Authentic group work, symbolic group work and implication for the social pedagogy at higher education institutions: A qualitative study

Dao Van Vy

University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Email: daovanvy@hcmussh.edu.vn

ABSTRACT: *Grounded on Engstrom's interacting activity theory, this qualitative study examines higher education (HE) students' views about the roles of their groups regarding tasks assigned to them during classroom activities and how their views influence the ways they interact with their peers in the groups. The key findings are twofold. In symbolic group work (GW) interactions, students perceive group leaders as a symbol of group authority who distribute unequal responsibilities among group members. Students, then, positioned themselves as "disciplined members" and passively participate in the group. In authentic GW interactions, students see that the group leaders put forth the authentic conversation and shared responsibilities among group members. Students then positioned themselves reflexively between "collaborative learners" and "active agents," in order to participate in the group actively. Findings suggest that students view GW dynamics differently when their interactions and participation are either imposed or supported by the group dynamics themselves and whether university teachers take social aspects of GW into account of their facilitation. The study provides insight into the complex interactional group dynamics that influence cooperative learning goals in the university settings and offers opportunities for university teachers to think about adopting social pedagogic approaches in facilitating classroom GW as a constitutive part of pedagogical reform at higher education institutions.*

KEYWORDS: **Group work dynamics, classroom interactions, social pedagogy, university teaching.**

➔ Received 12/7/2021 ➔ Revised manuscript received 15/8/2021 ➔ Published 30/12/2021.

1. Introduction

Researchers such as Kutnick, Blatchford, & Baines (2005) and Slavin, Hurley, & Chamberlain (2003) remind us that GW in university classrooms goes beyond the outcomes of assignments and tasks, and the roles of the groups should be extended to include students' social interactions as a part of group dynamics. Group work in classrooms is, thus, defined more than sitting students in groups and asking them to work together. The defining characteristic of GW is that the balance of ownership and control of the work shifts towards the students themselves. Group work should involve students as co-learners (Zajac & Hartup, 1997; Good & Lavigne, 2017), not just one helping another. Accordingly, university teachers need to include more social aspects of individual students and classroom environment when helping facilitate group work assigned to them.

However, much research on classroom teaching and learning as well as university classrooms' GW dynamics have primarily focused on the technical issues of the GW, for example, the group sizes, the tasks' content, the instruction assigned to groups, and the GW's results, under the assumption that students just need to follow teachers' instructions for the group activities and then to complete the tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Retnowati & Sweller, 2017). This group technique-only focus is limiting since it possibly overlooks that each student is a different individual who has views and perception of what they do and how they respond to the groups for what they see and believe. Furthermore, it may prevent researchers from seeing the complexities of these students' participation (Gillies, 2003)

in the groups where students interact with one another and with teachers while positioning themselves in a certain way.

In Vietnam, upon the demands of training 21st skills for labour workforces, recent government's legislation and advice, for example, on curriculum and pedagogical reform at higher education always calls for interactive teaching of which GW is considered a flagship. University teachers are encouraged to implement GW as an essential instructional approach, especially in the teaching of social sciences and humanities coursework. Group work virtually becomes an everyday part of classroom activities and has been applied across the whole university curriculum and pedagogy. However, when GW is mentioned in the policy documents, there is not much different instruction from that of whole-class teaching, or of individual work when assigned in groups. A connected point is that the debate and policy on GW in higher education classrooms are not yet informed by good empirical research. Research to date does not provide sufficient information to help teachers apply such strategies effectively within normal classroom contexts. This study is born in this context and considered as a response to the situation.

The central purpose of this qualitative research is to present a study of higher education (HE) students' views of their roles in the groups regarding the tasks assigned to them during classroom activities and how their views influence the ways they participate in the groups. The theoretical framework for the study is Engstrom's interacting activity theory, which is described in more detail below. The data for this study come from classroom observations and in-depth interviews with students from three university classrooms over one semester. The following questions guided this qualitative study:

(a) How do students view GW in the university classrooms regarding the tasks assigned to them?

(b) How do their views influence the ways they participate in the groups?

2. Literature Review

This research rests on three interrelated bodies of literature: cooperative learning, interactions in groups and students' perception of the group work. This research is also situated in sociological perspectives of learning and within HE's teaching contexts.

