, as in the figure below.
Figure 9 Vocabulary exercise

She indicates each picture in turn, waiting for students to select and call out the corresponding term from the options in their books. When one or more students call out the term, she repeats it distinctly, and students imitate her in chorus; she quickly repeats it again, and students respond again. In both class A and class B, students fully engage in this activity, responding readily as well to Meg’s follow-up questions and comments on each threat.

Once students have rehearsed and accessed schema around target vocabulary, Meg sets up the first task of her lesson, a discussion of the question above (“Which of the following things do you think is the biggest threat to people’s lives around the world? Why?”) She speaks simply and at a measured pace to introduce the task:

1. So discuss this in groups of four. You will probably all have different
2. opinions. ... So if you think that war is the biggest threat, you must say
3. why. Why. Maybe your partner thinks “No, global warming is the biggest
4. threat.” Well then, say why. And see if you can convince your partner.
5. Maybe your partner will start to believe what you say. So you can discuss
6. these things for about five minutes, in a group of four. See if you can
7. agree. [Students begin to move into groups.] What is the biggest threat to
8. people’s lives.

In the lower-proficiency class, instructions are subtly different:

9. Meg: So which of these things poses the biggest threat to people, people’s
10. lives? ... I’d like you to discuss, in groups of four. You need to choose the
11. one thing that you think is the biggest threat. If you don’t agree with your
12. classmates, what should you do? [1.5] You don’t agree. [2.0]
14. Meg: Yeah, OK, you should try to convince them. ... You [pointing to one
15. student] might say “I think terrorist attacks are the biggest threat”; you
16. [pointing to another student] might say, “No, I think war is the biggest
17. threat!” And [pointing back to the first student] you’ll say, “No, no, no, I
18. think this!” And see if we can all agree on one thing. So you need to try
19. and convince

What is clear from these instructions is the social goal Meg sets: students are told to “see
if you can convince your partner” or to “see if we can all agree” (lines 4, 14, 18) as to the biggest
threat. The generic structure of this dialogic performance is partially modeled for students: one
speaker is to issue an opinion and a rationale, and her interlocutor is then to issue a responding
opinion and corresponding rationale (lines 2-4). Jude, a focal participant in class B, and his
classmate Randy engage in this dialogic task (note the escalating emotions in turns 9-15), but can
reach no consensus; their other group mates do not contribute.
1. Randy: What do you think. Do you agree with [unclear].

2. Jude: I think war is the biggest problem. The biggest threat to people around the world. Some people shouldn’t die, but in wars they die and ah and ah war can make many problems. Uh...

3. Randy: ... I think the biggest threat the nuclear weapons. Mm, we all know ... World War 1 and World War 2, there are—

4. Jude: [argumentatively] So that if because the war, OK—

5. Randy: There are still many people

6. Jude: So that but but, because of war, yes. Right?

7. Randy: But the nuclear weapons can kill people in: one seconds ... millions of people in: in the few time. But war is uh: war the: there [.2] it have the nuclears—


9. Jude: But but depends on, which country [one of the other two group members is talking over Jude indistinctly] depend—which country should nuclear weapons, it depends on, it depends on war uh uh [2.0] [lapses into Chinese]

10. Randy: In the Russia and the America have the nuclear weapons, the most the most—they are have so many nuclear weapons. You know the two country is not friendly. If some days they they happen something and they will nn: take the nuclear weapon—[other two group members still speaking between themselves indistinctly]

11. Jude: So that it cause war. K?

12. Randy: But—[.2] [frustrated] it doesn’t mean this is war.


15. Jude: [raising his vocal pitch] Nuclear weapons it can kill people. It divide two
countries. ... So nuclear weapons, some countries shoot the nuclear weapons because of
the war.

To wrap up the task after students have engaged it in groups, Meg brings the class back
together, using the same photos to now anchor a class opinion poll as to the biggest global threat.
Meg calls on individual students to provide rationale for their choices, which they stand to state
for the whole class. Evidence of positive affect accruing from successful (i.e., persuasive) genre
performance is evident in the following excerpt from class B; Meg praises students for their
responses and when she finds that they have managed to persuade each other:

1. Meg: Did you change your mind, Elisabeth?

2. Elisabeth: Yes! [smiling]

3. Meg: [addressing Elisabeth’s persuasive groupmate] Ah, well done—you convinced her!

Randy has meanwhile remained unpersuaded by Jude’s arguments, and he volunteers to
maintain to the class his position that nuclear weapons (not war) are the greatest global threat:

1. Meg: Nuclear weapons. OK, Randy, tell us about it.

2. Randy [standing]: I think the biggest threat is ah nuclear weapons.

3. Meg: Mm. [using the falling-tone syllable that in Chinese functions as feedback and
encourages the speaker to continue]

4. Randy: Because uh when—we all know the, in the: World War 2 and the Americans
shot two nuclear weapons in Japan’s [speaks Chinese; students help him indistinctly]

5. Meg: In Hiroshima. [begins to write it on the board]

6. Randy: After after this these things, the the: whole people of that two city all died.
And the: nn the: and the trees and the grass, all the been: [ruin—

7. Meg: [Can you help him? Destroyed, yes?

8. Randy: Destroyed. And the- after after this ... that place will nn can’t can’t by live people.

9. Meg: Ah ah ah. [another common feedback utterance in Chinese; expresses sympathetic agreement]

10. Randy: And that’s so terrible. If if the uh: Russia and Americans uh: uhn:

11. Jude: [helping him] [indistinct]

12. Randy: if fight- fight with each other and they will use the nuclear weapon, how imagine that world will be?

13. Meg: Yeah, terrible, right? So the two cities, that—Thank you. [Randy sits.] The two cities in Japan that the bombs were dropped on, in English or in Japanese, they’re called Hiroshima, [students repeat in chorus] or Hiroshima [with alternate syllable stress; students repeat]. So this is the Japanese word; we use that in English when we talk about this. Yeah, I agree. I read somewhere that there are enough nuclear weapons in the world to destroy, to kill everybody [gesturing], several times.

In this dialogic excerpt, Meg allows students to voice opinions which she positions herself as able to agree or disagree with, rather than pronounce as right or wrong; she engages with students’ ideas as a peer in a discussion on global issues (both turn 13); and she models both target genre performance (i.e., persuasive dialogue) and civic engagement, referencing her reading on these issues and using this reading to justify her opinion (turn 13). Students build vocabulary knowledge (e.g., the term Hiroshima, turns 5 and 13) around topics they know and care about discussing.
In a second task of this lesson, students are presented with an empty Venn diagram and asked to write each threat into one of three categories—to the left of the diagram, “manmade” threats; to the right, “natural” threats; and in the middle, overlapping section, threats with both natural and manmade causes. After students have negotiated this categorization task in groups, Meg again reviews each picture on the slide, polling the class to see which category they had placed the corresponding threat into. This portion of the class is, like the first whole-class discussion, dialogic, with multiple perspectives invited. Meg models and maintains this dialogic mode by warmly defending her position when students disagree with her (turns 6-10), and, apparently, backing off from her position (turn 10), perhaps as she senses that her position as teacher is tipping the dialogue toward monologic expression:

1. Meg: [eliciting opinions as to whether the threat is manmade or natural] Poverty?
   
   [1.2]

2. A student: Both.

3. Several students: Both!

4. Meg: You think both? OK. Yeah, I think it’s manmade [advances slide to show that she has placed poverty in the “manmade” section of the diagram], I think it’s manmade. Some of you said: [if you live somewhere

5. A student: [Why?

6. Meg: that you can’t grow food ... then maybe that isn’t manmade, but, why do people live in these places? [a few students chuckle ruefully] Yeah, why don’t other countries open up their borders for these people to live in their countries; [why don’t we help these people?

7. S: [Because their ancestor, their ancestors [[indistinct]
8. G [But in the end—but money is manmade, right?]

9. Students: Yes!

10. Meg: Only people use money! ... So poverty must be manmade—[then with more
deferece] in my opinion, you can disagree.

In the next task, in which groups of students discuss in greater detail the causes of specific threats, students are provided with lexicogrammatical targets, sentence frames such as the following to scaffold more complex presentations of their opinions: “Although I have not personally experienced a flood, it seems to me that many floods are caused by __.” Meg again wraps up this task by eliciting opinions from individual students who address the whole class by describing causal chains. One such performance is captured in the following excerpt from Sara in class A, who along with Meg and her classmate, co-constructs a playful parody of formal teacher-student interactions:

1. Meg: And then floods. So some of you were talking about that, very good. Number two. Did anybody have an example in China? Any examples in China? Of:
   [consulting book] influence of deforestation on floods. [.5] If you don’t, it’s OK
   [smiling benignly].

2. Sara: [indistinct]

3. Meg: [pointing to her encouragingly] OK, tell us. [The ends of Meg’s sentences are mostly rising rather than falling, making them seem seem less commanding.]

4. Sara: Gansu.

5. Meg: OK?

6. Sara [stands]: Um, Lena told me [laughing; Meg and the other students join in laughing].
7. Meg: OK! You can take the credit.
8. Sara: Gansu, people cut down the trees.
9. Meg: Mm.
10. Sara: Cut down the trees and the um: [1.5] [utters a Chinese word]
11. Meg: [addressing the class] [Can you help her?]
14. Sara: Evapor—
17. Sara [returning to her explanation]: We have no water vapor.
18. Meg: Mm. [feedback]
19. Sara: And the wind: [Sara apparently can’t recall her next word and sighs with a 
self-mockingly valiant expression; other students laugh gently with her]
20. Meg: Lena, help her! [Students laugh.] It’s your [idea]! And the rain what. [Sara 
turns toward Lena] You can work together.
23. Meg: Yeah, the rain falls,
24. Sara: The rainfall will decrease.
25. Meg: Right, and then?
26. Sara: And uh the: soil will become [exhales pointedly and gestures downward with both hands as if to release anxiety; she may be embarrassed but is playing up the humor of her predicament]

27. Another student: Dropped.


29. Sara: Dropped, and—

30. Meg: Drier, yep.

31. Sara: Drier. [sighs yet again and covers her face with her book. Her classmates laugh.]

32. Meg: And then?

33. Sara: And then—

34. Lena: They can’t plant

35. Sara: They can’t plant anything.

36. Meg: Mm. [feedback]

37. Sara: And they will: suffer from the: drought, and uh: [.2] famine. [Having managed to fight through to her last word, she exhales with relief and drops into her chair. Her classmates laugh good-naturedly and applaud for several seconds.]

38. Meg: [under students’ applause] Good!

In contrast to teacher-student interactions reported on in previous sections, all participants in this excerpt seem more concerned that Sara persist through her recital of the causal chain than that a flawless performance stand as “the right answer.” Both Meg and her students here positively engage, both affectively (turns 6, 19-20, 26, 31, and 37) and socially (turns 11-12, 19-
GENRE/TASK APPROACHES IN WESTERN CHINA

20, 27-29, 37) with the genre performance, making light of the official discourse that “improper” responses are shameful, and rewarding Sara’s persistence with praise.

In the final activities of this 2-hour class session, Meg leads the class in the review of a cloze exercise which the students have completed for homework, and sets up the final task, a debate. In the cloze activity, Meg again relies on familiar formats—text-based, test-like, and word-oriented—but adds a multimedia component, supporting each cloze item with a photo that she displays on the touch-screen computer, and building lexicogrammatical and content-area field, as in the SFL Teaching-Learning Cycle (Rose & Martin, 2012). Following the cloze review, students complete a brief true-or-false comprehension check. Again, this test-like exercise takes on characteristics of a goal-oriented task when Meg encourages pairs of students to “decide” together if the statements are true or false.

In the culminating task, students debate the following motion, which Meg displays on the smart screen: “Man-made threats are much more dangerous to man than natural disasters.” Meg contextualizes this genred task by 1) referencing a similar out-of-class genre event, a formal campus debate competition which students had attended (and, in class A, been selected to take part in) the previous semester, and in which there had been strict guidelines for each turn, and by 2) referring the debate to the content of the current lesson:

So you know all about debates, because we had the debate competition last year.

“Manmade threats are much more dangerous to man than natural disasters.” We’ve been talking about this all lesson.

Next, she sets up the parameters of the debate and provides explicit guidelines for planning to enact the task:

So you’re going to work in groups of four [holds up 4 fingers], two people for [2 fingers
on one hand], two people are against [2 fingers on the other hand]. And you'll work
together, so you're on a team, together. First of all, I will give you two minutes to make
some notes [mimes writing], make some notes about what you think. Work together. So
you four, here, you are for, you are against, all right, so [addressing these four] you need
to make some notes [moves around the classroom assigning debate sides]. ... 

Meg gives students several minutes to take notes, then provides still more framing for the
genred task:

1. Let me explain the rules of our debate. For, you speak first. So the people who
2. are for, you begin: “We believe that—” [gestures broadly to the screen where
3. the motion is displayed in large script; reads the motion again] ... because.”
4. And then against. You [speaking more quietly and in a higher pitch] need to
5. listen carefully to what they say. Respond to what they actually say, OK? So
6. they give an argument; you have to say why they are wrong. And then you can
7. give a new argument of your own. Remember not to be too emotional—
8. [shouting comically] “Oh, you are so stupid:!” [Students laugh loudly.] “Did
9. you grow up on a farm:?!” [Students continue to laugh.] OK, this is not good,
10. this is not good. We must give solid reasons. Evidence. Facts. For why you
11. believe [wryly] what I have told you to believe. When you are speaking, you
12. can hold the microphone [picks up a student’s pencil case]. The microphone
13. is your pencil case, or: your glasses case, all right? The person speaking
14. should hold the pencil case, or the water bottle, anything you like, and we’re
15. going to stand up, stand up [students stand noisily; Meg finishes over them].
16. So for, when you’re ready, off you go.
As before, Meg models the formal, dialogic genre of the debate, asking students to state and support their positions using specific lexicogrammar, “We believe that ... because” (lines 2-3). In response, opponents are to “respond to what they actually say,” then “give a new argument of [their] own” (lines 5-7). Meg both further specifies the target performance, and appeals to students’ (and her own) sense of humor in lines 7-11, as evidenced by their loud laughter succeeding in engaging them emotionally in what they are about to do.

3.7 Discussion: GTI as Implemented in Meg’s Classroom

Meg’s classroom serves as a richly informative case study of genred task pedagogy: activities in the class were meaning-focused, cognitively engaging, and deeply rooted in real-world concerns—all features of task as operationalized in this study. What set classroom activities apart most distinctly as tasks, and at the same time distinguished them as genred tasks, was above all their social purpose—to persuade classmates, to reach consensus, to win a debate. In implementing such tasks, Meg leveraged students’ existing values for practical, social activity (values which will become clear in my analysis of student interviews, below) and managed to engage their effort in English learning.

In interviews, Meg had been realistic about the fact that her students, particularly the “less-motivated” ones, would opt out of any activity they did not “see the point in.” Rather than pass judgment on their character for this, she had assumed responsibility for supplying a point. In that Meg consistently asked students to achieve consensus with, entertain, or inform their classmates, she set them goals beyond language practice and secured their engagement in the face of what was widely acknowledged to be a campus culture hostile to academic engagement. My observations indicated that students—even the cynical Jude, whose perspectives are explored below—did respond to these approaches, consistently if not completely. In that all instructional
activity built toward tasks that functioned as the culmination of each 2-hour lesson, Meg’s classroom was not merely task-supported, but—more to the point, given this challenging environment—purposefully task-directed. That is, in the absence of real-world institutional, professional, or social goals for English learning, Meg had constructed goals (in line with her values for global civic engagement, discussed below), and then guided students in taking up these goals. Like stakeholders in McDonough’s (2015), students responded positively to the goal orientation of the task activity in this classroom.

While directing instruction toward genred tasks, Meg leveraged approaches familiar to students: vocabulary drills, text-based cloze review, and the formal conventions of student-teacher interactions. These were enacted not for the sake of vocabulary expansion only, but in ways that in fact seemed to align closely with Hua Lao Shi’s ideals of “deep” learning. That is, at a level beyond Meg’s linguistic and pedagogical goals for her students seemed to lay another, more philosophical one: to heighten students’ global awareness, e.g., of imbalanced access to global resources and threats such as global warming. In her synthesis of “deep” traditional practice and genred tasks, Meg modeled not just genre performance (how to support an opinion with reference to textual sources, for instance), but at the same time the personal qualities such as intellectual curiosity, empathy, and civic responsibility that made sense of this performance and gave it a compelling reason for being.

Meg’s philosophical goal of heightening students’ global awareness seemed overall to be pursued not via the monologism of the traditional classroom, but via a dialogic mode (Bakhtin, 1981) that made space for humor, disagreement, open-endedness, and parody. That is, Meg presented students not only with linguistic content and opportunities for language use, but with an additional mode of engaging language in counterpoint to the mode on offer in traditional
classrooms. That students did engage, not just with language practice, but also with this dialogic mode, is illustrated throughout my data from Meg’s classroom, and succinctly in the excerpt below.

In this segment several weeks into the new semester, students are reporting on their success in keeping their New Year’s resolutions. Meg has supplied a list of expressions for use in this discussion, which she reviews with students (“I have kept my resolution so far, although last week it was really hard when __”) before asking them to discuss their resolutions in groups. My field notes from this date indicate that almost no students used Chinese during this discussion, and that the topic, which leveraged their intimate knowledge of each other, seemed to engage students:

1. Selina: My resolution is in the coming year I will do exercise every day to keep healthy.
2. Elisabeth: She really did.
4. Selina: In the coming year I will not—I will not eat junk food frequently! Frequently!
5. Elisabeth: Really?
6. Selina: I just don’t uh eat as uh—
7. Elisabeth: How do you think about [name of junk food] and [another kind of junk food]?
8. Selina: Uh—
9. Elisabeth: And ah: [a third kind of junk food]?
10. Selina: ... Wo shuode shi [What I said was] “frequently” [loudly], can you understand what the meaning of “frequently”? [Chinese] ...
11. Elisabeth: Go on.

