

## **Research paper**

# **School Guidance and Discipline: teachers' and students' construction of classroom knowledge in two Hong Kong secondary schools**

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## **Contextualisation**

This paper bases its approach in the disciplines of sociology and social psychology. It focuses on pastoral care, school guidance and discipline. It is particularly interested in how the relationship between guidance and discipline are established, maintained and reproduced within a school organisation in the context of Hong Kong secondary education. Further, it looks closely at how schools make a difference in these respects.

**Abstract:** *Most Hong Kong secondary schools have two teams of guidance and discipline teachers to manage students' misbehaviour. The guidance team is mainly responsible for providing a personal counselling service and for carrying out guidance programmes, such as sex education. The discipline team works with students who have been identified as having behavioural problems. They are also responsible for enforcing discipline policy, such as the wearing of school uniform. Most teachers and school managers are concerned with the difficulty of integrating guidance and discipline into schooling. Many studies have shown that guidance teachers are described as 'soft' whereas discipline teachers as described as 'strict' and 'tough'. Each team of teachers has a contrasting rationale as to how best to help students resolve their difficulties. However, no research has yet been completed into how guidance and discipline are implemented in the classroom. This article focuses on this area and reports a study of what classroom knowledge teachers and students construct, with respect to the relationship between guidance and discipline. The qualitative methods for data collection are described and two case studies are presented. The analysis shows that such a relationship differs from school to school, and that teachers' construct of classroom knowledge of guidance and discipline is closely linked to the features of school organisation of the schools to which these teachers belong. Finally, the paper looks at the implication of this study in drawing school managers' and policy makers' attention to the impact of school organisation on guidance and discipline in the classroom.*

## **Introduction**

In most Hong Kong secondary schools, two teams of guidance and discipline teachers are structurally arranged to manage students' behavioural problems. During my four years of teaching experience in a Hong Kong secondary school, it became evident that school guidance and discipline were separated into two independent domains.

The separation was reflected in the phenomenon that a corrective and punishment-based approach to school discipline was adopted for the purpose of socialising students to behave as members of society and for teaching and supporting the value of collectivism. In the processes of discipline, students were seen as members of a collective group: teachers felt responsible for maintaining the consistency of school rules, and for managing students' misbehaviour within a protocol of procedures so as to achieve the targets of justice and fairness. By contrast, school guidance aimed to promote individual students' welfare and personal growth. In the processes of guidance, students were seen as individuals who were able, valuable, and

responsible: teachers should offer students in need, empathy, care and support to help them to resolve their problems. Participating in this working situation, most teachers experienced considerable difficulties in integrating guidance and discipline, at both the individual and departmental levels. They generally emphasised discipline more than guidance, and admitted that there was no room for school guidance in the classroom. With this contrast in mind, apparently, school guidance and discipline had a contrasting rationale as to how best to help students resolve their difficulties, and in doing so transmitted conflicting values to students, and contradictory messages to the rest of the school organisation.

Similar difficulties also appear to exist in other Hong Kong secondary schools (Lee, 1995; Kwok, 1997; Wong, 1997; Chung, 1998; Hue, 2001). For example, Wong's (1997) study found that in the case study school, guidance and discipline were mostly separated and independent, and that co-operation between teachers from these two teams rarely happened. Most of the teachers described the discipline team as a dominant department in the school. Also, school discipline was a corrective means for handling students' problems. Chung's (1998) study of teachers' and students' perception of the co-operation between discipline and guidance teams in 15 schools confirmed Wong's findings and showed that teachers and students stereotyped both the guidance and discipline teachers. They described the discipline teachers as strict and firm, whereas the guidance teachers were seen as kind and caring.

In this article, I look particularly at the classroom level, since this is seen by many educators as a core context of schooling. Amongst others, Watkins and Wagner (2000) suggest that teachers and students are placed together for most of their school day in classrooms where teaching and learning are carried out and where participants interact with each other. Therefore, how they make sense of the lessons in which they participate constitutes a significant part of their knowledge of school realities.

In addition, the classroom is commonly regarded by practitioners as the most important arena in which school policies and organisational arrangements are implemented. Teachers play not only the role of instructors who are responsible for transmitting knowledge of school subjects to students, but also the role of administrators, who enforce school policies relevant to classroom teaching and learning, and who teach according to the school's structural arrangements, such as the time-table for lessons, the school calendar with its standardised texts and examinations, and its definition of the progress of teaching, and the coverage of the syllabus.

Although many writers acknowledge that the classroom is the core of schooling, and that the classroom constitutes a vital component of the school organisation (McNeil, 1986; Greenhalgh, 1994; Watkins, 1995, 1999; Watkins and Wagner, 2000; Souter, 2001; Hue, 2001), there is as yet no empirical research into the relationship between guidance and discipline in the classroom, or into how the administrative context of schools affects such a relationship, particularly in the context of Hong Kong secondary schools.

## **The research**

The aim of this study was to examine how far the relationship between guidance and discipline in the classroom differs from school to school. My particular focus was on how teachers' and students' knowledge of the classroom related to theme of guidance and discipline. I am interested in, 1) how teachers and students describe their experiences of guidance and discipline; 2) how guidance and discipline are practised in the process of teaching and learning, and; 3) how far the organisational framework of the school affects teachers' practices of guidance and discipline in the classroom.