2.1. Cooperative Learning and Interactions in Groups

Since the 1960s, learning has been viewed under cognitive perspectives with the central concept that knowledge exists solely in students' heads, and learning involves finding ways to acquire this knowledge (Gagne & Briggs, 1993; Petry, Mouton, & Reigeluth, 2018). Over the last two decades, however, numerous educational psychologists, curriculum development, and pedagogical designers have begun steering their scholarly work away from cognitive theories that emphasize individual thinkers and their isolated minds. Rather, these researchers have applied perspectives that draw on the sociological and contextualized essence of cognition (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2020). Central to these perspectives is the cooperative learning with an emphasis on contextualized activity and collaborative participation between students and between students and teachers (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2017).

The underlying assumption of cooperative learning is that teaching and learning that promotes students' collaboration in small groups (with the requirements that students have to work together to complete given tasks) can optimize student learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). When group members are connected in which they learn more effectively if they all work together, they will actively support each other to ensure that the tasks are fulfilled and the group's goals achieved (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). However, while various quantitative studies have focused on the academic outcomes of cooperative learning, little is known about what happens specifically in the cooperative learning process and what perceptions/views students have of their cooperative learning experiences. Understanding what happens in the specific details of cooperative learning—in particular, the social interactions in groups and

how students perceive their cooperative learning experiences - can provide detailed evidence to understanding the benefits and challenges that students experience on their ways to achieve both academic and social goals. Only by acquiring this evidence, teachers can be supported to know what academic and social aspects are needed for their pedagogy and policymakers to figure out what social aspects of policy documents need considering guiding cooperative learning practices.

Interactions in groups are crucial to cooperative learning (Bennett & Dunne,1991). That means if the group members share ideas, information, and resources, they will explore solutions to given problems or discover underlying tenets to the problem on which they are trying to solve. Existing quantitative research has mainly focused on testing the hypothetical ideas embedded in particular group work models to understand, for example, whether group work can help students better express themselves (Shachar & Sharan,1994; Marcos, Fernández, González, & Phillips-Silver, 2020) or whether students who work in cooperative groups engage in more task-related interactions better than those who do not or the frequency of group interactions that have significantly predicted higher learning outcomes for students (Shachar & Sharan, 1994; Marcos, Fernández, González, & Phillips-Silver, 2020). While this quantitative research is important, little effort has gone to mapping students' interactions in groups with the social elements of group dynamics, such as the power relations, the group control issues, and the group rules shifting among group members. When this thin line exists, it has mainly focused on the low ends of the group dynamic, such as the conflicts and difficulties arising in the interacting process (see, for example, Dang, 2013). This has left out an unanswered question about whether there simultaneously exist the low and the high ends of students' interactions in the group dynamics, concerning both the conflicts and the unity as well as challenges and benefits those students possibly encounter from joining the group work. The study reported here aims to work on this left-open question.

2.2. Students' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning

While many studies have documented the benefits of cooperative learning, including how members sharing opinions, ideas, and resources as they work together, few studies have investigated students' perceptions of what happens during their cooperative group experience. Understanding students' perceptions are important because Ross (1995) and Keramat (2020) found that when students perceive groups as a comfortable setting, they are likely to effectively complete the group-related tasks in a collaborative manner. Furthermore, their feelings of self-efficacy are enhanced if they receive recognition from their peers for being productive and helpful.

Studies of students' perceptions of cooperative learning have been very scarce. Within the scant number of studies, much attention paid to survey-based research design and to students' perceptions of cooperative group work in comparison to their teachers' perceptions. For example, Mulryan (1994) surveyed students with questions about the characteristics of a positive cooperative group and found that most students believed that members needed to work well together, share the work, like each other; and remain on task. When the students were asked about their perceptions of their teacher' expectations of their behavior during cooperative, small-group work, they responded that they were to: work with others and not alone; help others; seek help from others; talk with others about the task; and give and receive opinions and ideas. Similar research findings were found in other studies (see, for example, Tan, Sharan, & Lee, 2007).