12. Selina: In the coming year I will [laughing] go to the library three times a week. Ha ha ha! [laughs affectedly]


14. Selina: [still laughing]

15. Jude: What? Three times a week?!

16. Elisabeth: Really?!

17. Selina: Ha ha!

18. Jude: Ah maybe three times a year!

19. Elisabeth: No, three times a year dou mei quguo. [She hasn’t even gone three times a year.]

20. Selina: Last year, I go to four times [dramatic pause] a year! And [accusingly, to Jude] you don’t go with us!

21. Jude: Ah! One time to: ah:

22. Selina: No no no [just ah

23. Randy: [visit the library

24. Jude: visit the library. [louder] [The second time to:

25. Randy: [The second time to ah: to


27. Elisabeth: No and the third is to pick up Teacher Chen [a physically impaired teacher who used a wheelchair whom students frequently assisted].

28. Jude: Yeah! And fourth time is ah

29. Elisabeth: pick up Teacher Chen.
30. Jude: Oh yeah! [laughter]

31. Elisabeth: Can you just stop—[laughing]


33. Elisabeth: [still laughing] Can you just stop?=

34. Jude: =No.

Here Selina and her group mates in class B agree (turn 2) and disagree (turns 5-10), poking fun at each other and at the social expectations (i.e., to position themselves as diligent students by studying at the library, turns 12-34) they have failed to live up to and are rejecting. Like Bakhtinian carnival expression, their parody of serious dialogue is frank, equalizing, and self-directed (Bakhtin, 1984).

Meg supported the critical, equalizing power of humor, perceiving laughter and playfulness to undermine the “contagious” social pressure for students to be apathetic toward school:

They [class B] have a good atmosphere in the class; they are willing to sort of be silly; I don’t think there’s such a barrier of “I’m not going to make a fool of myself.” They laugh at each other when they make mistakes, and it’s fine; it’s not malicious, you know.

In other classes in which apathy and anxiety were more pervasive—where students were “very uncomfortable about the English they know anyway, and then [1.2] not wanting to appear to be taking something seriously, because that’s not cool”—Meg was using laughter both to break down barriers to engagement and to build supportiveness among students:

I’m trying to encourage them more to not be afraid to make mistakes; I say to them, “You’ve been together a year and a half; we all make the same mistakes; let’s encourage each other; we don’t need to be embarrassed. Let’s—you know, laugh at yourself or
laugh at each other.... We need to be able to laugh at ourselves and we need to be able to
help each other.... We’ll laugh with you.”

From my first minutes on site, seated in a cartoonishly low chair in our supervisor’s
office, and throughout my year on campus, Meg consistently used humor as a means of
minimizing power differences, clearing away the attitudes that threatened communication and
relationship. As a self- and other-designated ‘outsider’ to the system, she was able to do this in a
way that her colleagues may not have felt free to. Her case may thus represent what is possible
for instructors when they are not implicated in a rigidly test-based system. I explore this
possibility further in the following chapter.
4 FINDINGS: STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND GENRED TASK PERFORMANCE

The following sections concern the nature of students’ perceptions of English instruction (and task-supported instruction in particular), and their enactment of genred task instruction. First, relying on interview and questionnaire data, I explore the extent to which students internalized their teachers’ attitudes, accepting the identities available to them as “bad students,” and taking up or rejecting teachers’ values for high test scores. Next, I turn to students’ genred task performances. For each of three activities (a cooking demonstration, a picture narration task, and a mock news report) I contextualize and analyze the performances in terms of my focal construct, GTI. I follow this analysis with a discussion of implications for pedagogy. In both subsections (i.e., describing perception and performance), I refer to Philp and Duchesne’s (2016) construct of engagement, which I review below.

In a contribution to the special issue on TBLT in the Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, Philp and Duchesne (2016) define “engagement” (specifically in tasks) as “a state of heightened attention and involvement, in which participation is reflected not only in the cognitive dimension, but in social, behavioral, and affective dimensions as well” (p. 51). These sub-constructs—cognitive, social, behavioral, and affective or emotional engagement—are not discrete but highly “interdependen[t]”; for instance, as Philp and Duchesne (2016) indicate, social disengagement (perhaps due to emotional disengagement) could lead to a students’ being “behaviorally off-task” and therefore cognitively disengaged (p. 52). In the analyses below, I further specify the nature of each subconstruct.
4.1 Student Perceptions Across the English Program

In all, I interviewed 15 students. My trilingual assistant researcher interviewed an additional 4 of my own students, whose data I have excluded here in order to limit my analysis to my focal participants. The demographic information of the interviewees is presented in the table below.

Table 2

Interviewee data (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>English (class B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jude</td>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>English (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizzie</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>English (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>English (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>English (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arman</td>
<td>Kirgiz</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChuCi</td>
<td>Mongour</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LiHua</td>
<td>Han</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LiMei</td>
<td>Xibo</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patigul</td>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delraba</td>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rizalet</td>
<td>Uyghur</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SunMa</td>
<td>Dongxiang</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WeiXi</td>
<td>Xibo</td>
<td>non-English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown above, 5 of the participants identified as Han. Among the minzu participants were students identifying with the Turkic-speaking Kazakh, Kirgiz, and Uyghur groups; the Mongolian minority group; and the very small Xibo, Dongxiang, and Mongour groups. The Xibo in Xinjiang are a Manchu-speaking group, descendants of an imperial military corps sent to the
region in the 1700s (Jacobs, 2016). Mongour and Dongxiang are both Mongolic-speaking groups, the Dongxiang being a Muslim group with historic ties to the Chinese military.

Interviews with non-English majors were conducted almost entirely in Chinese, recorded, and later translated into English for better analysis. Interviews with English majors were conducted mostly in English, with occasional lapses into Chinese or (in one instance) Uyghur.

The views I describe here depict students above all as agentive: not as passive objects whose trajectories are fixed by performance within a powerfully determinative system, but as critical consumers of an educational experience. These students opt in and out of classroom activity according to their interests; they pass judgment on the quality of their English instruction as “intriguing” or “boring,” “responsible” or “not very responsible”; they choose to take up part-time work, not out of necessity but simply for personal enrichment.

Academics are not unimportant for these students, but they are not the all-absorbing obligation that they seem to have been for their teachers. Students find plenty of time for other interests. Ma Lei explained her reasons for working about four hours a week even though her parents could have given her money whenever she needed it: “I do a part-time job just because I like selling things. I want to be independent.” Delraba said,

Most students want to have different experiences other than learning knowledge. They don’t want to be nerds. ... They don’t want to be the person who always studies studies studies, but doesn’t know what happens outside. They want social experience also. So they want to do some [kind of] part-time job and have a chance to see the outside world. Like their teachers, interviewees point to a campus culture that discourages academic effort. Randy, for instance, explained how his roommates, all English majors, pressured him not to practice English in his dorm room:
If you speak English to your roommates, they just think you are kidding; they will not care about you... They will hate for me to speak much English. They think I’m showing [off] my ability to them. So they think ... we [should] not speak English in the dormitory.

Interviewees do contrast themselves against their conceptions of a “good student,” candidly describing themselves as “lazy,” but they do this in more complex ways than their teachers do, accounting for their academic choices by expressing their preferences. “I just do not like studying that much,” said Delraba. Jessica said, “Sometimes I will learn some [things] I’m interested in. But when I found [that] something is boring, I will not learn it.” Students also pointed to the role of their teachers in stimulating their interest. They repeatedly stated that they had trouble staying awake in English class.

WeiXi believed that the ideal teacher “needs to make her class interesting, so we can be motivated all the time and learn a lot in her class. ... I do not like being forced to digest knowledge. ... Our English teacher lacks the power of motivating us.” LiHua said, I think the English we usually learn is not practical. It only offers the basic knowledge of English, or teaches us how to answer the test paper questions. ... If English were not a course, I would like this language.

Several interviewees stated that for the most challenged of their classmates, poor performance in English was the result of falling hopelessly behind in early schooling and thus failing to establish an adequate “foundation of English knowledge.” Li Hua’s story vividly illustrates:

In the second year of middle school, my parents were far away from me. I was assigned to the back row. The back row people thought learning was a shameful thing. They would laugh at me whenever I studied everyday. They thought I was not social. In order to be
friends with them, I slept in class and chatted with them in class, and no longer studied English. In high school, I had a great English teacher; he was very humorous ... if I did not do well on a test, he would be upset and helped me patiently. And my English was better again during that time. But I had fallen behind too much in middle school and I had not learned English for a long time. So when he was no longer my teacher, my English went bad again. I did not know where to catch up since I had missed so much. ... My English just became worse and worse. ... I think I have talent in learning language. But I'm lazy; I need someone lead me on track.

As this narrative indicates, social experiences appear to be more deeply valued by my interviewees than academic achievement is, especially where students do not relate positively to their teachers. In line with this value, several of them seem to prize communicative competence more highly than academic performance in English. Rizalet, a multilingual Uyghur student who identified as minkaohan—a minority student who had been educated in Han Chinese schools—stated,

I think it's more important to speak when learning a language. In order to use the language, sometimes it's OK that we can't write, we can't take a test. Those are not important for communication. As long as I can speak, understand, and communicate with English when facing another person, then that's good enough.

Randy said,

Why we are learning English is that we should [know] how to use it [to] communicate with others ... not understand what’s ... in the book. So [the test is] useless.... We just want to pass the TEM4, TEM8; it’s just a paper. It’s not useful for us. We should improve ourselves to use English to communicate with others. So that’s the point. ...
Maybe [the test] can help me find a job, but, you know, the test cannot ... [measure] how good you are at English. ... Maybe you just can know how to get a good grade, but you can’t use English to communicate.

Students do value a passing score on national English proficiency exams (either the CET or TEM), but only in terms of its utility in helping them secure jobs. Beyond this, participants indicated almost no connection between their performance on the test—which Randy dismissed as “just a paper”—and their sense of self. Li Mei indicated that she valued the CET and graduation certificates for their usefulness in proving practical competence in a competitive society:

Even people with both diploma and certificate go back home to be farmers, or start their own business and become millionaires. ... This society values people with expertise. Society is very realistic. People compete on their abilities. ... I think it's important to see your achievement in learning.

It may be that students’ appreciation of practical communicative competence is related to their identities as members of a diverse, multi-lingual, and multi-literate community. At Oasis City, all students were required to study one of two local minority languages from their second year; all of them were thus in the process of learning a language immediately useful in their local environment. Both minzu and Han students had a clear concept of what it meant to use multiple languages for communicative purposes.

LiMei, a Xibo major, found English self-evidently important:

English is a language. ... It's impossible that we only communicate with Chinese people [in the future]. It's impossible that we just stay here, and not communicate with people out there. ... It's always better to know another language.
Arman, a Kirgiz student, became interested in English from an early age, and his interest was sustained both by a “very devoted” primary school English teacher and by his encounter with a group of tourists biking through his hometown near Kyrgyzstan.

I myself enjoy communicating among different cultures and different perspectives. So from that time [primary school] I started to like learning English ... When I had just studied English for two years, there were a lot of foreigners who came to our hometown. A lot. I was so happy to see those people since I had just started learning English. I wanted to communicate with them. ... When you learn Chinese you learn [Chinese] culture also. Same for learning English: we can learn about your culture, your lifestyle.

Patigul, a Kazakh-speaking education major, indicated another potential advantage of multilingualism to English learning. She stated that for members of her ethnic group, “learning English is easier ... because we have many words the same as English, like taxi and such.

Many are the same—tractor and such. They are connected languages, so I don't think it is difficult. My Han classmates feel more difficulty in pronunciation. So I think Kazakh or Uyghur people are better and faster at learning English.”

One Xibo student who was majoring in her native language valued English not “intrinsically,” but because it could help her communicate to a broader audience about her ethnic group, allowing her to “introduce to the foreigners Xibo language and culture in a museum in Beijing as a job... . I may not want to learn it intrinsically, but it is so useful.”

It was perhaps because of their communicative, social orientations to language use that students were able to imagine a kind of teaching approach that incorporated these orientations. Rizalet said,
I really want to know how to learn English well in a more casual context. When listening to English songs, I can learn to sing it quite fast and delightfully. I wonder whether there is a way that we don’t have to learn English through test preparation. I hope I can learn English well. But I don't do it well, especially in the test.

In his future work as a teacher, Arman planned to leverage social motivations: “I would definitely motivate the students, make them curious and interested. They should like the class by liking me. Only if they like me will they like the things I teach.”

In spite of their social orientations to learning and language, the interviewees were critical of instructors who were not “strict” enough with them to focus their attention on English content. Arman, for instance, stated his intention to “be strict” with his future students; “they should stay focused in class instead of chatting with each other.” In his current English class, he stated, “the teacher just throws out everything”—i.e., presents content without concern for whether students understand it.

So some students understand, some don't. And the teacher does not have that much time I think, so it's impossible to explain everything maybe. There are good students and bad students. But I think this is not very responsible still. Unlike the English teacher from our high school—he/she really took us [and] the course very, very seriously. Very responsible. So both good and bad students could catch up with the class and understand the content.

Randy, an English major in Meg’s lower-performing class B, sensed that most of his teachers did not care about his and his classmates’ English development, and was critical of this:
The teacher is not very strict, so we often speak Chinese. So it’s not useful for us. ... We don’t like to speak English, but Meg pushes us to speak English—but the other teachers don’t. ... They don’t care what we [say].

Sally, an English-major student in class A, was less critical of her teachers in the English department, and praised them for incorporating non-traditional—what she called “western”—approaches, for example forming groups of students to discuss how to translate a paragraph, or asking students to report how they would teach a certain passage. Sally had actually scored high enough on the gaokao to have earned admission into one of the province’s top two universities, but because of her overly modest prediction about her score, had ended up at ONC. Even Sally’s mind wandered at times, she admitted with an embarrassed laugh—but only “just a little, because we should respect the teacher.” She had no trouble focusing during Meg’s class.

[In] Meg’s class, I can be relaxed; I know what she wants to say, and I can think something by myself ... I think [we] can express ourselves’ ideas. ... I think my classmates are active; they always want to do something in Meg’s class.

Jessica, an English major in class B, agreed: “I think [Meg’s class is] very interesting. She always lets us discuss, and I think she is a funny person. So we will not feel bored.”

The statements above illustrate quite clearly the ways students’ interrelated social and emotional orientations (cf. Philp & Duchesne, 2016) may impact their perceptions of and enactment of (English language) instruction. In this multilingual zone where communicative competence in an additional language yielded immediate social connection, students indicated desires to “communicate with English when facing another person” more than to succeed academically by passing tests. Their social orientations led to behavioral choices; to gain “social experience,” students invested time in part-time work rather than be socially isolated by constant
study. Whereas they resisted traditional approaches as “boring,” choosing therefore not to sustain behavioral engagement, they displayed positive emotional orientations toward communication and activity perceived as relevant to post-school responsibilities—both features of TBLT and (especially) GTI.

Zooming in more closely on student perceptions of genred task instruction, I report below the perceptions of two focal participants, Jude and Lizzie, both second-year English majors and students of Meg, again referring these to constructs of engagement in Philp & Duchesne’s (2016) work.

4.1.1 Student perception of GTI: Jude. Jude was a Mongolian minority student with a cynical, conflicted attitude toward formal education. “I used to be a businessman,” he explained to me, seated on a broken couch in my fifth-floor campus apartment. He used to “buy something from China and send it to the foreign country,”—“like medicine, clothes, and some—wait a moment”—he consulted his smart phone—“Cat-catton? Cotton.” So he had had real-world goals for studying English: “I need to talk ... to the foreigner.”

Jude had started his English studies at age 10 in urban Xinjiang. He spoke more Mongolian than Mandarin at home—“because we’re Mongolian and we need to talk that”—but had attended a mainstream Mandarin-medium school, not a “bilingual” school. There he had had “maybe some good English teachers, but most of them just tell you to read the book, and some of them … can’t speak very fluently.” Around 2009, he had dropped out of high school “to do some business” in a large city. “I just want[ed] to make some money, and I’m very interested in business.” He had later returned to high school and graduated, but his low gaokao scores had afforded him few college options. On the advice of a family member he had applied, and been accepted, to Oasis City Normal College.
Jude’s college experience had been a complex one. He had chosen to attend to improve his English for his private business; yet he was a self-proclaimed “bad student” who didn’t “pay attention” in class and did “almost no” study outside of class. He thought that passing the test (in his case as an English major, the Test for English Majors Band 4, or TEM-4), although useful for making a person eligible for teaching or government positions, was a requirement forced on students in order to ensure school funding. Overall he was cynical about the value of the test to ensure success or measure ability.

It’s not important for me. ... [If I pass,] maybe I will be happy, but maybe [if] I didn’t pass, I will not be sad. ... I know so many people that they don’t pass the gaokao and they don’t pass so many exams. But they [are] still very rich, ... and they have so many houses in Urumqi, in Beijing, in foreign country. ... And when they graduate from high school they go to do business or go to some company. … But [others] go to the university, and when they graduate from there, ... I didn’t see there is any ability.

In fact he considered experience to be a better—albeit more brutal—teacher than formal education in its capacity to prepare a person for the real world:

I don’t mean [college education is] low-quality. I mean that when you graduate from whatever, high school or university, when you go to the ... society[,] maybe you can get more pressure and that can make you to find a better way to live, and that can give you pressure to be a better man. ... [“Better”] not means be rich. Just be better.... Society is so real. ... Maybe society will kill you. But before you are killed by society, just go ahead. Just do it.