The teachers, in turn, stated that a good cooperative group was one in which students work together and help each other. As such, students should encourage, discuss, explain, and share information. Furthermore, they need to be open to the ideas, opinions, and resources from peers, remain attentive to the tasks, contribute to the group, and be prepared to judge their own opinions. In essence, the students' perceptions of what is expected of them during cooperative learning and their teachers' perceptions of what they expect to have happend were well consistent with both the students and the teachers

perceiving cooperative, small group learning as one in which students work together. Similar research findings were found in other studies (see, for example, Tan, Sharan, & Lee, 2007). In addition, the cooperative setting was also seen as a classroom strategy that provided students with the opportunities to engage in metacognitive skills in a way that is not often seen through other pedagogical approaches (Johnson & Johnson, 2000).

Despite the contribution of these findings, less attention has been given to understand to what extent the ways students perceive the interactions in group possibly lead to how passively and actively students participate in the groups and why. In addition, there is limited research about the influence of classroom teachers' pedagogical approaches on students' participation in group work. The study reported here aims to address these issues.

3. Theoretical framework

This study builds on Engstrom's interacting activity theory. The interacting activity theory is a part of Engestrom's activity system theory that has an explicit focus on the link between social contexts (such as GW) and individual views of students about the group process. Engestrom (1999) wrote:

The fundamental societal relations and contradictions of the given socio-economic formation - and thus potentials for qualitative change - are present in each and every local activity of that society. And vice versa, the mightiest, most impersonal societal structure can be seen as consisting of local activities carried out by concrete human beings with the help of mediating artiefacts…In this sense,e it might be useful to try ad look at the society more as a multiple layered network of interconnected activity systems and less as a pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single center of power. (pp.8-9)

In this quote, Engestrom (1999) suggests the ways in which social contexts can be characterized within the individuals' views and perception about the learning processes in the group activities. As this study focuses on understanding the relationships between individual students' views and the group dynamics and how they affect individual students' participation in the group, this theory is relevant for serving as a theoretical perspective for this study.

The center of interacting activity theory is the activity system that is illustrated by Engestrom (1999) in Figure 1 below.

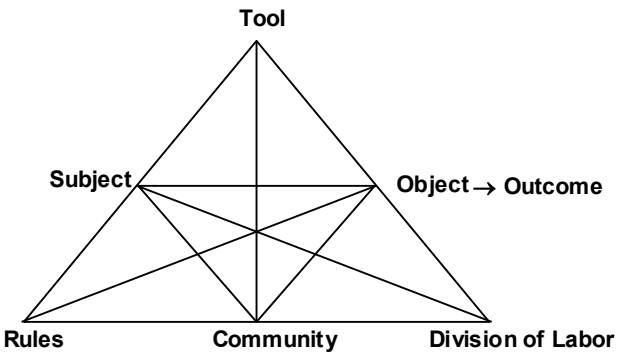

Figure 1: Activity system model adapted from Engestrom (1999)

According to this diagram, the *subject* refers to an individual who is chosen as the point of analysis. In this study, that is HE students in the English and Social Skills classrooms who have particular stances, views, perceptions about the GW. The *object* refers to a targeted practice or outcome that comes out as a result of interactions between the subject and activities. The *tool* refers to resources used by individuals which can be physical resources and/or intellectual resources, such as artifacts, ideas, and concepts. The *community* refers to multiple individuals who share the same general object or practices and outcomes. In this study, the tools and resources refer to the ways teachers facilitate the GW, the rules refer to the group norms and its process running during the activities assigned by teachers with given tasks. The *rules* refer to implicit or explicit norms, regulations, and values that promote and constrain actions going on in the activity system. The *division of labor* refers to the relationships between individual's status or positions and power charged in a system or a community.

This study purposively chose three aspects from the diagram (subject, rules, division of labor, and tools) to shed light on the data and

to understand the dynamics of GW within the views drawn from students chosen for the study. Specifically, the observations of what students actually do—how they capture and react to the groups' rules, how they assemble tools and other artefacts in their work with other group members, and how they react to the ways responsibilities and power codes revealed through group work were conducted. This is considered the best way of gaining insights into the group dynamics (Engestrom, 1999). So too is talking/interviewing with students to gain their sense of what they are doing and why, how they experience different types of group dynamics, what they believe to work best for their participation in group, in each of the different group phenomena to contribute to their own learning. Within the abundance of quantitative studies, combining qualitative observational and qualitative interview data in research is still relatively rare, yet vital to the field of cooperative learning and group interactions.