Jude was brashly critical of Meg’s oral English class overall—it was “boring”; he “didn’t need it.” But when I asked about a specific assignment, the news report, he betrayed interest:
I think it’s very good... In one hand it can let us to know the news, and in other hand it can practice our logic, and our just like—how to say that, just like a reporter do some, give a talk on TV. How to say that, jinshi. [consults phone] Uh, immediately…. Instant message [extemporaneous speech].

I confirmed his apparent interest. “So you like it?” His mask fell back into place.

“Maybe.”

My conversation with Jude went some way toward accounting for his spotty engagement in Meg’s class. He had shrewdly sized up, and chosen mostly to opt out of, the examination system, seeing it as having only limited benefit to him. Along the same lines, perhaps, he was opting in and out of activities in Meg’s class as he judged them relevant for strengthening his “ability” and ultimately helping him survive in a competitive society. As Meg had sensed, he seemed unwilling to betray interest in academic effort. By perceiving and appealing to his non-academic interests, however, Meg had managed partly to bypass his apathy and that of his classmates in class B, so that in her words, “before they realize it they’re getting into an activity even though they don’t want to.” More specifically, Meg’s course had elicited Jude’s cognitive engagement—his “sustained attention and mental effort”—and therefore his behavioral engagement, by appealing to his social values for survival in what he experienced as a harshly competitive society.

4.1.2 Student perception of GTI: Lizzie. Meg’s student Lizzie was a buoyant student in class A who was always tilting her face up to look out of her slipping spectacles. She had had a rough go of it, by her own account, but remained optimistic. Born in Szechuan, she had moved to western China with her parents when she was about 10. With no hukou (household registration permit) for Xinjiang, she had had to return to Szechuan for high school and sit a difficult gaokao...
paper meant to winnow down the enormous college-bound population of that densely populated province. Her *gaokao* score, although competitive by other provinces’ standards, had been too low to admit her to any of the universities she had selected (per the normal college admission procedures, since reformed, she had had to select her schools *before* knowing her exam results). Her only option was either to retake her last year of high school and sit the *gaokao* again—an option she had dismissed as “a torture”—or to select from a list of lower-tier universities still accepting students. Her parents were working in Oasis City, so she had picked ONC. She was offered a place in one of two departments, secretarial studies or English. She had chosen English.

Lizzie had been disappointed when she arrived on campus, in particular by the strict student schedule. But by “adjusting herself”—resetting her expectations and re-inventing her personal goals—Lizzie had managed to stay positive about her college experience:

Actually, when I came to this university, maybe I’m sometimes, I’m not very happy.... We called it Oasis City Teacher’s [1.5 pause; then laughing] High School, we usually call it. ... Like junior high school, we have a self-study in the morning, and we also have self-study at night.... So we think it’s *bi gaozhong hai gaozhong* [graduating from high school into yet more high school]. ... But after that I adjust myself.... I think [if your] attitude has changed ... you will feel better. So I think it’s OK. I think after graduate I will take a post-graduate examination and choose another university and study further. So it’s OK. And you also can study new things at this school and know different people; I think it’s also study and grow up. So it’s OK.

She expanded on her goal to grow personally and to “get new things” through her study of English: “I ... just want to improve myself, and let myself know more, and I can be capable of doing some things.” Lizzie maintained this rationale in spite of the fact that she did not expect to
use English much after graduation, even as a secondary school English teacher, except in the context of test preparation:

We [will] also use English [as teachers], but just we do some papers—*ti hai zhan shu*, you know [the art of tackling a problem, here, the *gaokao*, by flooding it with practice].

... In class mostly you maybe use your Chinese.

This assumption was likely based on her own high-school experience. “When I was at high school, we [tsk] we just study English but not read it. *Yaba yingyu,*” she said, citing a common expression disparaging the “deaf and silent English” of many Chinese students. “So we just do some papers ... how to do this question, how to answer this question.”

The contrast between her high school experience and her experience in Meg’s class was sharp. She found Meg’s class taxing but also rewarding.

[In Meg’s class] we need prepare presentation, debate, so maybe sometimes you are very tired. But you can improve yourself, really. For example, ... the last term of the first year, we took the Meg’s class. ... And we did some debate and presentation. So I think it’s really improved me. We can speak—maybe some problems still existed, but I can do it better than before. ... I think I really improved. ... Meg creates a chance for us to communicate with English. Because although we study English as a major, but in extensive reading [class] and maybe some intensive reading, listening class, we [makes a dissatisfied ‘tsk’] we have little chance to speak loudly and to express ourselves’ ideas. But Meg gives our chance to communicate this problem. Maybe sometimes you will [feel] very tired because you are talk talk talk at all the time. ... But you can practice yourself. I think it’s good.

In a later interview, Lizzie explained that for her, success on exams was only part of what
she expected to obtain from college. Practical ability, for her, was also essential:

Maybe sometimes the examination is not the most important in our life. ... The score of examination is a foundation, a fundamental. It maybe can help you to get the good job. But after that, when you go to the company, you must use know how to get along with your ... colleagues and your leaders, and how to deal with your business.

Like Jude, Lizzie experienced cognitive engagement, and therefore notable behavioral engagement (to the extent that she felt “tired” in class), by appealing to her social values—not for survival in a competitive society, but for harmonious participation in her imagined future social environment; for her, it was essential to “know how to get along with your ... colleagues and your leaders.” Her response also indicates that she experienced emotional engagement via TBLT; she approved of and seemed to enjoy the opportunities afforded her to expand her own potential. More evidence of her emotional engagement is explored below.

4.2 Discussion: Students’ Versus Teachers’ Perceptions

The disparity between students’ perceptions, reported here, and that of their local teachers, is a distinct one. As noted in the discussion of teacher interviews, local teachers consistently perceive a contrast between their own and their students’ values. They see this contrast in terms of a deficiency—an absence of value for diligent academic effort that has been borne out of a desire for knowledge and a sense of “duty.” What the student interviews make clear is that the students themselves see positive values underlying their choices. Students desire a particular kind of knowledge, different from the knowledge on offer in traditional classrooms, and a particular identity not afforded them in the traditional teaching model which relies on intensive self-directed study. As Delraba (English major, class B) put it, “Most students want to have different experiences other than learning knowledge. They don’t want to be nerds ... the
person who always studies, studies, studies, but doesn’t know what happens outside. They want social experience also.”

My interviews with local teachers demonstrated that although they were keenly aware that their students were dissatisfied with traditional instruction, they were not empowered to explore possibilities for designing instruction more suitable to their students’ values. Meg’s approaches may be an instance of what is possible when a teacher is free to act on her own perceptions about what students need, without these being imposed on by a rigidly enforced curriculum. Rather counter-intuitively, this freedom for Meg results in more rather than less “strict” approaches, at least with her lower-performing students; not having to concern herself about how they will perform on a test that they do not care about, she is free to hold them to a standard well within their interest and their reach. This new standard, the performance of a richly contextualized genre tied to global concerns, is one that students themselves choose to press toward, both at higher- and lower-proficiency levels, as the subsequent analysis of their performance demonstrates.

So to further illustrate characteristics of genred task activity (research questions 1B & C) in order to establish the feasibility of this activity for the target context, below I present students’ performances of three genred task activities in Meg’s classroom: 1) a cooking demonstration performed by Lizzie, a student in the higher-proficiency class A, followed by Lizzie’s statements during a follow-up interview; 2) a picture narration task performed by students in classes A and B; and 3) a news report performed by students in classes A and B. For each activity I provide a lesson summary, the instructions for the activity, a narrative transcription of the performance, and an analysis of the performance in terms of my focal construct, GTI.

As in the case studies above, the findings below take what Van den Branden (2016) calls
a “descriptive” approach to task (and, by extension, genred task) pedagogy research (p. 177), providing an answer to research questions 1 (on GTI feasibility) and 1b (on task and genre enactment), in particular by accounting for how students engage (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) with task and genre. I justify this decision on the basis of Philp and Duchesne’s (2016) observation that, since engagement has been considered the “visible manifestation or ‘descriptor’ of motivation,” it requires a descriptive account of on-site research: “[engagement] needs to be explored through context-specific research, through observation of students in action, that is, in the classroom context, actually working on tasks in class” (p. 52). My rationale for the extent of this presentation (i.e., including complete genre transcripts and lengthy narrative descriptions) is that, as stated above, since GTI involves not just word- or sentence-level instruction, but engages with whole texts and embeds these in richly specified “fields,” the extent of this account is necessary in order to further establish that genred task instruction as operationalized in this study was in fact being implemented by Meg—i.e., to establish the “construct validity” of her course, or its correspondence to operational definitions (cf. Long, 2015, p. 17).

4.3 Genred Task Performance 1: Cooking Demonstration

4.3.1 Lesson Summary and Instructions

In the class meeting before the cooking demonstration was due, Lizzie and her classmates built up their lexical knowledge around the topics of food and cooking, as in the previous lesson on natural disasters. This opening exercise activated schema around the topic and linked it to broader contexts. Below is a photo of Lizzie’s textbook from this class period.
After a follow-up discussion on the cultural significance of Chinese foods, students completed an unusual exercise. To the delight of her students, Meg had brought cooking utensils...
to class, each tagged with a number. Students noisily passed around cooking implements including a wok, writing each utensil’s name next to its number in the textbook.

Following this work at the word level, mapping English lexical items to physical objects or to their equivalent in Chinese, students worked at the generic level with several recipes. First, they worked out a recipe puzzle by re-ordering the stages of a simple Chinese dish. They worked in pairs to describe how to make three other simple Chinese dishes, then worked with a recipe for (the more foreign endeavor of) baking a cake, predicting the order of recipe steps. Finally, they watched a video produced by Meg to confirm their predictions. In the video, Meg demonstrated how to bake a chocolate cake, starting with the ingredients and displaying and narrating every step.

As stated above, GTI implements tasks with attention to the interlinked contexts, purposes, text types and linguistic features relevant to a given task. In the lesson just described, students considered the socio-cultural context of cooking and the significance of special dishes (e.g., longevity noodles for birthdays in China). Within this context, they built up a lexicon of cooking nouns and verbs, embedding these in genre-specific sentences in the imperative mood (“Pour some oil into the wok”), and sequencing these sentences within the genre of the recipe. Finally, they interacted with a modeled demonstration of the recipe genre—a cooking demonstration, presented via video. The kind of input involved in this lesson is beneficial both from the viewpoint of SLA experimental research on form-focused instruction and task planning, and of SFL pedagogy, both of which advocate the careful scaffolding of linguistic material at all levels—lexicogrammatical, textual, contextual—of text. This input provided the basis for the following student assignment.

Meg had provided detailed instructions for a cooking demonstration assignment in her
self-published textbook. In part, these were as follows:

“You and your partner will present a 6 minute ‘cooking program’ to the class. You should imagine that you are the presenter of a popular TV show teaching your audience how to cook. ... Obviously you cannot actually cook the dish in the class, but you should prepare some props to aid in your presentation and should act out your presentation as if you are on TV ... Make your presentation interesting and funny. Try to think about the cooking programs you have seen. What made them interesting?”

The activity is clearly a task in that it is goal-oriented, meaning-focused, and mapped to the real-world activity of learning to cook. It is genred in that it is referred to generic models—“the cooking programs you have seen”; the structure of the performance will be discussed further below. Where the assignment moved beyond genred task pedagogy as operationalized in the introduction chapter, and began to elicit students’ (social, emotional) engagement, was in the instructions to “imagine that you are the presenter of a popular TV show” and to “make your presentation ... funny.” Here again, consistent with the strategies she stated in her interview for navigating the realities of her context, Meg leverages humor and offers alternate identities for completion of the task. A narrative transcription of Lizzie’s performance follows.

4.3.2 Narrative Transcription

The PowerPoint screen displays three words, “Delicious Delicious Delicious.” Lizzie and Marie have stepped onto the teaching platform. They turn with their backs facing the class, who have become their TV audience. On Lizzie’s back is taped a paper sign with the handwritten words “Super Chef Lizzie.” On Marie’s back is a sign that reads “Beautiful Host Marie.” Upbeat music is cued from an obliging classmate’s phone and plays for a few seconds. A few
audience members giggle. Lizzie and Marie spin in sync to face the audience as the music fades out.

1. Lizzie: [Hello!]

2. Marie [waving]: [Good morning ladies and gentlemen! I’m Marie, and welcome ‘Delicious Delicious’ program! [gesturing theatrically] Today, we are honored to have [turning to indicate her dramatically] Lizzie with us. Welcome! [leads audience in applause].

3. Lizzie [speaks animatedly]: Hello everyone, I’m Lizzie. I’m so happy to be here today. I think we will have a good time today. Enjoy it.

4. Marie: Thank you, Lizzie, thank you very much. [Lizzie turns to touch the smart screen, advancing it to a slide displaying a dish.] And today—Lizzie, we know that you are super chef. Today [you will

5. Lizzie: [Thank you.]
6. Marie: You will show us how to cook [slows down to announce the dish prominently] “Spareribs with Brown Sauce.” Is that right?

7. Lizzie: Yes. As we all know, “Spareribs with Brown Sauce” is very popular and yummy. But I don’t think everyone can do it by himself.

8. Marie: Yes.

9. Lizzie: So, Marie, can you do it by yourself?

10. Marie: [taking a step away, embarrassed] I’m sorry, I can’t! But I looked for some method—and, but the result is not good [with seriousness] because progress is so brief. So Lizzie could you please help me?

11. Lizzie: [decisively] Yes. I’m a super chef! I can do it! [fully extending her arm in a “Superman” gesture]

Figure 12 Lizzie and Marie’s cooking program (2)

12. Marie: ... OK let’s prepared the ingredients [advances to slides with individual ingredients displayed.] ...
13. [Lizzie lists the ingredients and Marie repeats them. The two mime the cooking process using props made of paper and the boxes of chalk already on the desk.]

14. Lizzie: ... As soon as the oil becomes hot, put spareribs in it,

15. Marie: Yeah.

16. Lizzie: and stir-fry five minutes [holds up 5 fingers].

17. Marie: Yeah stir five minutes. [The class laughs as Lizzie exaggeratedly stir-fries the ingredients as if over a big fire.] You look so cool!

18. Lizzie: [also laughing] Thank you.

19. Marie: Next?

20. Lizzie: We need put our ginger,


22. Lizzie: And: garlic in it ... and stir-fry thirty seconds. ... And next we need put our soy sauce in it. ... Ah, the important step.

23. Marie: Yes, the important step is?

24. Lizzie: [holding up a water bottle] One liter water in it.... At the same time, put two teaspoons salt.... and half a teaspoon gourmet powder in it.

25. Marie: So, is it over?

26. Lizzie: No. Ah when the water is boiling, we need put potatoes in it.

27. Marie: Yeah! Forgot the potato!

28. Lizzie: Yeah, a—and when the [clears throat] potatoes cook thoroughly, we need put scallion in it.

29. Marie: Scallion, yes. Wow. So [peering into the dish as Lizzie stirs] is it over?

30. Lizzie: Yes!
31. Marie: Now, let’s put it in the pan. [Lizzie picks up the boxes of chalk with her hand and transfers them to a pan made of paper. The class laughs.]

32. Lizzie: Oh, I’m sorry! [She finishes the transfer using the paper utensil prop. She lifts the dish to Marie’s face.]

33. Marie: [smelling it rapturously] Ah!:! ... [The music from the opening sequence begins to play again from a classmate’s phone.] So, my dear friends, I do believe that you have learned a lot about Spareribs with Brown Sauce. So if you have another idea [to] cook delicious food, you can connect with us. Let’s thank Lizzie again! [leads the audience in applause]

34. Lizzie: [over the enthusiastic applause] You’re welcome! Thank you!

35. Marie: See you next time! Bye! [waving]

36. Lizzie: [waving] Bye!

The performers collect their props and step off the platform. The class claps again, this time as supportive classmates rather than audience members.
4.3.3 Analysis

From a genre-analytic standpoint, Lizzie and her partner’s performance was highly complex in its structure and in the multiple social roles it involved: the target genre was a *procedural demonstration*, embedded in a *dialogue* between an expert and a learner, who are at the same time guest and host of a TV program, for the benefit of an audience of classmates. Lizzie and Marie deftly coordinated the multiple roles of this complex performance, addressing their audience in the opening and closing sequences (turns 1-4, 33-36), and in their dialogic interactions clearly projecting the roles of learner host and expert guest (e.g., turns 7-10). Besides establishing the construct validity of Meg’s classroom activity as constituting *genred* task instruction, the generic complexity of the performance Lizzie and Marie have just pulled off speaks to the *cognitive engagement* (Philp & Duchesne, 2016) it has involved.

Lizzie and her partner had scripted the program and rehearsed it, as she told me in an interview, ten times on the morning of this performance. They had worked together to script the program and practiced it several times previously to this, a fact which accounts for the fluency of their demonstration (here referring to their performance of it virtually without unplanned pauses). During these rehearsals, some of which had taken place during class time, Lizzie had consulted Meg on the accuracy of her language. Such intensive behavioral engagement (“described simply in terms of time on task or participation,” Philps and Duchesne, 2016, p. 55), beyond the requirements of Meg’s course, indicates the potential of GTI approaches to elicit sustained “effort, persistence, and active involvement” (p. 55) in English learning. All of these attitudes are clearly linked to language development, as Schmitt (2008, 2010) observes.