4. Methodology

This is a qualitative study based on the data collected from class observations, interviews with selected individual students, and students' written work. Qualitative research approaches are appropriate to this study because they provide a methodological framework for understanding the person's experiences that takes into account multiple social factors (Creswell, 2007) and it offers "the structure for analyzing and reporting in detail the views of participants." (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

4.1. Data sources

This study is conducted at the Green University (a pseudonym, as are all names). The university is located in a metropolitan area in Ho Chi Minh City. This research site was deliberately selected based on the historical development of the university, especially in terms of its active participation in Vietnam Government's pedagogical reform movement in the higher education institutions since the 2000s, allowing for depth of information regarding students' perception about interactive classroom teaching and learning phenomena and the social aspects embedded in the classrooms.

Data were collected over one semester in three periods of time: beginning, middle, and end of the semester between January 2021 to May 2021. The class observations were conducted in three English classes and three Social Skills classes. Each period of observation lasted for two hours in which two GW sessions were occurring. In order to capture the dynamics of each group focusing on the students' interactive behaviors with one another, field notes were taken during each class observation. After each class observation, in-depth interviews with three students who participated in the class and in the GW activities were conducted. Students participated in the interviews on a volunteer basis. Each interview lasted for 45-60 minutes. In the first set of interviews, the questions probed the interviewees' academic backgrounds and their general views about class activities with regard to the English courses and the Social Skills courses. In the second set of the interviews, to promote and listen for stories during interviews. indirect questions about their ways of interacting in the groups but explored their experiences about their group lives in the classrooms were asked, probing for detailed descriptive information about their actual views about GW, as well as how they made sense of what was going on in the groups. The participants were also asked to describe and explain in detail their participation in the groups and how the way they participated would reflect their views about the ways the groups functioned. Interviewees were also asked to choose an incident from groups as an exemplar of their interactions with others in the groups.

The interview responses were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in its entirety for further data analysis. In total, 24 students were participating in the interviews. In this paper, six students from this total whose responses were chosen as they really provided their distinctive views about the characteristics of group dynamics, concerning higher inference of concept and understanding (Miles, & Huberman, 1994) about the "high ends" and the "low ends" of the group dynamics mentioned in the literature review.

4.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis included interview transcripts, field notes, and audiotaped transcripts of classroom observations, research logs, interview memos, and documents such as student work from their participation in groups. Interview transcripts were main data sources for data analysis. To consider the validity of the analysis, interview findings were triangulated with the remained data sources (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the interactions that supported or imposed the students' participation in groups were also identified by triangulating data collected over time (namely, at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the semester) from the interviews and class observations as well as the constitutive elements described in Engstrom's interacting activity theory. The aspects that were in focus in the triangulating stages included: (a) the literature from which the theoretical framework was derived in relation to how high and low the students engage in participation in the groups and (b) the appearance of the most frequent codes in relations to these "high" and "low" across all data sources and all three classrooms.

The analysis process was begun by researcher's reading, re-reading of the interview transcripts, and then dividing the transcripts into text fragments. The fragments' length depended on their meaningfulness: all utterances constituting one coherent, meaningful message or viewpoint by participants were kept together in one fragment (Miles, & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the length varied from a couple of words or sentences to a short paragraph. In analyzing the texts, the ones that closely connect to the incidents students mentioned in the interviews were chosen, the incidents using Engstrom's concepts of interacting activities in the groups were analyzed, then coded and themed into the group characteristics while noting (a) rules and norms of the GW, (b) interactions between students, (c) division of labor or how the group power was divided among members in the groups. These themes were then connected to the texts that revealed how students positioned themselves in the groups and how teachers facilitated the group and then bucketed codes into the final findings that characterize two types of GW interactions representative to the "high ends" and the "low ends" of group dynamics, respectively, that is, authentic GW interactions and symbolic GW interactions, each is constitutive of respective aspects presented in the interacting activity theory.