Besides being cognitively and behaviorally engaging, this genred task activity was a highly positive experience affectively for Lizzie. As she had stated before, Lizzie appreciated the
opportunities Meg gave her to “improve herself.” She returned to this theme when I asked her about the cooking program during a subsequent interview:

I think it’s a chance. It’s a chance for us to practice ourselves. It’s also ... you can get some cooking skills. You really can get! And you can study from your classmates, and do some easily cooking, you can do it by yourself, you can try it! You not only study English, ... you improved another skills! Really.

Clearly, Lizzie’s enthusiastic response to the cooking demonstration task indicates another potential advantage of GTI: its capacity for increasing emotional engagement, described as “motivated involvement during learning activities” displayed in “enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment” (p. 56). My observation of Lizzie’s presentation indicated that the activity succeeded in engaging not only her, but the entire class affectively—that is, by appealing in particular to their sense of humor, the genred task activity maintained students’ attention (behavioral engagement) and thus enhanced their opportunity for learning (see turns 17 and 31).

Questionnaire data collected in classes A (n=12) and B (n=10) confirms and extends this observation, uncovering the social values students’ evident emotional and behavioral engagement may be tied to. Four questionnaire items gauged students’ perceptions of the value of tasks vis-à-vis traditional lecture methodology. Item 18, for instance, read as follows:

Some teachers prefer to lecture at the front of the classroom, while others prefer to use some tasks to help students learn English. For example, the teacher might ask students to order at a restaurant, or decide in a group which movie they want to watch. Which do you think is more useful for your English proficiency, lecturing or these kinds of tasks? Or do you think a combination of the two is most useful? Why? (一些老师喜欢站在班级前面讲课，然而，另外一些老师喜欢使用任务来帮助学生学习英语。例如
Results from Meg’s students on these four items are summarized in Table 3, below.

Table 4.2

*Meg’s students on the value of tasks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire item</th>
<th>Combine tasks &amp; lecture</th>
<th>Tasks only</th>
<th>Lecture only</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 More useful for English proficiency</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 More interesting</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 More useful for passing exams</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that nearly all students in Meg’s classes who completed questionnaires preferred task-supported (i.e., combined task and lecture) or task-based (tasks only) approaches for 1) these approaches’ perceived benefits for proficiency and 2) their intrinsic interest. Surprisingly, even for purposes of test preparation, a majority of students still preferred a combination of tasks and lecture methods to an exclusively lecture-based approach.

In open-ended questionnaire responses, students gave a variety of reasons for preferring task-supported or task-based approaches, most to do with positive affect or the enhancement of practical ability. Lizzie wrote, “Lecturing gives a good teaching atmosphere so we can learn comprehensive knowledge. However, on other occasions, [tasks] can cultivate our interest in learning, and it's more fun; ... we can experience genuine situations or language settings” (translated from Chinese). Whereas lecture was better for exams, Lizzie thought, (“because we
have to learn the skills to pass the exams,” emphasis added), it was also unengaging: “Our classrooms are mostly lecture-based, so it's unavoidable that our classrooms are boring.” Another student in class B agreed: “It's so boring that a teacher speaks all the time. Often students can't stand this kind of way to learn.” A student in class A said, “I think to combine both of [these methods] would be more effective, because lecturing is boring, and too many tasks would make students feel too stressed, so if we can combine both of them, that would be good for both instructors and students.”

In their responses, many students approved of task-supported teaching because of its balance of theoretical and practical knowledge, or its ability to help students consolidate knowledge through practice. “Tasks can help us to practice and to apply what we learned in the classroom,” said one student. “I want not only the strict and rigorous atmosphere of lecturing, but also the vividness and activeness with TBLT,” said another. The student continued: “I think both these methods would help us to learn more knowledge that would be applicable, ... not limited to the content of textbooks.” Yet another student said, “If we learn both [i.e., learn via both lecture and tasks], we can know a lot of things about society, and after graduation, we can easily accommodate to new lifestyle.” These and many similar statements harmonize with those of Lizzie in her interviews, when she expressed the desire to grow personally and to “get new things” through her study of English: “I ... just want to improve myself, and let myself know more, and I can be capable of doing some things.” By leveraging this preference for expanded capacity—appealing to students’ desires to expand their symbolic capital (cf. Norton & Gao, 2008)—the GTI enacted in Meg’s classroom succeeded in securing their emotional engagement, and thus expanding their opportunities for acquiring language.

In the following section, I further illustrate students’ enactment of genred task
performance, this time in a contrastive way, by comparing genred tasks at higher and lower proficiency levels. Both tasks are embedded within a lesson on news and current events.

4.4 Genred Task Performance 2: Picture Narration

4.4.1 Lesson Summary and Instructions

Meg opened her unit on news and current events, adapted from the published textbook series *Let’s Talk* (Cambridge), with three discussion questions. In class B, this discussion (somewhat predictably) began with students resisting reading the news:

1. Meg: Three questions for you. Number one. [looking at her slide] “Do you think reading news is interesting?”
2. Students [loudly, in chorus]: No-o-o.
3. Meg: OK, number two. “Do you think it is important to keep up to date with current affairs?” Current affairs or current events are things that are happening in the world today. And number three, “What was the last news story you read about? Tell your group.” And you can begin by saying, “I recently read a story about—blah blah blah blah blah.” Tell your partner. So, off you go. [Students break into groups of 3 or 4.]
4. Jessie, to her three group mates: I don’t think read the news is interesting.
5. Ruby: Yes, because it’s so boring.
6. Jessie: But, some—some news is interesting, but uh:
7. Leah: Just a joke [comics or humorous news]
8. Jessie: Yeah. [laughs] ... “What was the last news story you read about?” [2.0] Oh! [recalling something] In this uh this noon, I read a news [a group mate looks with interest at her] about ah a girls was killed by: by her boyfriend.
9. Frieda: Why?
10. Jessie: Mm, I don’t know exactly, uh di-directly—detailed, yeah. Um maybe she dumped [1.0] he. Did you read it?

11. Group: No. ... [to another group mate] Tell a news!

12. Frieda: I didn’t read news. I’m sorry [laughing].

After this opening discussion, students move into their first picture narration task. They are to describe the news events surrounding the photos in the figure below.

![Picture narration task 1 stimuli](image)

*Figure 14 Picture narration task 1 stimuli*

To prepare for this task, the students review relevant vocabulary. Meg has prepared slides illustrating each target item (as in Figure 13) and drills each word, expanding on each with examples and questions.
Figure 15 Picture narration task 1: Pre-task vocabulary drill support

Following the vocabulary drills, pairs narrate the pictures in Figure 12; then individual students stand to describe the events they imagine for each picture. Meg next directs the students to the third task, a listening summary cloze on an ‘actual’ news report covering the events in each of the pictures. This task involves the students’ first exposure to a genre model for the news report. The report begins with upbeat music; then an announcer says, “Hello. Welcome to Good News Today.” He continues,

*I’m Ron Boyd. With me tonight is Veronica Mendez.*

*Veronica: Hello.*

*Ron: Tonight we hear stories from our reporters around the globe. First, we’ll hear about a family who is very happy today. ...*

After checking the cloze summaries, students discuss them as directed by the *Let’s Talk* lesson. Students are asked to discuss which story is happiest and to tell each other real news stories similar to the ones they have just heard. Groups discuss the stories, and Meg follows the discussion up with the whole class.
The lesson as just described richly illustrates the GTI construct, especially in terms of building *field*, both content-area knowledge and lexicogrammatical knowledge. Meg builds up students’ background knowledge about the genre of the news report—and leverages students’ social engagement (see turn 8, above)—by eliciting news stories the students know, referring them to colorful photos of news events, and providing two models for presenting the news story, a simple one in turn 3 (“you can begin by saying, ‘I recently read a story about—blah blah blah’”), and a more explicitly contextualized one in the audio presentation from “Good News Today.”

Further, all activities—the opening discussion, the vocabulary drill, the first picture narration task, the follow-up discussion—involve varied and multiple exposures to the target lexicogrammar, or FFI both incidental and “preemptive”: e.g., the incidental FFI of turn 3 (“current affairs or current events are things that are happening in the world today”), and the extensive, explicit and “planned” vocabulary building activities illustrated in Figure 13.

The presentation of the target genre, the news report, is highly iterative, as in the Teaching-Learning Cycle (Rose & Martin, 2012); by the time students engage in the picture narration task below, they have either heard or delivered a news story *at least 16 times*—at least once in the opening warm-up sequence, at least once in the first picture narration group task, 4 additional times in the whole-class recap of that task, and at least 8 more times during the listening and cloze task.
Figure 16 Picture narration task 2 stimuli

The main genred task activity of the lesson is an additional picture narration task based on the pictures in Figure 14. Meg sets up this picture narration task as follows for students in class B:

1. **Meg**: You can decide what happens. And you need to think about four things at the bottom of page 17. One, who are the people? Who was involved? What happened before, so what happened before this picture [pointing to the picture displayed on the screen] was taken, what happened? And then what happened later. So what happened before [gesturing to the left of the screen] this picture was taken and what happened afterwards [gesturing toward the right]. Just like last week when we talked about taking an interesting journey, when you tell a story what’s the first thing you need to do? [1.5] When you tell a story.
2. Students: Time.

3. Meg: Tells when, yeah, good.


5. Meg: Yeah, good, so we’re going to set the scene [spreading hands outward panoramically], set the scene. Give me an introduction. Tell me what is going on. Then: you’re going to tell me what happened [gesturing with both hands as if to indicate a block of time], the main body of your story, try to make it interesting and exciting, and then finally? [moving her hands to the right of the space she had previously blocked out, as if to indicate a later block of time] [1.0] How will you finish the story?

6. Students: Write it?

7. Meg: No.

8. Student: Ah con—

9. G: Tell me how you feel, how you felt about it.

10. Students: Aah [nodding]

11. Meg: how people here [indicating the people in the photos on screen] are feeling about it now, what is happening in their lives now. So with your partner, try and make an interesting news story, and then, when you are ready, you can tell it to the people sitting behind you.

This activity clearly constitutes a task as operationalized in this study: it is meaning-focused and tied to real-world activity; students rely on their own linguistic resources to accomplish the task. The ignorance of the listener as to the outcome of the story constitutes the gap. Meg supplies a rhetorical outcome by asking students to make their stories “interesting and exciting.”
Further, this task is *genre*-informed in that it is 1) tied to a well-established real-world text type, the news story; 2) contextually grounded by the genre samples modeled previously, as well as by the photos and the contexts (the sports world; televised sporting events) invoked by these photos. 3) It is goal-directed, as described above, and in terms of the purposes inherent in the text type, the news story, itself—to inform a public audience about current events. 4) The task instructions include guidelines for within-text staging.

It is the instructor’s attention to generic staging that particularly illustrates the special characteristics of GTI as an expansion of TBLT. For this staging, Meg gives students three interrelated options. First, she supplies a time-oriented frame adapted from the *Let’s Talk* textbook: “Who was involved? What happened before…? … And then what happened later” (turn 1). This is reinforced visually and spatially when Meg gestures to indicate blocks of time before, during, and after the events of the picture. Further, interacting with students, Meg supplies a question heuristic frame that students have discussed the previous week (turns 1-4). Finally, in turns 5-11, Meg supplies a text-structure frame, indicating that students should include an “introduction” segment (“set the scene”), a “main body” (“what happened”), and to “finish the story” an emotional response (“Tell me how you felt”).

### 4.4.2 Narrative Transcription and Analysis

Students engage with this picture narration task in varied ways. In the first excerpt, Xiao Bo, a student in class B, dialogically narrates a photo of a soccer pitch, both approximating the generic structure Meg has set out *and* quite clearly managing to “interest” and entertain her interlocutor. First, Xiao Bo sets the scene, describing the main actor:

1. **Xiao Bo:** [pointing to the soccer picture in the book] *This, I think this man, his name is Shanei. Song Lei [nods]: Ah.*
2. **XB**: Shanei, a soccer player. And ah he likes to hit people by his head [*tapping* her own head with her fist].

3. **SL**: Why?

4. **XB**: Because he’s bald. [SL laughs and covers her mouth] Look. [XB *pointing*] He’s bald. [smiles and emits a short laugh before going on] And ah when he when he think uh his uh [.5] opponents [\'ə-pō-nɔnts\'] [looks to SL, who *nods*] opponents [\'ə-pō-nɔnts\'] is bad [is bad

5. **SL**: [Opponents [\'ə-pō-nɔnts\']

6. **XB**: Opponents [\'ə-pō-nɔnts\'], opponents [\'ə-pō-nɔnts\'] [smiles and covers her mouth apologetically to acknowledge her pronunciation mistake] were, was bad, he will hit [miming a head butt] them by his head.

Continuing, Xiao Bo narrates “what happened” in the picture:

7. **XB**: And this man [*pointing* to the photo], clearly, he was just ah hitted by by Shanei, and his ah

8. **SL**: Stomach.

9. **XB**: No no, his ah [*holding* her hand to her chest] his ah chest, chest, was ah was hurt, and he fall down to the earth. [Both laugh.] And he can’t, he couldn’t stand up. And ah his friends was ah [1.5] his friends was *blamed* Shanei. Maybe he was saying, “Why, why did you do that? Why did you use your bald head to hit—”

10. **SL**: “You broken the rule.”

11. **XB**: “Yes, you broke the rule, not not us.”

Xiao Bo immediately proceeds into her conclusion, an emotional response to the story:
12. XB: And this is very funny because when I see the soccer: [consulting the vocabulary bank in her textbook] competition and I often see, I often saw [demonstrates a head butt on her partner’s shoulder; both laugh]. Very funny! Maybe you think that was not too much hurt but after he hit people

13. SL: the people will


15. SL: Really? [laughs]

16. XB: Yes! And cute. [.5] [XB looks down; her tale is told.]

Song Lei circles back to the main body of the story to clarify what happened:

17. SL [points to a player in white in the photo, forming a question]: Punished? [I.e., will Shanei be penalized by the referee?]

18. SL: Yeah.

19. XB: No. And—

20. SL: Why?

21. XB: Because he hitted [gesturing a small head butt] people usually after those game. [SL raises her eyebrows.] When the game is rest. [SL nods in acceptance of this explanation.]

Middle rest [chopping her hand downward], middle rest, and he will po [head butts toward her partner again. Both laugh.]

Besides clearly referenced to the generic structure Meg presented (“set the scene”; “tell what happened”; “tell how you felt”), this excerpt is also a vivid illustration of interdependent types of engagement. Throughout the excerpt, the pair display behavioral engagement (“active involvement,” Philp & Duchesne, 2016) through their frequent gestures—pointing, nodding, and miming the activity of the narrative (see the bolded verbs in turns 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, and 21).
They display social engagement through their supportive turn-taking and feedback (e.g., turns 4-6), emotional engagement through their frequent laughter (turns 4, 6, 9, 12, 14, 15, and 21), and cognitive engagement in the language-related episode (or LRE; for the relationship between LREs and cognitive engagement, see Philp & Duchesne, 2016) of turns 4-6, the search for a previously learned word in their textbook (turn 12), and the follow-up question probing the credibility of this “news story” (turns 17-21).

When pairs report their stories to their group, Meg encourages them to add further contextual framing: “Imagine you’re on TV, all right? On TV. How are you going to tell your story on TV?” Students in class B do not appear to attend to this additional parameter; one student ends her story with a moral: “This story is [laughing] tell us ‘Don’t argue with your friends. Say sorry is no use.” Jessie, describing a photo of a stunt person, follows the essential frame set out above (background; main events; emotional response), but again does not attempt to approximate a news report. Evidencing both emotional engagement (line 10) and behavioral engagement even under social pressure to drift off task (lines 1-2, 7-8), she perseveres in telling her story in spite of the good-natured jokes of her group mates:

1. Jessie: This is my uncle. [Her group mates joke that he is “Superman.”] He is
2. interested in moto [motorcycles]. And—listen to me! [Her group mates
3. continue to joke.] And he is interested in moto and he played it every day. And
4. and he likes fancy life, more more passion. Until day he decide to challenge
5. Jinisi [Guinness]. World Record. And and we encouraged he should try it. His
6. job is ride moto from from building. That building is almost eighty meters
7. high. He he he would ride moto from that building down. Right? ... [Group
8. mates joke indistinctly and laugh] No! He is wonderful. That one time he was
9. succeed. So we are very happy. He he he ... [consults book] won the prize.

10. [Jessie smiles and nods once with satisfaction.]

In class A, students likewise frame their stories as Meg has indicated; one pair struggles, though, to achieve their rhetorical outcome of making the stories “interesting and exciting” to their classmates. Here, they attempt to narrate two stories but are discontent with their outcome:


2. Rena: Yeah.

3. S: And ah uh his frien—his friends ah [1.5]

4. R: can’t swim. But

5. S: Ah. Can’t swim.

6. R: But drop their—

7. S: drop the water

8. R: drop the water

9. S: and he he save, saved his friend [1.0] But [discontentedly scratches her head, then looking at Rena] the story is too easy [laughing]. Do you think so?

10. R: Not very interesting. [0.8]

11. S: Let me see. [0.5]

12. R: We can try the: third—

13. S: You change again! [laughing]


16. R: Motorbike. Uh-- [3.0]

17. S: jumped down a tall building.

18. R: Jumped? [2.5] Was he rode the motorbike on: this building?


20. R: Acrobat. [nods] And— [clapping hands together with a sudden idea]

21. S: [I'm sorry I—[holds head as if she has a headache] He is a acrobat.

22. R: Fall, he fall on, he falled off, he fall—[moving hand as if it is a motorbike driving off a roof]

23. S: Fall? ... I don’t think it’s a true thing. Maybe it’s ah: [2.8] difficult to make up a story.

24. R: And at at at last, at last, he died.

25. S: He died? He d—[laughs] Not happy ending!

26. R: Yeah. [nods; they move on to the last picture]

Although the excerpt above indicates some negative emotional response to the task, as Rena and Sally struggle to achieve their goal (turns 21, 23), it also illustrates cognitive engagement, not just at the surface level of lexicogrammar (turns 14-16), or at the level of the narrative’s content, but at a meta-analytic level. Interacting supportively (displaying social engagement) to construct their stories, Rena and Sally indicate an ability to evaluate the stories as instances of these stories’ generic class—news reports like the ones they have told and heard during the lesson. Against their internal criteria, their own stories fall short: the stories they attempt are “too easy” (turn 9), “not interesting” (turn 10) not “true” (turn 23), and do not have a “happy ending” (turn 25). Although the pair has not managed to accomplish the task to their own satisfaction, this excerpt illustrates the potential of their genre-related activity to help them build
up their capacity for doing so. It may also illustrate a potential pitfall of GTI: where students do not feel adequately prepared for genred tasks, they may engage negatively with these tasks and develop resistance to future similar tasks.

Rena and Sally join their classmates Lizzie and Marie to rehearse their news reports once again with a slightly bigger audience. Lizzie begins. She straightens her back and folds her arms formally, as if she is a TV host.

1. Lizzie: We choose second picture.
2. Marie: Yes.
3. Lizzie: [clasping hands in front of her] Hello, Marie, have you s—have you heard very interesting story? [turning to Marie]
4. M: Yes!
5. L: Yeah, ah yeah. And ah the twins got join in bank.
7. L: Yeah, to join bank ah they were invited by their friends to take part unh to take part and they they wear the suit, so that they look very handsome.
9. L: Yeah, and they go to ah went to the party,
10. M: Yes.
11. L: but, they’re very they attempt themself, they want to they went to ah swimming pool, but! Unfortunately, someone chase the Mark and they pull her [miming a push] ah sh--him ah pulled him into [the swimming pool.
12. M: [swimming pool!]
13. L: But!
14. M: So Mark call, “Help me, help me!”

15. L: Yeah. But Mike didn’t know how to swim [dramatically]. So they ah they very worried and—worried and ah luckily, his brother, John, heard ah heard their [glancing toward the ceiling to find the right word] scream [turns to Marie questioningly]. Scream?


17. L: Scream, and helped, helped him. Ah rescue him from swimming pool. Happy ending story. [Lizzie smiles, imitating a TV host as she clasps her hands together again formally, then laughing at her own imitation; her story is finished].

18. M: [nods] It’s a really happy ending.

The excerpt above an additional level of generic framing (and thus another kind of cognitive engagement) beyond that of the previous ones. Here, Lizzie and Marie enact the social roles involved in a televised news report (e.g., turn 3, and in the dialogic exchanges), and this enactment generates emotional engagement (turn 17); Lizzie is enjoying taking on the role of TV host. Cognitive engagement is illustrated as well in the LRE of turns 15-17.

The group transitions to Sally and Rena’s story. This time, the two students leverage the abruptness of their story to capture their classmates’ interest. Again, like their classmates (turns 17-18, above) they display cognitive engagement at the meta-analytic level, evaluating the nature of their story as a story (turns 1, 11). Throughout this excerpt and the previous two, there are evidences of social and behavioral engagement, with supportive turn-taking and eye contact, active gesturing (turn 11 above; turns 1, 10, below), and (in Sally and Rena’s story) persistence through what the group members perceive to be a difficult task.
1. Sally: Rena make up a not happy ending story. About ah that one [pointing to the third photo]. [2.5] Uh she said [1.2] uh this man [pointing to the third photo] is a acrobat.


3. S: Yeah. Acrobat, [and ah


5. S: He with her: motorb—motorcycle

6. M: Yeah?

7. S: jump from a tall building.


9. S: [looking at L & M to watch their reaction] And then [.2] he died.

10. M: Whoa! [They laugh; S puts her hand over her mouth.] So!

11. R: So—then so yes, so shocked.


13. R: Shocked.

It is clear from these excerpts illustrating the second genred task performance that students engage positively with this picture narration task, even in the lower proficiency group, where class engagement overall was less consistent and students reported avoiding speaking in English when Meg was not nearby. Students rose to the challenge of entertaining their classmates; they visibly registered pleasure and satisfaction while and after narrating their stories, and while listening to others’ stories. At both levels of the course, students engaged the cognitive complexity of the task as genre, using simple framing, as Meg directed, to supply a clear beginning, middle, and end. At the higher proficiency level, two students further framed
their story by presenting it as a news report, with gestures and dialogue. As I will explain further below, these behaviors seem strongly indicative of the feasibility of this approach for the students at Oasis City—even those who describe themselves as “bad” and “lazy” students.

4.5 Genred Task Performance 3: Formal News Report

4.5.1 Instructions

To finish up the lesson just described, students work in groups on a final task: to achieve consensus with their classmates on a list of the 5 most important news stories from the past year. This is a clearly goal-oriented task, with a clear outcome (consensus). No genre construction is called for, but the task is preparatory to the formal news report assignment that caps this lesson.

Meg follows up this group task by rehearsing some of the stories she herself considered important, including the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight 370 and the conflict in Ukraine involving the loss of a plane. In doing so, as seen in chapter 3, Meg again models the kind of global civic awareness she is expecting students to engage through literate involvement in reading and evaluating the news. Building on the foregoing lesson, Meg sets up a formal news assignment in which students are to choose a recent news story, perform it as if they are news anchors, and then lead the class in discussion of the story. Her instructions are extremely interesting in terms of the focal construct, GTI. In class A, she sets up the assignment as follows:

1. You have been telling your partner about different news stories that you’ve heard about, yeah? Now it’s easy telling your partner, maybe it’s a little nerve-racking, standing on the stage, telling everybody, but it’s the same thing. So try to choose a story that your classmates will find interesting. Um
2. be thinking about news stories from the last year that you paid attention to. If
3. you find it interesting, probably they will find it interesting. Choose something
7. that your classmates can discuss. Remember I want you to think about 3 discussion questions.... Why was the plane shot down over the Ukraine? Who shot down the plane? These kind of questions. And think about the issue from all sides. Few things in life are black and white. There may be many many angles to one story. So don’t use just one website. Use different websites. ...

12. Maybe a website from Russia will say something very different from a website from America about what happened in the Ukraine. ... One’s looking from this way [bringing her right hand in toward her face] one’s looking from that way [bringing her left hand in to face her right hand]. ...

In this excerpt, Meg appears to heighten students’ emotional and social engagement: “try to choose a story that your classmates will find interesting. ... If you find it interesting, probably they will find it interesting” (lines 4, 6). She heightens cognitive engagement, as well, asking students to consider the genre of the news report as a category and select a story from within it (line 5) based on its cognitive complexity, as “something that your classmates can discuss” (lines 6-7). Then, beginning in line 7, she takes students’ cognitive involvement to a new level of meta-analysis, asking them to consider their news story not just at a textual level, or even as a story within a genre category of other similar news stories, but at the level of the genre itself. She asks them to consider the news story, in the abstract, in its rhetorical context—a dialogic, contested space where events are not “black and white,” and where the narratives surrounding newsworthy events exist in tension with one another. Clearly, the genred task Meg is setting for students involves a high degree of cognitive complexity, and as the transcriptions below demonstrate, students’ final reports evidence engagement with this complexity. At both levels, however, they
appear to stop short of fully contextualizing their reports in the rhetorical space Meg has just indicated.

### 4.5.2 Narrative Transcription and Analysis

1. Cherie and Sabrina, students in class A, open their PowerPoint and seat themselves at the teacher’s desk on the platform, which has become their news anchors’ desk [see Figure 15].

![Figure 15 Cherie, Sabrina, and Hallie’s news report (1)](image)

2. They lower their heads and cross their arms formally, trying to keep their composure as their “opening music,” [a patriotic symphonic piece] plays.
3. Cherie: Good evening everyone.
5. Cherie: Today is 2015, April twenty fifth, Saturday.
6. Sabrina: Today's news is mainly about the earthquake in Nepal. [Both students speak fluently and with a formal, curt tone.]
11. Cherie: And now let's get to new[s] event. According to a report, at twenty-eight
12. point two degrees north, and eighty-four point seven degrees east, [Sabrina
13. advances the slide to a map] an eight-point-one magnitude earthquake struck
14. Nepal at eleven minutes past two o'clock p.m., Saturday Beijing time. At present it
15. has caused fourteen hundred seventy-five people killed, including at least for
16. Chinese nationals, and hundreds of people are injured. Actually over twenty-five
17. millions years ago, India is an [unclear] island, and there always has a collision
18. between India and Asia. Thus, this stress, the Himalayas became the highest peak
19. in the world. And it sparked many strong disasters earthquakes. In 1943, there
20. was an, there was an eight-point-two magnitude earthquake struck the east of
21. Nepal, and about ten thousand people died at that time. This time, the earthquake
22. happened in the capital of Nepal, Kathmandu. And the epicenter is not as deep as
23. before, which is an about nine miles deep-th, so the shake of the ground is more
24. violent. And according to a saying of the Professor [unclear; a surname], who is
25. major in geology, this earthquake makes the whole city move ten miles toward the
26. direction of east. And the rescue operation is still underway. Last, please contact
27. the reporter at the scene. Hallie? [Sabrina advances the slide to a photo of
28. crowds of displaced persons in Nepal.]
30. Cherie: Good to have you with us, Hallie. So what's going on there?
Figure 18 Cherie, Sabrina, and Hallie’s news report (2)

31. Hallie: As you can see, I'm standing ... in front of the Central Square in the center of Kathmandu. Now, the sun is setting under a golden sky. The outside temperature is about 50 cent- degrees centigrade. Hundreds of tents were set up.

32. [1.0; coughs, apparently to cover a lapse in memory] Worried about uh:, worried about after work— aftershocks, people are unwilling to return home. Before the earthquake, a square was a place where the military club carried about— carried about sports activities. However, the place has become [home] to these victims. ... Food and water shortages become two biggest problems. ... Large quantities of international aid have not been delivered, so people have to save themselves. ... The rescue operation is still underway. To: ... to all the deceased, rest in peace. Request all the health, uh s— wiped away tears,

42. to continue. Hallie reported.

43. Sabrina: Thank you for reporting. And we do hope you take care of yourself there.

44. As Hallie reported, as soon as the earthquake happened, Prime Minister Li
45. Keqiang give a consolation call [advances slide to a portrait; see figure] to the prime minister in the Nepal.

46. [Image]

Figure 19 Cherie, Sabrina, and Hallie’s news report (3)

47. He expressed condolences, condolence to the poor victims, the injureds, and their family.... Chinese government has provided 20 million rescue goods to Nepal, which include carpets, tents, etc. China is trying hard to help Nepal. As con:...  

48. scientists concluded, the main reason that that this earthquake happened is the location of Nepal. Nepal is located at the border of Indian Ocean ridge—ah plate, and Eurasia plate. When the earth crust moving, two plates rub against each other. It not only caused the big earthquake, but also affects Himalaya. After earthquake happened, some people start thinking—Does the earthquake relate to human activities? Nowadays human are taking full: use of natural resources. We even make big damage to our earth. How dare us say it is not a reason that caused the frequent crest moving? And what will happen if we continue to
58. exploit? But it's a pity that scientists haven't found the answer yet. But we all
59. know that it's time for our, for us protecting, protecting our earth, and it's time for
60. a change.

61. Cherie: Today's news is over.
62. Sabrina: Thank you for watching.
63. Cherie: See you next week.
64. Sabrina: See you. [loud applause from classmates]
65. Cherie: And our first question that, did you experience an earthquake?
66. Students: Yes.
67. Cherie: How many people have experienced an earthquake before? [Of the nine
68. students visible in the video, four are raising their hands.] So many people! So who
69. would like to share your experience? ...

Cherie, Hallie, and Sabrina’s report sophisticatedly illustrates the kinds of engagement
this chapter has discussed before. The students display cognitive engagement in the enactment of
a detailed news report, with their skillful use of physical space, media, and objects: the screen
and teachers’ desk on the teaching platform are their news studio, which is additionally evoked
by the opening and closing music; the space near the door, and an image of the disaster in
Kathmandu, is the on-site location of the earthquake; Hallie’s phone is her microphone.
Cognitive engagement is evident as well in the multiple sub-genres the students include in their
report: a straightforward, factual narrative in lines 11-16; a historical recount in lines 16-21; a
more expressive on-site report comprising a rich description of the earthquake site (lines 31-40)
and condolences for the grieving families (lines 40-42); an encomium on China’s role in the
wake of the disaster (lines 44-49); a processual scientific account of the cause of the disaster (49-
53); and a more philosophical discussion raising the possibility that humans, in their exploitation of the earth’s resources, are somehow complicit in this disaster (53-60). The report ends by leveraging this exigency to call for more responsible treatment of the environment (lines 58-60).

Especially in Hallie’s on-site description and condolences, and throughout the performance, the students display emotional engagement with this intense story of large-scale tragedy on China’s southwestern border; and in the loud applause and eager responses at the close of the report, their classmates display this engagement as well. By raising students’ awareness of and empathy for their fellow creatures in a neighboring state, this emotional engagement may again serve to further one of Meg’s social goals for her course, discussed above and in chapter 3: to develop her students’ sense of global civic awareness and responsibility.

But although clearly and sophisticatedly framed, the performance stops short of presenting the news from multiple or conflicting perspectives. The students have very skillfully represented a global news story, yet from a distinctly local point of view. They do contextualize their story more broadly, however, (and perhaps obliquely introduce a dialogic response to local discourse) by addressing the possibility that exploiting natural resources has led to an increased incidence of natural disasters.

The performance presented below is shorter, with these students (in class B) developing their presentation, on the topic of genetically modified food, within the familiar moves of a test essay (lines 4-8, below). Yet students engage the task cognitively, as a genred activity, by taking on the roles of news reporters and leveraging the teacher’s platform and smart screen as their prop. And in one way their performance is more sophisticated than that of the students in class A: to an extent, they problematize their story along the rhetorical lines that Meg has directed.

1. Diana: Hello everyone, Reporter Diana. Today we will tell you about, we will
2. talk about the topic about the, about this [gesturing toward the PPT screen;
3. laughter from classmates]. Genetically [struggles to pronounce ‘genetically’;
4. her classmates help her finish the term in chorus] modified food. Recently
5. years, with the development of economic, communication communication
6. between countries is getting closer and closer. It include economic, politics,
7. culture and so on. Especially culture. Foreign food found in China. For
8. example KFC. For example KFC. [3.0] umm although it's, although it's
9. delicious, but it's, but it's, but it's so many so many so many problems. [2.0]
10. and it's not very it's not very healthy. And ah and ah KFC face some, face
11. some, face some food safety problems. And ah and ah there, and there and
12. there are some, and there are some food safety incidents. Incidents. [clears
13. throat] ... Nowadays more and more generatively [sic] modified food come
14. including and become part of our daily food. Is it safe to be consumed? Don’t
15. they have any bad effects? The public become skeptic about them. And even
16. protest against them. The government have been complicated over the issue.
17. What's the result of the battle? Can protesters get what they want? Next,
18. welcome to my partner to introduce about the safety events. [Applause as
19. Sunny steps onto the platform. She advances the slide to reveal a disturbing
20. image of a mutated animal.]
Figure 20 Diana and Sunny’s news report

21. Sunny: Good afternoon everyone, I am the reporter Sunny. Just as a Reporter
22. Diana said, many foods are genetically modified food, we can see it's
23. extremely harmful to us. Increasingly, it becomes a hot topic today. In June 2,
24. according to the Wall Street Journal, the fast food chain KFC is going to sue
25. three companies because of using using social media to spread false rumors
26. about its food, including that it use six wings and eight legs chicken. KFC
27. claims composition compensation of 1.5 million yuan and an apology. A case
28. has been filed before a court in Shanghai. But those companies hadn't
29. commented yet. And it also it's it's [1.0] more difficult to [unclear] this
30. problem that the rumors have spread through at least 4000 posts on the
31. WeChat A-P-P, so there's no doubt that it's will, the profits will decrease
32. rapidly, and KFC decided to stop cooperating with these films [firms]. Thank
33. you. And, [looking at the screen where questions are displayed] how often do
34. you eat modified, genetically modified foods, such as fast food? And the
35. second how do you think genetically modified food? Three. Do you think six
36. legs chicken is normal? [applause]

There is less apparent emotional engagement in this story, including on the part of
students who half-heartedly discuss the questions raised in lines 33-36. Again, however, the
students engage this task cognitively by framing their presentation as a news report, enacting the
roles of reporters (lines 1, 21) and staking out its rhetorical space. To do this, Diana heightens the
tension between three groups: KFC (lines 7-12); a skeptical, increasingly frustrated public (lines
15-16), and official Chinese entities who have not yet ruled finally on the issue of KFC’s alleged
use of GM food (line 16). Summing up this tension, she asks, “What's the result of the battle?
Can protesters get what they want?” (line 17). Sunny then indicates an additional set of players,
the “three companies” who have spread allegedly “false rumors” about the fast-food chain using
“social media” platforms including WeChat (lines 25, 31). Again, she indicates that official
entities have not yet ruled on the issue (27-29). Most notably, she cites a non-Chinese news
source, The Wall Street Journal, to acknowledge that KFC has denied allegations that they use
GM food (23-27). In the end, though, she appears to assume the truth of the allegations in the
discussion question, “And, how often do you eat ... genetically modified foods, such as fast
food?” As in the report above, the students’ ultimate perspective seems to be a local one, with a
foreign firm held responsible for introducing an unsafe product to China.