The qualitative methods used in this study do not aim to claim the generalization of the findings. Nor did it have metrics of each group dynamics against which to precisely measure the differences. Such measurement was beyond the scope of this study, particularly given that it would have required the development of growth measures (to help account for different ways that students interacted in the groups). Nor did the study claim a causal relationship between the group dynamics and students' interaction with and participation in the groups. Instead, the study claimed consistent and detailed descriptions in the extent to which students engaged in interacting activities described in Engstrom's sociological theory which was supported by students' different views and reactions to the groups' rules, division of labor, and tools. These claims, as Creswell (2007) suggested, reflected the essential nature of qualitative research methodology.

5. Results

The presentation of findings in this study is organized in the following way: Each type of GW interaction charts students' descriptions of the rules and norms of the groups, then how the group authorities were divided among members and then the positions that students took for themselves which is followed by the ways students participated in the groups. After presenting the description of each type of the GW, the comparison of the main points and the indication of the noticeable notes coming from class observations were made to see how the ways teachers facilitated groups might influence the group dynamics. The brief details of two contrasting types of group dynamics are summarized in Table 1 below.

Theme 1: Symbolic group work interactions

This theme signifies the low ends of the group dynamics as presented in the literature review. In

Table 1: Two types of group work interactions

GW Interactions	Rules	Division of Labor	Subject	Teachers' Facilitation for the Groups (from the field notes)
	What norms and rules are used in the group	How the group power is divided among group members	How students positioned themselves in the group	How teachers provide instructions for the groups
Symbolic GW interactions	leader symbolizes the group participation,	unequal labor division,	a disciplined person,	focus on the technical aspects of instruction; count on some students' voice but leave others being untouched.
Authentic GW interactions	leader facilitates authentic conversation	shared labor division,	a collaborative learner or an active agent	engage social meanings in the instruction, tailor-made instruction.

this theme, the students believed that the norms and rules of the groups they joined tend to be autocratic and demanding. The group norms were described as "making choices based on one person's belief," "making the members follow specific directions," "completing the tasks on time," too much scrutiny," "command and control." For example, Chien - a student from English class spontaneously depicted the incident in which he was placed as a group follower because the group leader outlined everything while making the group plan without having her peers involved in the plan. He admitted finding himself being dominated in the planning process because the group leader made the final decisions on the plan while expecting him to be low-key, meaning he had fewer opportunities to speak out his opinion in the group. He also admitted that the group norms were in favor of the group leader in ways that created conditions for the leader to be in the spotlight of group presentations. The leader was considered as a group representative who carried the bright-faced icon and symbolized the participation manners to the rest of the group. Preferring harmony, the student expressed himself content because there was no chance to argue much. He recognized, however, that the group members' contributions to planning were unequal. Being aware of the unequal division of labor and responsibilities, and in an attempt to resolve it he positioned himself as a very disciplined person, obeying all demands and control and never started speaking first in the group discussion or presenting ideas or questions first in the group activities. My class observation reveals that the teacher who was in charge of delivering instruction to this group was facing a conflict between different rules internal to the teaching profession. One rule dictates that the teacher must focus on the prescribed techniques of teaching group to make the group end up with the results following the tasks' requirements. Another rule dictates the teacher should not socially interacting too much with students.

Theme 2: Authentic group work interactions

This theme represents the high ends of the group dynamics. In this theme, the students believed that the norms and rules of the groups they joined tend to be flexible and accommodating. The group norms were described as "members are consulted or participate in the decision-making process," "members are aware of what is happening in the group discussion." For example, Trang - a student from the Social Skill class recalled a situation when both she and the group leader were equally engaged in planning, despite their lack of confidence in the subject matter. Collaboration during planning lessened the challenges in the tasks. The leader continued encouraging her to lead co-planning activities. She described herself as pleased with the leader's efforts in the planning process and giving critical feedback on the pair's ideas. She admitted finding herself engaging with planning and appeared happy with the co-planning process, which she believed was equal. The notes indicate that the teacher who facilitated this group moved

from adhering to the prescribed lesson plan, as commonly done by many teachers to admitting satisfaction when she deviated from the plan in response to students' needs. The tailor-made instruction mediated learning to collaborate with group leaders and members in the group.

6. Implication for social pedagogy at higher education institutions in Vietnam

Findings from this study reveal that the students view group dynamics differently. Such differences reflect the different ways in which students interact with social factors of the GW (norms and the division of labour) and social contexts of the classrooms (the ways teachers instruct, involve, and communicate with groups). The study also shows that when students have different views and perspectives about the group dynamics, they participate in the group differently. This study highlights two contrasting types of group dynamics and the compassing dimensions concerning group's rules, the divides and the unity of group's power and responsibilities as well as the roles of tools used within the group interactions. The less interactive GW, namely, symbolic GW needs attention because it is where the hidden power relations, less supporting classroom contexts, and the teacher's contradicting perspectives exist which inadvertently position the students as isolated, incapable, and lack of confidence which then influences students' cooperative learning.

The study echoes the findings from the previous research about the complexity of interactions in the classrooms, specifically how the group work dynamics influence cooperative learning at higher education institutions. For example, the findings extend Engstrom's (1999), Vygotsky's (1978), Lave & Wenger's (1991), and Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton's (2003) discussion that treats group work as a platform of socialization based on cooperative learning. Although this research focused on the GW dynamics in English classrooms and Social Skills classrooms, the findings are useful for other teaching contexts of other subjects/ courses because the teacher-student network and students-students interactions work in any GW and operates in all classrooms. The findings offer opportunities for university teachers in Vietnam to think about the pedagogical approaches that can facilitate GW beyond the techniques of classroom arrangement and student knowledge acquisition. One option for the thinking is the design of social pedagogy.

Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton's (2003) suggest a framework for social pedagogy that can underpin the development of group work in schools and with its extension to the pedagogical practices at higher education institutions. According to Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton's (2003) social pedagogic approach - one that focuses on building the social and human interactions in the classrooms can facilitate group work in the ways that affect student on-task behaviour, interactive dialogue in groups (e.g., more giving and receiving help, more joint construction of ideas) as well as create equal relationships and positive human relations in groups. Behaving in a human and constructive way in relation to others is best furthered by students being given opportunities to access multiple points of view and the being held responsible for their own contribution to the society in their long-run future. The adoption of social pedagogy, for Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton's (2003), needs to consider the following:

First, human relationships are fundamental for group work. As identified in the findings, particularly in the case of the symbolic group, some students often feel uncomfortable being threatened and do not understand how to work in a group with their peers. The study found that teachers had not overcome this lack of group work skills in their classrooms. Conversely, the study also found that most teachers and students agreed that supportive relationships are essential for the promotion of learning. Those are relationships that are built upon trust between peers and between students and teachers, and the ability to communicate effectively and jointly resolve problems with partners. It is important to adopt social pedagogy to understand how the discomfort emerged, and ways to resolve it which leads to more student's engagement in the GW.

Second, effective group work involves an effective classroom context. If group work is to be effective, students s must be able to work in a socially inclusive manner with all other members of their class and not be dominated by same-gender and friendship preference groups as noted in Kutnick and Kington (2005). The ways students interact in the authentic GW is an illustration of this point. For students to draw upon supportive human relationships and be less dependent on their teachers in their learning, the curriculum and interactional contexts of the classroom (e.g., whether the language teachers use and the ways the instruction is delivered incorporate social aspects of groups composition and size) must be coordinated to support group work.

Third, teachers are essential for the organisation of the learning experience of their students, but as shown in the findings, they rarely draw upon social pedagogic principles. While teachers in Vietnam have still faced the challenges of establishing pedagogical changes to improve cooperative learning, it might be useful if they keep their teaching informed by the evidence-based research related to such topics as group dynamics, interactive learning tasks, and social interactions in groups. For example, teachers might need to consider building their pedagogical design while keeping in mind contrastive dimensions in group interaction as the findings of this study indicate. Aspects of group dynamics needs attention might be the mutuality of exchanges, the achievement of joint attentional engagement, and the alignment of group members' goals for the group's task completion process.