4.6 Genred Task Performances: Discussion

Along with students’ perceptions as expressed in interviews and questionnaires, these
genred task performances, with their multiple and varied evidences of cognitive, behavioral,
emotional, and social engagement (Philps & Duchesne, 2016), indicate the feasibility of GTI as
defined in this study. Again, feasibility here comprises three interdependent components:
acceptability, practicality, and integration (Bowen et al. 2010). Acceptability indexes
stakeholder responses to GTI (in this chapter, displayed through engagement); practicality
“explores the extent to which [task approaches] can be delivered” given existing constraints; and
integration “assesses the level of system change needed to integrate [the target approaches] into
an existing infrastructure” (Bowen et al., 2010).

To account for the diverse types of engagement illustrated above, I refer again to
Norton’s (Norton Pierce, 1995; Norton & Gao, 2008; Darvin & Norton, 2015) notion of
“investment.” Norton and colleagues have claimed that “if learners ‘invest’ in the target
language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and
material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” (Norton & Gao,
learning in order to gain access into “imagined communities”—often, communities they see as
prestigious; thus “an investment in the target language is in fact an investment in the learner’s
own identity,” a bid to participate in and identify with a valued social group (p. 110).

Unmistakably, students in Meg’s classroom have chosen to invest in the genred-task instruction
on offer there, consistently engaging (cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, and socially) in the
wide variety of genred tasks set out for them with interest and humor.

To a large extent, I suggest, students’ consistent investment in GTI is due to the fact that
the values of Meg’s classroom intersect with students’ own values for practical activity, social
connection, and dialogic, even comic interactions. Meg pushes students beyond their existing
values, however, when she asks them to attend not just to tabloids and comedy but also to
international disasters and trends, nudging them toward increased awareness of and concern for their counterparts across the globe. As the performance excerpts throughout this chapter and the previous one have indicated, students do move into this dialogic space, challenging and responding to one another and to her, and engaging global issues. As the news reports illustrated, however, there are limits on these dialogic interactions; there are some discourses that students do not engage.

In sum, GTI is clearly acceptable to student stakeholders, harmonizing with their values for real-world social activity. Along the same lines, GTI is practical in the research context, deliverable even under the constraints of low student morale and resistance to academic effort. Whether it is also capable of integration within an existing educational system may depend to a large extent, what one teacher participant designated “teacher morale.” This is the subject of the following brief chapter.
5 FINDINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Emma’s Views

My colleague Emma, decisive and confident, was an extremely popular teacher, highly proficient in English, and well-regarded by her colleagues and our supervisor Director Xiu. For the past several years she had worked closely with Meg to run the children’s school. During the semester I conducted formal classroom observations, she was away in eastern China, having been funded to undergo a special teacher training program that was run jointly by the Ministry of Education and a prominent British university. I observed a single lesson of Emma’s toward the end of the semester—not an official one, but a “demo” lesson she was rehearsing for a provincial teaching contest. Like most of my observations, it was a reading lesson, but it was different from any I had seen in the department. The lesson was fast-paced and meaning-oriented, with tight sequences of goal-directed tasks (i.e., “in one minute, find the answer to one specific question, in one specific portion of the text”) interwoven with whole-class discussion. Varied media (images, a partial printed text, a brief video) and discussion groupings (pairs, whole class) supported conceptual understanding. Throughout the lesson, Emma constantly and skillfully posed questions that kept students curious about and attentive to the meaning of the passage. Other than a few minutes of shuffling to make sure all students had access to the handouts, the lesson was seamless, and students remained fully engaged, as evident in their fully on-task behaviors (eye contact, eager responses to questions, absorption in whole-class and small-group discussion).

I was very interested to understand Emma’s ideas about English instruction at the college, and she was candid in expressing them. During her training in eastern China, she related, she had gained a strong, practice-based grasp of implementing communicative teaching methods. She
contrasted these with what she dismissively called a “grammar-first” approach. In her view, the main challenge in the department was not with students’ motivation; in her experience, even so-called “bad students” were responsive to innovative methods. She had implemented an innovative goal-oriented activity with one group of students, a class which she had taken over from another colleague upon her return from eastern China:

Actually this class is the one that the previous teacher told me that, “This is a terrible class. I don't want to continue the teaching because they have no response.” And then when I used this activity in this classroom, everything was fine; the students are very active actually. They are very good students.

There were two main obstacles to implementing the kind of innovative methods that she believed students preferred. One of these was teachers’ knowledge:

I don't think the teachers know what is task-based. They don't know it. They are teachers, but they are not trained .... We only have several teachers [names two] ... [who] teach the teaching methods, so they know a little bit about it. I don't know whether other teachers know which kind of teaching methods or approach we are going to use.

But the problem ran much deeper than teacher education, she thought; she herself had been trained and was confident in her ability to implement her training. She dismissed two other possible obstacles which had been raised during our focus group. First, she disagreed with her colleagues who stated that exam pressure limited the content of the courses: “Actually, you ... can decide .... We can adapt some of the texts or units.” She likewise dismissed the potential obstacle of implementing activities with the very large classes at ONC. Her British trainers had specifically addressed how to adapt instruction for large classes.

The remaining problem, for her, was that preparing a task-based lesson took time—2
hours, she guessed to prepare innovative materials for just one lesson, and she was teaching 10 lessons (20 hours) a week. She could not justify this kind of time investment under her current teaching conditions.

I should say that I've learned a lot [during her teacher training]. If you give me enough time, just like the teaching competition, ... then [matter-of-factly] I can do it. I can set up activities just like what you saw last time. I can do it. I can [make] my normal teaching like this. But [1.2] it's too much work. ... If it is too much work, it's unfair. This teacher is just reading PPTs, and I do so many activities—I did so many preparations for every lesson. That is unfair.

With more recognition from her administrators, she would be willing to invest in this kind of preparation:

If I do it [i.e., implement innovative methods] and then I get a very good result, maybe the dean will say, “Oh you did a good job,” and he will give me some prize or something like that—and then, I will. But so far, the common atmosphere is, “Just do it.” [flatly] “Just finish it.” ... Now the criticism we got is something like [voicing a supervisor], “You are late. [1.0] There's something wrong with your test paper.” ... Even the supervisors who came to observe the lesson ... will say, “Oh the students are sleeping in the back. You should be careful. You should know how to use the computer....” something like that. They would never talk about a deep issue related to methods:, related to the quality:, related to what you have in your PPT, what is your goal, your achievement [in] this class. Nobody is caring about it.

In Emma’s account, she and her colleagues had little time to invest in their teaching, no opportunity or incentive to share their ideas with one another, and virtually no recognition from
their supervisors. Upon her return from her semester of training, no one had asked her to share what she had learned. Her idea to collaborate with colleagues to prepare lessons had been dismissed by a supervisor. Several weeks after her return from a rewarding teacher education experience, Emma’s morale was running very low.

5.2 Other Teachers’ Views

In the following section, I rely on focus group data to present a consensus of my colleagues’ views of the nature of teacher support in the target context. I follow this account with a discussion of implications for teacher education.

In July of 2015, at the end of the data collection period and my sojourn in western China, I held a focus group dinner for my teacher participants. For two hours, ten of my colleagues met in my airless fifth-floor apartment, complaining about the desert heat and sharing their views on my research questions. After the focus group meeting, we caravanned to a favorite local restaurant for dinner and goodbye speeches. Here I present just a portion of our discussion, my colleagues’ representations of the nature of teacher support at the college.

As Director Xiu had indicated in his interview, teachers agreed that administrator priorities were to cover the syllabus and to “strive to let more of your students pass the exams.” Teachers reported three kinds of administrative intervention: meetings, observations, and the occasional special lecture by a professor from a more prestigious school in the east of China.

Teachers stated that they attended one meeting per week with their administrator, Director Xiu. These meetings were mostly policy-related, having to do with important administrative issues that could not be communicated via an online platform. Teachers did not feel that the meetings helped them become better teachers but viewed them as necessary. One teacher said that the meeting “contains two parts ... how to control or manage students [and to
communicate] some reform” of the examination, curriculum, or department organization and schedule.

Once per semester each teacher underwent an observation by an administrator. Some teachers viewed the observation as just a formality; others pointed out that observers do “give us some feedback.” Teachers agreed (with a laughing “no”) that their teaching did not change following this observation. The feedback mostly concerned, for instance, students sleeping or playing on their phones during class. Following up on this point, a teacher pointed out that their income was tied to student behavior: “If students are sleeping in your class, then maybe you will be fined.” Another teacher added that the observations (and accompanying fining system) were “a kind of a way to guarantee the normal teaching”—to standardize external activity across the college. This standardization was enforced outside of these formal observations; throughout the semester staff observers would circulate the classroom buildings unannounced, making sure behavior was “normal.” Teachers’ salaries were affected by these observations, as well.

Beyond these interventions, teachers had two other opportunities for support: continuing education and colleague support. Opportunities to study abroad were competitively awarded, however; teachers could apply “but it doesn’t mean that we can get the chances. There are few chances,” said one. Occasionally teachers would swap resources with one another, for instance when Adelina shared her automatic grading site with her colleagues, but they could not say how often this occurred.

5.3 Implications for Teacher Education

Within an activity system (Engeström, n.d.; Roth & Lee, 2007) comprising a set of tools (top-down curriculum and high-stakes test), a particular division of labor (designated roles in curriculum development, delivery, enforcement, and mastery), and rules (for ensuring a
maximum of students can demonstrate English competence on the high-stakes test) focused on objects and outcomes (a globally-savvy population competent in English), administrators at all levels are particularly powerful community members (see figure below). They create rules and determine how to enforce them. They set objectives and determine the tools by which these objectives will be achieved.

As previous chapters showed, these objectives are widely shared by student and teacher stakeholders: students themselves wish for successful participation in imagined globalized futures; both local teachers and their waijiao colleague wish their students to have a “bright future” and assume this to be achievable through English competence—not only as measured by their passing an exam and securing their diploma, but also, and ideally, through more reflective and practical kinds of language mastery. This apparently mutual goal of all stakeholders in my study, very broadly construed as achieving English competence for success in a globalized community, seems a relevant and justifiable one, and points to the potential for transformative innovation through convergence across multiple activity systems on a single object, as in third-generation activity theory (Engeström, 2001).

But although these ends are harmonious, the means currently used to achieve them are at odds. In the system depicted again in the figure below, the activity of college-level English teaching is pulled one way by the state-level directive to promote universal English competence (“especially ... listening and speaking ability,” MOE, 2007), and another way by the additional directive to do so using a tool which emphasizes reading proficiency. An additional element of tension is introduced by students’ alignment with the objectives, but resistance of the rules, tools, and labor designated to them in meeting these objectives.
Figure 21 Activity System of ONC’s College English Program: Local teachers as subjects
This chapter has demonstrated that within a system in tension even highly capable, extensively educated teachers lose morale, bearing out the insights of sociocultural theory into L2 teacher development processes, and acknowledging that teaching involves the agentive action of whole persons enmeshed in social contexts (Cross, 2010; Roth & Lee, 2007; Johnson & Golombek, 2003). As teachers in this context come up against the disheartening realities of a student population resistant to academic work, on the one hand, and sets of administrative expectations on the other, their investment in practice suffers. Emma is a powerful case in point. Although her teacher education experience enabled her to gain control of and skillfully deploy the teaching concepts she had internalized (Johnson & Golombek, 2003), she met roadblocks to implementing these concepts—particularly the requirements of her intensive teaching schedule, but also the lack of social support she experienced within her department for her professional ideals. When these ideals and her identity as a competent teacher were not acknowledged by colleagues and administrators, she resisted implementing the concepts she had internalized.

If (as sociocultural theory posits) teaching is a socially constructed activity, it is no less a socially deconstructed one. Without an adequate appreciation of teachers’ social values—i.e., to achieve positive social recognition and reward—administrators in the existing college English system may struggle to elicit the levels of investment they expect from instructors, particularly under such challenging conditions as those described here. More seriously, teachers’, and hence their students’, human potential for growth may be permanently limited.
6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I return to my overarching research questions. I address each question, contextualizing it with reference to recent research, and lay out implications for future research.

6.1 Summary of Findings

This dissertation has addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the feasibility of genre-informed, task-supported teaching (or GTI, genred task instruction) in the target context?
   a. What are instructors’ understandings of genre and task?
   b. (How) are activities enacted? Where there is limited or no evidence of task- or genre-related instruction, what may account for this?

2. What are considerations for teacher development and support in this context?
   a. What are considerations for teacher development and support for local instructors?
   b. What are considerations for teacher development and support for non-Chinese instructors (waijiao)?

The foregoing analysis and discussion have demonstrated that GTI is partly feasible in the context: first, it is highly acceptable to student and (to a lesser extent) teacher stakeholders; second, it is practicable under certain conditions (i.e., in the waijiao’s classroom), particularly in that it responds to students’ values and accommodates students’ resistance to academic effort. Within the existing system, however, which involves rigorous accountability for standardized test results and severely limited administrative support, GTI resists implementation on the part of local teachers. This is partly due to some local teachers’ inadequate understanding of task-based methodologies, as well as to perceptions that its task component is unfeasible given severe
contextual constraints, especially test washback and heavy workloads (cf. McDonough, 2015). Like teachers in McDonough’s (2015) study, some teachers question whether task approaches can promote language development adequately (p. 229)\(^\text{17}\); but as I have stated, even where acceptance and deeply internalized understandings of task approaches exist, these are being blocked by administrative activity.

On the other hand, local teachers’ *existing* control of skillful genre-analytic approaches and meticulous form-focused instruction has the potential to inform a broader genred task approach; in this sense, teacher knowledge (i.e. of genre analysis and FFI) constitute “resource units under control” (Klein, 1990) and a further argument for the feasibility of GTI in the context. GTI’s points of correspondence with existing practice may in fact make it likely to be more feasible than TBLT; as Long (2015) states, curricular innovation (in his discussion, TBLT) is fostered by teachers’ “perception that the change involved is not too radically different from current practice” (p. 19).

The need for ongoing teacher support is acknowledged to be a critical obstacle to TBLT implementation (Long, 2016); without “adequate in-service (re-)training and continued teacher support,” innovative practice, where it is desired, is unlikely to succeed (Long, 2016, p. 28; cf. Van den Branden, 2016). In overcoming this obstacle and providing truly adequate support, teacher educators must above all take account of teachers’ real values. As I have claimed, teacher developers in the context (most crucially, local administrators) should consider how increased attention to teachers’ social values—e.g., for recognition from colleagues and administrators for

\(^{17}\) Such teachers could be referred to McDonough’s (2015) summary of research indicating that task approaches do in fact promote development, or to Li, Ellis, and Zhu’s (2016) discussion of task-supported methodologies as alternatives to strictly task-based approaches. Van den Branden (2016) acknowledges, however, the role of teachers in determining to what extent TBLT can and should be implemented in their contexts.
professional effectiveness—could foster increased investment on the part of teachers and encourage them to use existing resources in more productive ways.

As a tool to this end, an SCT/CHAT framework could prove helpful, allowing administrators and teachers to resolve the “dissonance” (Poehner, 2011) inherent in their awareness of students’ dissatisfaction with traditional instruction. Through this attempt toward resolution, teachers and administrators could come to view one another and their students in a more empathetic and positive light, deepen their awareness of all stakeholders’ human potential for growth, reinvigorate their willingness to collaborate with one another and invest in students, and ultimately transform their practice. The collaborative efforts described by Dong (2006) provide a locally-initiated exemplar for this process.

McDonough and Chaikitmongkol’s (2007) description of a TBLT curriculum pilot study in a Thai university gives further insights into the ways that teachers could—and should—be supported specifically as they transition into using task-based methodologies. In their study, a “course design team” responded to teachers’ perceived needs by designing pre-session workshops and detailed lesson plans for use in later iterations of the course. These workshops and lessons, crucially, addressed the resistance of both teachers and students to unfamiliar methodologies by clarifying the rationale and goals of task-based instruction as compared to the “teacher-fronted grammar-based courses” students were used to (p. 122). For departments planning to implement TBLT, McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) stress the importance of “teacher ... preparation” via discussion and observation; teachers could “watch videos of teachers implementing a similar task-based course and then discuss their role” in such a course (p. 125). In-house, department-wide efforts of this kind, with their potential to develop socially constructed, locally referenced understandings of target approaches across the faculty, may be
much preferable to the isolating, although otherwise exemplary, teacher-education experience of Emma (cf. Van den Branden, 2016; Long, 2015).

In the unusual situation of the waijiao, Meg, genred task instruction met with fewer obstacles to implementation: again, without the obligations of the local teachers to use prescribed curriculum and prepare students for high-stakes examinations, Meg was free to construct a course that was responsive to students’ values and interests—one that engaged them emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, and socially. Even without the constraints of her local colleagues, this was no easy feat; even after investing heavily in her class materials and preparation, Meg repeatedly confronted the realities of low student morale. By her account, it was her efforts to engage students’ social values—to offer them new identities within the social context of the classroom; to break down resistance to academic effort by engaging them emotionally, through humor—that proved most critical in helping students sustain extensive engagement with genred tasks.

6.2 Research Implications

Ethics in applied linguistics research involves seeing participants as complex human persons, taking seriously the realities that make up their psychological landscapes. Such an effort is in fact highly pragmatic; by grounding research recommendations in the realities of student and teacher life, this kind of ethicality helps ensure that these recommendations will be taken seriously by stakeholders at the chalkface.