7. Conclusions

Collaboration with others through cooperative learning in groups has long been a central form of human activity. It has been capitalized explicitly in classroom settings and supported by various empirical research, aiming to produce 21st century's young generations with team-based skills. Studies designed to evaluate the efficacy and outcomes of cooperative learning arrangements typically have relied on metrics of individual learning as the primary indication of cooperative learning success. Such work has demonstrated its importance. However, the study reported in this paper moves beyond those traditions of measurement by utilizing qualitative observational and qualitative interview data-based research to understand the specific elements that constitute the group dynamics in the social contexts distinctive to teaching and learning practices in higher education institutions in Vietnam. Moving beyond simple demonstrations of the numerical indicators of successful learning in groups, the findings provide sound understanding of the interactive processes informed by social factors that lead to learning outcomes. The study suggests the social pedagogy as a refreshing strategy for facilitating small group learning which paves the way to capturing detailed reasons for variability of outcomes in cooperative learning ventures. The study hopes to contribute to pushing forward the reform agenda on teaching and learning at higher education institutions in Vietnam.

References

Blatchford, P., Kutnick, P., Baines, E., & Galton, M. (2003). Toward a social pedagogy of classroom group work. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *39*(1-2), 153-172.

Brown, J.S., & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning and innovation. *Organization Science, 2*(1), 40–57.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Cunliffe, A. L., & Easterby-Smith, M. (2017). From reflection to practical reflexivity: Experiential learning as lived experience. In *Organizing reflection* (pp. 44-60). Routledge.

Dang, T. K. A. (2013). Identity in activity: Examining teacher professional identity formation in the paired-placement of student teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *30*, 47-59.

Engestrom, Y. (1999). Activity theory, individual, and social transformation. In Y. Engestrom & R. Miettinen

(Eds.), *Perspective on activity theory*. Cambridge: Princeton University Press.

Engestrom, Y. (2001). Expansive Learning at Work: Toward an activity theoretical reconceptualization. *Journal of Education and Work*, 14(1), 133-156.

Gagne, R. M., & Briggs, L. J. (1993). *Principles of instructional design*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Gillies, R. (2003). Structuring cooperative group work in classrooms. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 39, 35–49.

Good, T.L., & Lavigne, A.L. (2017). Looking in Classrooms (11th ed.). Routledge.

Hayes, D., Mills, M., Christie, P., & Lingard, B. (2020). *Teachers & schooling making a difference: Productive pedagogies, assessment and performance*. Routledge.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F. P. (2000). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills*. (7th ed). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1994). Cooperative learning and traditional American values. NASSP Bulletin, 80(579), 11–18.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1999). Making cooperative learning work. *Theory into Practice*, *38*(2), 67–74.

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, F. P., & Stanne, M. (2000). *Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis*. http:/ www.clcrc.com/pages/cl-methods.html (accessed 29 July 2021).

Keramati, M. (2020). The perception of undergraduate students in the field of counseling on cooperative learning in the classroom. *Research in Teaching*, *8*(1), 18-1.

Kutnick, P., & Kington, A. (2005). Children's friendships and learning in school: Cognitive enhancement through social interaction? *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75, 1–19.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Marcos, R. I. S., Fernández, V. L., González, M. T. D., & Phillips-Silver, J. (2020). Promoting children's creative thinking through reading and writing in a cooperative learning classroom. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, *36*, 100-113.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, M. A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Petry, B., Mouton, H., & Reigeluth, C. M. (2018). A lesson based on the Gagne-Briggs theory of instruction. In *Instructional theories in action* (pp. 11-44). Routledge.

Retnowati, E., Ayres, P., & Sweller, J. (2017). Can collaborative learning improve the effectiveness of worked examples in learning mathematics? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *109*(5), 666.

Ross, J. (1995). Effects of feedback on student behavior in cooperative learning groups in a grade 7 math class. *The Elementary School Journal*, *96*, 125–143.

Shachar, H., & Sharan, S. (1994). Talking, relating, and achieving: Effects of cooperative learning and whole-class instruction. *Cognition and Instruction*, *12*(4), 313-353.

Slavin, R., Hurley, E. A., & Chamberlain, A. (2003). Cooperative learning and achievement: theory and research. In W.M. Reynolds & G.E. Miller (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Educational psychology* (Vol.7, pp.177–198) New York: Wiley.

Tan, I. G. C., Sharan, S., & Lee, C. K. E. (2007). Group investigation effects on achievement, motivation, and perceptions of students in Singapore. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *100*(3), 142-154.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Processes.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Zajac, R. J & Hartup, W. W. (1997). Friends as coworkers: Research review and classroom implications. *The Elementary School Journal*, 98(1), 3-13.