Much of what is at least tacitly assumed to constitute ‘best practices’ in adult EFL takes for granted a socio-economic infrastructure that ensures desirable outcomes such as high test scores, acceptance to college and graduate programs, and job placements. This infrastructure
includes, for instance, the personal wealth that frees up students’ time for study from the earliest years of life, and affords parents and other care-givers the educational and ideological resources to support that study. All of this contributes to habits of investment in and reward for effortful academic work, so that by the time students arrive in the (expensive) programs from which most SLA research participant pools are drawn, those students are already prepared to continue investing in ways that are recognized by their academic communities.

But what happens when this infrastructure is missing? when what Wang Fang called “family conditions” have not allowed students, from the earliest years of life, leisure to study or psychological support when they do? when students opt out of academic effort because they have rarely, if ever, derived any reward from it? when influential peers mock academic effort, so that a choice to invest in it constitutes a threat to their status within their community of peers? when, more seriously, regional tension or actual trauma renders academic effort irrelevant? Under such conditions, careful task design and implementation, the purview of much instructed SLA research, remain important; but this research must also address deeper, and less easily measured, realities. Unless it does, it will be disregarded, despite all the efforts of researchers, administrators, and teacher educators, as unfeasible for “our students.”

The teacher participants in my study were working under extremely difficult circumstances. A disposition to invest in academics and English did not come “built in” to their students by their families or prior schooling experiences. The failing test system, built for another era, could no longer be relied on to help ensure that investment, and teachers were severely strained by being made to bear the responsibility for students’ test performance.

My argument in this study is a modest one: that the widely touted task-informed and communicative methodologies are workable not only, as others have shown, in well-resourced
western ESL settings; not only even in the urban, intensely test-driven Chinese high-school settings where these methods are typically tested, but also in under-resourced, remote settings where language-learning motivation—indeed academic morale in general—is profoundly low. I argue in fact that these alternative, skill- and practice-oriented methods seem to be the only approaches that appear to have the potential to engage students in this research context—students who are, first, deeply disaffected by a traditional academic environment in which they are persistently marginalized as under-achievers, and second, members of a “new generation” of students who are adherents not so much of Confucian ideals as of a self-oriented pragmatism, according to M. Bastin (2013), a British academic writing for the China Daily. Like the students in McDonough and Chaikitmongkol’s (2007) study, who valued task-based methods for their ability to promote “independence,” the students in the current study valued GTI for its perceived ability to expand their “practical” competence.

This study has further argued that since, as Bakhtin intuited, language itself is at its core dialogic, a methodological framework that nurtures dialogism is best suited to foster language development, where that development is considered “the ability to use a continuously expanding range of text or discourse types, oral and written, where these text types are understood as instantiating ways of doing, knowing, and being in cultural contexts” (Byrnes, 2015). Given that genre is a dialogic response to context in time and space, genred approaches in the language classroom are well suited to cultivate the responsive, point-counterpoint movements that are intrinsic to language and thus to the development of discourse complexity and fluency (i.e., expanded discourse) in language use. As we have seen, Meg’s dialogic tasks—debates, news reports with follow-up discussions—fostered sustained behavioral engagement on the part of her students, the majority of them (and many by their own admission) emotionally disengaged in
learning generally. Thus “engagement” was fostered and “sustain[ed]”, not only, as McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) found, via the content of pedagogic tasks—“opportunities [for students] to learn more about topics that interested them” (p. 122)—but also, and perhaps even more powerfully, through the dialogic mode intrinsic to Meg’s genred task approach.

I set out in this study to explore whether and how China’s diversity might bear on the feasibility of highly recommended approaches to teaching English. What I expected to uncover were implications of ethnolinguistic diversity; these, however, were relatively minor compared to the implications of the social diversity I observed. There was a sharp distinction, consistently reinforced by students and teachers alike at ONC, between “good” and “bad” students which bore directly, I suggest, on students’ willingness to invest in learning: whereas “good” students could accrue further social capital from academic effort, “bad” students could not, since their identities were already bounded by this label, and so chose to invest their energies elsewhere. Getting self-designated “bad students” to opt into learning—and from several teachers’ perspectives, all students at third-tier ONC were “bad students”—involved much more than implementing even the most carefully designed instruction, however thoroughly grounded in research.

Meg’s approaches were indeed in clear alignment with genred task instruction as I have operationalized and justified it from previous literature. But her approaches, as I have said, went beyond GTI to meet the challenges of her context. She offered students alternative roles which allowed them to transcend the limits imposed on them by self and others: “I’m a student from Tsinghua. So I’m not a student from Oasis City Normal College with terrible English. I’m a student from Tsinghua; I’m the cleverest student in the whole of China.” She relied on humor to dismantle negative attitudes such as shame over making a mistake or over betraying interest in
academics: “Let’s encourage each other; we don’t need to be embarrassed. Let’s ... laugh at yourself or laugh at each other.... We need to be able to laugh at ourselves and we need to be able to help each other.”

Researchers in contexts where student engagement can be taken for granted may not need to consider the role of humor in classroom approaches. Their student populations, well socialized as to the value of academic effort, may not require alternate identities in order to engage in pedagogical tasks. This is not to the discredit of these researchers’ highly important work. But the consumers of their research, practitioners in settings where engagement cannot be assumed, may founder if they expect to apply these researchers’ recommendations uncritically. As this study has illustrated, rather than foundering, some of these practitioners overcome their students’ un-engagement to such an extent that even the most cynical of students pronounces class activities “very good”:

In one hand [the news report] can let us to know the news, and in other hand it can practice our logic, and our just like—how to say that, just like a reporter do some, give a talk on TV. How to say that, jinshi. [extemporaneous speech]. (Jude)

Our field needs to hear more often from such practitioners. While SLA researchers continue to uncover effective approaches under (arguably) optimal conditions with academically engaged learners, they and others should consider as well how engagement might be fostered in the first place, under less-than-optimal conditions, in order to create the necessary pre-conditions for implementing these approaches. And if, as Schmitt (2010) points out in his meta-analysis of SLA research of lexical learning, “virtually anything that leads to more exposure, attention, manipulation, or time spent on lexical items adds to their learning,” the question of how to foster such pre-conditions might be in some ways the more critical of the two projects.
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Song, L. I., Yang, L. I., & Lei, Q. I. U. (2006). Exploration of the implementation of task-based instruction in college English teaching. Journal of Northeastern University (Social Science), 5(017),


Tinker Sachs, G. (2002). *Action research in English language teaching*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong.


The Teacher’s College  
Local City  
XX Prefecture  
People’s Republic of China  

December 2014  

Dear Institutional Review Board,  

I affirm that the research of Merideth Hoagland and Diane Belcher, titled “Teacher Development and Genre/Task-Based Instructional Approaches: Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context” can be conducted with volunteer participants at The Teacher’s College, between January 2015 and August 2016. Procedures may take place on the campus of The Teacher’s College, in administration buildings, classroom buildings, or private campus housing, as appropriate. I have reviewed the procedures and confirm that they are appropriate for local conditions.  

I am the Chair of the English Department at The Teacher’s College. I am authorized to affirm that this research conforms to local customs and laws.  

Sincerely,  

LAST First  
Chair, Department of English  

Address: The Teacher’s College, Local City  
XX Prefecture  
People’s Republic of China  

Email: xx  
Phone: xx
Appendix B: Recruitment guide: Teachers

Hello! My name is Merideth Hoagland, and as you know, I teach English here at The Teacher’s College. I am also a Ph.D. student in linguistics at Georgia State University, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I plan to conduct here, with approval from my university and the head of the English department, Dr. Liu.
I am interested in investigating how a certain approach to English teaching works in this environment, especially from teachers’ perspectives. To find out more about these approaches and how teachers use them, I would like to observe your classes and collect some of your class materials, your students’ class work, and class-related communication. I would like you to complete a questionnaire. As a follow-up to this, I would like to ask you to participate in some interviews.
I would like to request your help in volunteering as participants yourselves, and also to allow me to come to your classes and recruit potential students to participate in the study.
If you would like to think about participating, please review this consent form, which provides more details about the study including the time commitment required and compensation. After you have reviewed it, I will contact you to see whether you are interested in participating. You are welcome to ask me any questions about the study at any time. If so, we can schedule our first observation session and interview.
My sincere thanks for considering taking part in this research study. Should you decide to participate, I hope that it will be a meaningful and constructive experience for you and your students.

Students

Hello! I would like to invite you to participate in a research study beginning in the spring. Merideth Hoagland, an English teacher here at The Teacher’s College, is also a Ph.D. student in linguistics at Georgia State University. She is interested in investigating how a certain approach to English teaching works in this environment, especially from teachers’ perspectives. To find out more about these approaches, she would like to observe your classes, collect some of your class work and class-related communication, and record your class activities. She would also like you to complete a questionnaire. As a follow-up to this, she would like to ask some of you to participate in interviews.
If you would like to think about volunteering for the study, please review this consent form, which provides more details about the study including the time commitment and compensation. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact Merideth at XXXXXXXXXXX. If you wish to participate, you may return the consent form to [contact person]. S/he will put your name and phone number on a sign-up list so that Merideth can contact you about the study.
Thank you very much for considering taking part in this research study. Should you decide to participate, we hope that it will be a meaningful and constructive experience for you.
Appendix C: Consent forms

CONSENT FORM: STUDENTS: INTERVIEWS
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed consent: Interview: STUDENT
Title: Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher
Student PI: Merideth Hoagland

I. Purpose:
You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how well current English teaching methods work at Oasis City Teachers’ College (ONC) and its Foreign Language Training Center. You are invited to take part because you are studying English at ONC. A maximum total of 1012 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will take at most 3.5 hours of your time over 8 months from January to August, 2015.

II. Procedures:
If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed by Merideth, and your interview will be video/audio recorded. If you need a translator, one will be provided. If Merideth is your teacher, you will be interviewed by another teacher at the college who is trained to do interviews. Interviews will take at most 1 hour and be conducted 3 times a semester, for a total of 3 hours over 8 months. Also, you may be contacted for brief follow-up clarification questions after the final interview. It may take up to 30 additional minutes for you to address these questions. The study will take place at ONC, between January and August, 2015.

III. Risks:
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may learn more about how you learn English. Overall, we hope to understand more about how English teaching methods work best for students in this part of China.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Taking part in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your grades or status in the course or any other course will not in any way be affected by your choice to participate or not, or to stop participating.
VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. M. Hoagland and D. Belcher, and their translators, will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. These include the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a false name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected devices. Video files will also be stored on password-protected devices. The name key will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. We will destroy the key and video files after the study is closed, at latest Dec. 2017. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in anonymous form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact M. Hoagland at [email address], XXXXXXXXXX, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You may also contact D. Belcher at [email address], 001-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can reach her at 01-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can talk about questions or concerns about the study. You can offer input or get information about the study. You can make suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be video/audio recorded, please sign below.

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Participant Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded only, please sign below.

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Participant Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research but do not wish to be video/audio recorded, please sign below.

_______________________________________ ____________________
Participant Date

_______________________________________ ____________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date
CONSENT FORM: STUDENTS: CLASSROOM STUDY

Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed consent: Classroom study: STUDENT

Title:  Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context

Principal Investigator:  Diane Belcher
Student PI:  Merideth Hoagland

I. Purpose:

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how well current English teaching methods work at Oasis City Teachers’ College (ONC) and its Foreign Language Training Center. You are invited to take part because you are studying English at ONC. A maximum total of 1012 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will take at most 1.5 hours of your time over 8 months from January to August, 2015.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to take part, 1) your class activities will be observed and video/audio recorded, and observation notes will be taken in written/audio form. 2) Your class work and communication will be collected and analyzed for research. This includes virtual communication, e.g., in an online class forum. 3) You will complete a questionnaire. Merideth will observe the class and take notes and photos during class and video/audio record the classes. Merideth will collect the study materials and analyze them. The study will take place at ONC, between January and August, 2015. This classroom study will take place during your normal English class. No extra time will be needed outside of normal class time.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may learn more about how you learn English. Overall, we hope to understand more about how English teaching methods work best for students in this part of China.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Taking part in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits
to which you are otherwise entitled. Your grades or status in the course or any other course will not in any way be affected by your choice to participate or not, or to stop participating.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. M. Hoagland and D. Belcher will have access to the information you provide. A translator may also have access to the information. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. These include the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a false name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected devices. Video files will also be stored on password-protected devices. The name key will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. We will destroy the key and video files after the study is closed, at latest Dec. 2017. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in anonymous form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact M. Hoagland at [email address], XXXXXXXXXX, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You may also contact D. Belcher at [email address], 001-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can reach her at 01-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can talk about questions or concerns about the study. You can offer input or get information about the study. You can make suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

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If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be video/audio recorded, please sign below.

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Participant Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded only, please sign below.

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CONSENT FORM: TEACHERS: INTERVIEWS
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics

I. INFORMED CONSENT: INTERVIEW: TEACHER
Title: Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher
Student PI: Merideth Hoagland

I. Purpose:
You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how well current English teaching methods work at Oasis City Teachers’ College (ONC) and its Foreign Language Training Center. You are invited to take part because you teach English at ONC. A maximum total of 1012 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will take at most 5.5 hours of your time over 8 months from January to August, 2015.

II. Procedures:
If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed, and your interview will be video/audio recorded. Interviews will take at most 1 hour and be conducted 5 times a semester, for a total of 5 hours over 8 months. You may be contacted for brief follow-up clarification questions after the final interview. It may take up to 30 additional minutes for you to address these questions. Some of the interviews will involve watching some videos of your classroom and discussing them with Merideth, who will conduct the interviews. The study will take place at ONC, between January and August, 2015.

III. Risks:
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:
Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may learn more about how your students learn English and how effective your methods are. Overall, we hope to understand more about how English teaching methods work best for students in this part of China.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:
Taking part in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your relationship with the researcher will not in any way be affected by your choice to participate or not, or to stop participating.

VI. Confidentiality:
We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. M. Hoagland and D. Belcher will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. These include the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a false name rather than your name.
on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected devices. Video files will also be stored on password-protected devices. The name key will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. We will destroy the key and video files after the study is closed, at latest Dec. 2017. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in anonymous form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. **Contact Persons:**
Contact M. Hoagland at [email address], XXXXXXXXXX, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You may also contact D. Belcher at [email address], 001-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can reach her at 01-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can talk about questions or concerns about the study. You can offer input or get information about the study. You can make suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. **Copy of Consent Form to Subject:**
We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be **video/audio recorded**, please sign below.

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Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent | Date
CONSENT FORM: TEACHERS: CLASSROOM STUDY
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed consent: Classroom study: TEACHER
Title: Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher
Student PI: Merideth Hoagland

I. Purpose:

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how well current English teaching methods work at Oasis City Teachers’ College (ONC) and its Foreign Language Training Center. You are invited to take part because you teach English at ONC. A maximum total of 1012 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will take at most 3 hours of your time over 8 months from January to August, 2015. Please note: this classroom study will take place during your normal English class.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will do the following: 1) Your class sessions, teacher development sessions, and teaching-related communication will be observed and/or recorded, and observation notes will be taken in written/audio form. This includes virtual communication, e.g., in an online teachers’ forum. (NOTE: Merideth will arrange with you in advance which classes will be observed.) 2) Your teaching materials (textbook, PPT, etc.) will be collected and analyzed. 3) You will fill out a questionnaire. Merideth will observe the class and take notes and photos during class/teacher development sessions, and video/audio record the sessions. Merideth will collect the study materials and analyze them. The study will take place at ONC, between January and August, 2015.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may learn more about how your students learn English and how effective your methods are. Overall, we hope to understand more about how English teaching methods work best for students in this part of China.

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____________________________________________  __________________  
Participant                                      Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded only, please sign below.

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Participant                                      Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research but do not wish to be video/audio recorded, please sign below.

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<th>Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent</th>
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CONSENT FORM: ADMINISTRATOR
Georgia State University
Department of Applied Linguistics
Informed consent: ADMINISTRATOR

Title: Case Study of an English Program in a Multi-Ethnic Chinese Context

Principal Investigator: Diane Belcher
Student PI: Merideth Hoagland

I. **Purpose:**

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand how well current English teaching methods work at Oasis City Teachers’ College (ONC) and its Foreign Language Training Center. You are invited to take part because you are an administrator in the English department at ONC. A maximum total of 1012 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will take at most 4.5 hours of your time over 8 months from January to August, 2015.

II. **Procedures:**

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed, and your interview will be audio recorded. If possible, you will supply administrative documents such as reports of test scores and curriculum documents. Interviews will take at most 1 hour and be conducted 3 times a semester, for a total of 3 hours over 7 months. It may take up to 1 hour total to compile administrative documents such as test scores and curriculum documents. Also, you may be contacted for brief follow-up clarification questions after the final interview. It may take up to 30 minutes for you to address these questions. Merideth will conduct and record the interviews and collect the documents and analyze them. The study will take place at ONC, between January and August, 2015.

III. **Risks:**

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. **Benefits:**

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. You may learn more about how students at ONC learn English, and about the effectiveness of current teaching practice at ONC. Overall, we hope to understand more about how English teaching methods work best for students in this part of China.

V. **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:**

Taking part in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop taking part at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits.
to which you are otherwise entitled. Your relationship with the researcher will not be affected by your choice to participate or not, or to stop participating.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. M. Hoagland and D. Belcher will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly. These include the GSU Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). We will use a false name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on password-protected devices. Video files will also be stored on password-protected devices. The name key will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. We will destroy the key and video files after the study is closed, at latest Dec. 2017. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in anonymous form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact M. Hoagland at [email address], XXXXXXXXXXXX, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You may also contact D. Belcher at [email address], 001-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can also call if you think you have been harmed by the study. Call Susan Vogtner in the Georgia State University Office of Research Integrity if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can reach her at 01-XXX-XXX-XXXX. You can talk about questions or concerns about the study. You can offer input or get information about the study. You can make suggestions about the study. You can also call Susan Vogtner if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be video/audio recorded, please sign below.

____________________________________________  __________________
Participant                                      Date

____________________________________________  __________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent  Date

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded only, please sign below.

____________________________________________  __________________
Participant                                      Date

____________________________________________  __________________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent  Date
If you are willing to volunteer for this research but *do not wish to be video/audio recorded*, please sign below.

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Appendix D: Interview protocols

TEACHERS

This protocol provides a framework for semi-structured interviews with teachers. Follow-up questions may be pursued as appropriate, in light of the research questions. The order of interviews and questions may also be altered as appropriate to the researcher’s and participants’ needs.

Interviewee: _____________________________________

First interview: Teaching Background and Professional Development

Introduction: Thank you for joining me today. As you know, I am interested in understanding your perspectives on effective methods for teaching English. Feel free to share your real opinions, as much as you are comfortable, and as much as you consider appropriate for a Chinese citizen in any other situation. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers in this conversation. Also, remember that you are free to stop the interview at any time. At most, this interview conversation will take 1 hour.

1. First, when did you become interested in English?
2. Please tell me about your language background. What languages/dialects do you speak with your family? With your friends? Which language is your most fluent? Can you read and write in these languages?
3. How would you identify yourself ethnically? (Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, etc.)
4. Tell me about your training in English and English education. Where did you attend college? Did you get a master’s degree, and where, if so? Have you completed any other types of continuing education as a teacher? What was most useful in preparing you to do what you do now?
5. Walk me through a typical day/week for you as a teacher. What courses do you teach, and to which student populations?
6. Tell me about a recent class meeting in ___________________________ [a specific class]. What did the students do? What did you do? What homework was assigned? Was this class period typical for you?
7. What is an effective teacher, in your opinion? In terms of your day-to-day practice, what (e.g., a person, a conference, a book) has been most helpful in making you a more effective teacher?
8. In what ways do you think you have changed as a teacher over the course of your career?
9. For you, what does professional development mean? What kinds of activities does it involve? How useful are these various activities? What do they offer you (e.g., a promotion, better skills)?
10. How much time do you typically need to accomplish all your professional responsibilities (meetings, administrative work, lesson planning, grading, publishing, etc.)? What would you like to have more time for?
11. If someone were to sponsor you to undertake any type of professional development (e.g., a writing sabbatical, conference attendance, a mentor program), with no restrictions, what kind of professional development would you engage in?
12. What is one goal you have as a teacher, and what are possible factors impacting on that goal? (Use Activity Triangle.)

Second interview:
Teaching Approaches and Tools; Genre and Task; Constraints on Teaching Practice

Introduction (see above).
1. What textbook (and teacher’s guide, if any) are you using for the course? Please walk me through a unit and tell me how you use it.
2. Is this a required textbook? Can you supplement with other materials?
3. Do you use PowerPoint or other multimedia? Please walk me through a presentation, etc., you have recently used.
4. How well do you think these materials are working for you and your students? What do you like and dislike about them?
5. Communicative teaching, and especially task-based teaching (involving students in doing things with language) has gotten a lot of attention from researchers, especially in China. What does TBLT look like to you?
6. Does it work here, from your perspective? from administrators’ perspective? If not, why not? (Listen for examination/curricular/student population constraints and expand.)
7. If so, what adaptations do you need to make, if any, to make TBLT work?
8. If you use tasks, how do you usually set them up? (Listen for modeling, pre-task planning and expand on these.)
9. How has your use of communicative approaches changed over your career as a teacher?
10. I’ve been experimenting with teaching students how to tell a story by following a particular organization pattern (genre). Do you do something similar? If not, how well do you think this might work in your classes, for your students?
11. Besides stories, what other genres (text types) are important for students in your classes to master, if any (e.g., exam essays, debates, presentations)? How do you go about helping them master these?
12. One prominent method for teaching genres is the Teaching-Learning Cycle (describe). What is your sense of how your students would respond to this type of instruction? Or, if you use this approach, how well does it work for your students?
13. Let’s return to the goal you mentioned in the first interview, along with the impacts on that goal. Have there been any changes in this scenario? (Review Activity Triangle.)
14. If implementing more TBLT or genre is a goal, what might be impacting that goal? (Use Activity Triangle.)

Third interview: Stimulated Recall

Introduction (as needed; see above).
The class he/she will be describing in the interview: ___________________________ (same as the first and second interviews)
1. I recently observed and recorded a portion of your ___________________________ course. Please view a portion of this video and stop the video when you would like to tell me what you were thinking. I will stop the video to ask you about things I’m curious about.
2. How did you feel about the class overall?
3. How do you think students responded to this class?
4. Did you face any problems during the class, for example related to the difficulty of the material, student motivation or behavior, your own time constraints or resources?
5. What do you think is working well in the class? And on the other hand, what changes do you think might be made? (Use Edge’s Cooperative Development model.)
6. Let’s return once again to the goal you mentioned in the last two interviews. Have there been any changes? (Review Activity Triangle.)

**Fourth interview: Stimulated Recall**

1. I recently observed and recorded another portion of your __________________________ course. Please view a portion of this video and stop the video when you would like to tell me what you were thinking. I will stop the video to ask you about things I’m curious about.
2. How did you feel about the class overall?
3. How do you think students responded to this class?
4. Did you face any problems during the class, for example related to the difficulty of the material, student motivation or behavior, your own time constraints or resources?
5. What do you think is working well in the class? And on the other hand, what changes do you think might be made? (Use Edge’s Cooperative Development model.)
6. Let’s return once again to the goal you mentioned in the previous interviews. Have there been any changes? (Review Activity Triangle.)

**Final Interview: Wrap-up and Member Check; Task/Genre Criteria**

1. In previous interviews, you reported that … [provide a summary of the teacher’s comments on her/his professional development, teaching goals, use of tools including task and genre approaches]. Would you like to add anything to these comments? Have your views changed in any way?
2. According to my observations, your students have performed the following tasks/genres [list]. I have brought samples of these [display and explain]. Could you tell me how you would grade one or more of these? What are your criteria for assessing the quality of students’ performance?
STUDENTS
This protocol provides a framework for semi-structured interviews with students. Follow-up questions may be pursued as appropriate, in light of the research questions, and the order of the questions may be altered. Note to interviewer: The interview should be more like a conversation than a test. The questions in boldface type are the most important. If time is limited for any reason, the conversation should focus on these questions.

Interviewer: _____________________________________
Interviewee: _____________________________________
Interviewee’s class number: ___________________________

First interview

Introduction: Thank you for joining me today! As you know, Merideth is interested in understanding your perspectives on effective methods for teaching English. Feel free to share your real opinions, as much as you are comfortable, and as much as you consider appropriate for a Chinese citizen in any other situation. Please remember that there are no right or wrong answers in this conversation. Also, remember that you are free to stop the interview at any time. At most, this interview conversation will take 1 hour.

The class he/she will be describing in the interview: ___________________________

1. First, when did you start studying English?
2. How did you choose to major in English?
3. How did you choose to attend this college?
4. It is normal for students to find work outside their major. What do you hope to do in the future?
5. What motivates you to study English every day? (Grades, job, parents, etc.?)
6. How do you expect you will use English after you graduate? (e.g., for work, for personal enjoyment, to make friends, etc.)
7. Please tell me about your language background. What languages/dialects do you speak with your family? With your friends? Which language is your most fluent? Can you read and write in these languages?
8. How would you identify yourself ethnically? (Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, etc.)
9. What kind of school did you go to? (Minkaomin, Minkaohan, or Shuangyu)
10. Do you work part-time? If so, how many hours a week do you work? Is this work necessary for your living expenses?
11. What do your parents do?
12. Tell me about a recent class meeting in ___________________________ [a specific class]. You do not need to mention the teacher’s name. What did the students and teacher do? For example, maybe the students had to listen and take notes, work in groups, or give presentations; maybe the teacher gave a lecture using PPT, or organized some activities. What homework was assigned? Was this class period typical for this teacher?
13. What other kinds of activities does this teacher often use in the classroom, for example, lectures, pair and group work, etc.?
14. What kinds of support materials does this teacher often use? (PPT, textbook, self-made handouts, etc.) What do you think of these materials?
15. What is your overall impression of this teaching method, or combination of methods?
16. How do you think your classmates respond to these methods, generally speaking? What improvements (if any) could be made to make the instruction more suitable to you and your classmates’ needs and motivations?
17. Please give an example of an activity you recently did in the class. What was the activity about, and what did you have to do? What was the outcome (for instance, a story, or a performance, or a group discussion)? Did you like the activity? What aspects of it did you like or dislike?
18. Have you taken TEM-4 or TEM-8? Are you preparing to take it? How do you expect to perform on the test?
19. Do you think it is important for this teacher (i.e., the teacher discussed in this interview) to help you get ready for the TEM-4 or 8? Why or why not?
20. What do you think is working well in this class? And on the other hand, what changes do you think might be made?
21. What do you think are some difficulties teachers (in general) face when they teach the students in your class?
22. Is there anything else you would like to mention about English learning, especially in this college? We are very interested in your views.

Second interview

Introduction (see above).
The class he/she will be describing in the interview: ___________________________ (same as the first interview)
1. In the last interview, we talked about your ___________________________ class. Tell me about a recent class meeting in this course. What did the students and teacher do? For example, maybe the students had to listen and take notes, etc.; maybe the teacher gave a lecture, etc. What homework was assigned? What kinds of support materials did the teacher use? (e.g., textbook, PPT)
2. What was your overall impression of this class meeting? Of the activities? Of the support materials (e.g., the text)? Of the homework?
3. How do you think your classmates responded to the class meeting?
4. Did you face any problems during the class meeting, for example related to the difficulty of the material, your classmates, etc.?
5. Please tell me your impressions of an activity you recently did in the class. What was the activity about, and what did you have to do? What was the outcome (for instance, a story, or a performance, or a group discussion)? Did you like the activity? What aspects of it did you like or dislike? Do you think it was helpful for your English proficiency? What aspects of it were helpful or not so helpful for your proficiency?
6. What do you think is working well in the class? And on the other hand, what changes do you think might be made?
7. Now we are halfway through the semester. Many students often feel less motivated to study at this point. How about you? What do you think teachers could do to keep you motivated in class?
8. Is there anything else you would like to mention about English learning, especially in this college?

Third (final) interview

Introduction (as needed; see above).
The class he/she will be describing in the interview: ___________________________ (same as the first and second interviews)

1. **What do you hope to do in the future?** Have your plans changed?
2. **What motivates you to study English every day?** (Grades, job, parents, etc.?) Has your motivation changed?
3. In the last 2 interviews, we talked about your ___________________________ class. Now that the semester is almost finished, what is your overall impression of [a specific teacher’s] teaching method, or combination of methods?
4. How do you think your *classmates* respond to these methods, generally speaking?
5. What do you think are the most important characteristics of teachers, and why? How would you evaluate your teacher, according to these characteristics?
6. What do you think are the most important characteristics of students, and why? How would you evaluate *yourself* and your *classmates*, according to these characteristics?
7. Is there anything else you would like to mention about English learning, especially at this college?
Appendix F: Questionnaires

Teachers

Background and Teaching Experience

1. Name _____________________________
2. Date of Birth _____________________________
3. Gender: M / F
4. Hometown _____________________________
5. Ancestral home (laojia) _____________________________
6. How would you identify yourself ethnically? Circle one.
   a. Han
   b. Hui
   c. Kazakh
   d. Kirgiz
   e. Mongolian
   f. Uyghur
   g. Other: __________________________
7. Where did you attend college? _____________________________
8. Did you get a master’s degree, and where, if so? _____________________________
9. Have you completed any other types of continuing education as a teacher? Please describe.

10. Of this preparation, what was most useful in preparing you to do what you do now?
11. How many years have you been teaching?
12. Where have you taught? Please describe briefly (e.g., “2 years teaching English at No. 8 Middle School, Urumqi”).
13. What courses do you teach now? Please fill in the chart below.

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<tr>
<th>Course title</th>
<th>Level (first-year, etc.)</th>
<th>Number of students per course</th>
<th>Number of students per section (i.e., in one classroom)</th>
<th>Student population (e.g., art majors, <em>benke</em>English majors; <em>zhuanke</em>English majors)</th>
<th>Course textbook</th>
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14. What other courses have you taught in the past?

15. What languages/dialects do you speak? Please state where you speak each language (e.g., “Kazakh – at home”; “Local Gansu dialect – with parents”)

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16. How would you rate your abilities in each language below? Check one box for each skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

**Mandarin**

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**Another language you speak (Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, etc.)**

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**Professional Development**

17. For you, what does professional development mean?

18. What kinds of activities does it involve, and how useful are these various activities? What do they offer you (e.g., a promotion, better skills)?
19. How much time per week do you typically need to accomplish each of your professional responsibilities?
   a. meetings
   b. administrative work (e.g., communicating with students)
   c. lesson planning
   d. grading
   e. research and publishing
   f. other: ___________________________

20. What would you like to have more time for?

21. If someone were to sponsor you to undertake any type of professional development (e.g., a writing holiday, conference attendance, a mentor program), with no restrictions, what kind of professional development would you engage in?

**Teaching Methods**

22. Communicative teaching, and especially task-based teaching (involving students in doing things with language) has gotten a lot of attention from researchers, especially in China. What does TBLT look like to you? Please provide a brief definition.

23. Does communicative teaching (and/or task-based teaching) work at Yili Teachers’ College, from your perspective? If not, why not? If so, what adaptations do you need to make, if any, to make TBLT work for your classes?

24. If you use tasks, how do you usually set them up? In other words, what do you need to provide students in order for tasks to be successful?

25. If you did not use communicative methods before, but do use them now, why did you change?

26. What genres (text types), if any, are important for students in your classes to master (e.g., exam essays, debates, presentations, conversations)? How do you go about helping them master these?

27. One prominent method for teaching genres is the Teaching-Learning Cycle, which involves teachers first modeling the target genre with the whole class, then letting the whole class write a sample together, and then asking individual students to write the genre on their own. Do you use this type of instruction? How well does it work for your students, or how well do you think it might work?
28. Is there anything you would like to add about your teaching methods and/or professional development?
Questionnaire: University Students

**Background and Educational Experience**

1. Name _____________________________
2. Date of Birth _____________________________
3. Gender: M / F
4. Major _____________________________
5. Class number (e.g., 14-B) _____________________________
6. Hometown (jiaxiang) _____________________________
7. Ancestral home (laojia) _____________________________
8. How would you identify yourself ethnically? Circle one.
   a. Han
   b. Hui
   c. Kazakh
   d. Kirgiz
   e. Uyghur
   f. Other: __________________________
9. Where did you go to high school? (e.g., No. 8 High School, Hetian)
   __________________________
10. What kind of school did you go to? Circle one.
    a. Chinese language school
    b. Minority language school, minority language testing (Minkaomin)
    c. Bilingual school (Shuangyu)
11. When did you start studying English? (e.g., Grade 3 Primary school)
    __________________________
12. How many years have you studied English? (1 year = an academic year at school)
    __________________________
13. Do you work part-time? __________________________ If so, how many hours a week
do you work per week? __________________________ Is this work necessary for your
living expenses, or just for extra spending money? __________________________
14. What do your parents do?
   ______________________________________________________________________
15. What languages/dialects do you speak? Please state where you speak each language (e.g.,
   “Kazakh – at home”; “Local Gansu dialect – with parents”)
   **Language**               **Where**
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16. How would you rate your abilities in each language below? Check one box for each skill (reading, writing, listening, speaking).

**Mandarin**

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17.  
18. **Another language you speak (Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, etc.)**

19. **PLEASE LIST:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very limited</th>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<td>Listening</td>
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20.  
21. **Another language you speak (Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, etc.)**

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23.  
24. **English**

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**Preferences for English Learning**

25. What motivates you to study English every day? Circle one or more.
   a. Nothing special. English is just a requirement. I want to graduate.
   b. My parents’ want me to study English.
   c. I need English if I want to get a good job.
   d. I want to be an English teacher.
   e. I want to pass CET.
   f. I want to pass TEM.
   g. English is important for Chinese people in today’s economy.
h. I want to pass my English class(es).
i. I really like English.
j. ________________________________

26. Some teachers prefer to lecture at the front of the classroom, while others prefer to use some tasks to help students learn English. For example, the teacher might ask students to order at a restaurant, or decide in a group which movie they want to watch. **Which do you think is more useful for your English proficiency, lecturing or these kinds of tasks?** Or do you think a **combination** of the two is most useful? **Why?**

27. **Which is more interesting**, lectures, tasks, or a combination of the two?

28. Which is more **useful for passing exams** (e.g., CET or TEM), lectures, tasks, or a combination of the two?

29. Do you think teachers at Yili Teachers’ College should use lectures, tasks, or a combination of the two, and why?

30. What types of texts have you studied in your classes? Circle one or more.
   a. stories
   b. news reports
   c. procedures (e.g., how to make something, step by step)
   d. persuasive speech/writing
   e. debates
   f. conversations
   g. other: ________________________

31. Choose **one** of the texts you circled above. What are the basic parts of this kind of text?

32. Can you perform these texts (story, etc.), in speaking or writing? Please check the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text type</th>
<th>I can speak this kind of text.</th>
<th>I can write this kind of text.</th>
<th>I can write and speak this kind of text.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>News report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Procedure (e.g., how to make something, step by step)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
33. What do you think are some difficulties teachers (in general) face when they teach the students in your class?

34. How many hours do you usually study English every night?

35. What do you do when you study? (e.g., memorize words, review class notes, etc.)

36. Is there anything else you would like to mention about English learning, especially in this college? We are very interested in your views.

    Thank you very much!