Two Hong Kong secondary schools, indicated as Schools B and E in this article, are chosen from among the five schools involved in a preliminary study. The selection of these five schools

was based on six dimensions of features so as to ensure the group represented a diverse range of contexts. These include their position in the banding system, geographical location, religion, length of establishment, funding base and policy on medium of instruction. The preliminary study showed that in the schools with a more integrated relationship between guidance and discipline, like School E, teachers described the relationship between guidance and discipline as close: the guidance and discipline teams were more able to collaborate with each other than in other schools. In the schools with more fragmented relationships, like School B, this relationship was described as isolated: teachers in this school found that each of the two teams had a contrasting rationale towards helping students resolve their difficulties, and even transmitted conflicting values to students.

Using an ethnographic approach, I employed multiple methodological strategies, which included participant observation (Gold, 1958; Denzin, 1978; Woods, 1986), unstructured interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998), and focus group interviews (Krueger, 1994) to collect qualitative data.

School B is an aided school with a Christian background. It has been established for 20 years. The school has been in transition from the policy of English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) to that of Chinese as Medium of Instruction (CMI). Students are streamed by their academic proficiency into various classes.

School E is a 'direct subsidised school', established by a Christian organisation. It has been established for 40 years. The school has seen positive transformations since the present principal arrived seven years ago, and was fortunate enough to receive the support of most teachers. The school adopts the policy of EMI. Students are unstreamed. Like most Hong Kong secondary schools, in Schools B and E two teams of teachers, the Counselling and the Discipline Departments/Teams provide for school guidance and discipline.

My research in these schools lasted for one academic term, in total 34 days in School B and 30 in School E. During this time, I explored school practitioners' knowledge of school realities, through unstructured interviews and daily conversation (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). I also kept field notes about participants' interactions and features of school organisation. As a part-time teacher as well as participant observer, I taught Geography in 3D at School B and in 3B at School E for nine lessons respectively. I also interviewed teachers who taught each class so as to investigate how other teachers perceived the situations in these two classes. In total, six teachers from School B and five from School E were involved.

To explore students' experiences of guidance and discipline in depth, focus group interviews were conducted in Schools B and E. I invited five students from each of the classes I taught to join four focus group interview sessions. These interviews aimed to explore students' perceptions and experiences in four areas: their own role in the classroom, the teachers' role in the classroom, the discipline and the counselling teams, and school rules.

Finally, the data collected were processed and analysed by the constant comparative method, adapted from Glaser and Strauss (1967).

## **Teachers' and students' construction of classroom knowledge**

In what follows, I will summarise teachers' and students' construction of classroom knowledge, and contrast how teachers' classroom knowledge related to the theme of guidance and discipline in these two schools, on the basis of the main themes emerging from data of interview and field notes, and from my teaching experience in the classroom.

## **In School B**

The classroom knowledge of teachers and students will be summarised under three broad themes: the insistence on classroom discipline, the streaming of students, and the impact of the Discipline Department.

### **Insistence on classroom discipline**

Teachers tended to prioritise discipline and instruction over guidance when teaching in the classroom. They shared the Chinese belief that '*Guan jiao: xian guan huo jiao*', which is translated by Cheng (1996) as '*effective management of behaviour is the prerequisite of effective teaching in a classroom*' (p 16). This belief helps us to understand why teachers in School B emphasised '*control*' and '*punishment*' in the process of teaching and learning, rather than guidance, though they admitted that discipline was not an effective way of getting students to learn and behave properly.

The teachers' perception of the necessity of playing a disciplinary, rather than a guidance, role was in fact maintained and reinforced by students' views that teachers should be '*hard*' and ensure the consistency of application of school rules so as to achieve the claim of fairness and justice. In their view, the teachers who played a guidance role were the '*soft*': not strict, or '*hard*', enough to maintain classroom discipline. For example, when Miss Wan intended to play a guidance role in the classroom in order to establish a positive relationship with students, some students reflected to her that she was too '*soft*' to maintain classroom discipline, and these students even accused her of breaking the coherence of school rules. To avoid this happening again, she determined not to play a guidance, but a disciplinary role:

- Interviewer: What do you think of the students' perception of you?  
Wan: How to perceive me? They might think I am... quite mild and easy to get along with.... Because of this, they think I allow them to break any 'grey areas of laws'.... In their eye, I am not strict... and not harsh.... I think... they [3D students] are... they think I am too 'soft'.... They might even think I don't know how to manage classroom discipline. For this reason, whenever I make an order or something they have to do, I try my best strictly to ensure its enforcement... [Laughing]  
Interviewer: [Laughing]  
Wan: But I think I have been improving.  
Interviewer: 'Improving' means?  
Wan: This means if I proclaim that I'll exercise any punishment, I will definitely enforce it on my students (B991123-Interview Note).

This insistence on discipline related to the phenomenon that classroom teaching and learning were controlled in the school system in two ways: through the instructor role of teachers, and through promotion of the academic performance of students.

Firstly, an administrative role was imposed upon classroom teachers by the subject department. As a part-time classroom teacher at School B, I felt obliged to fulfil administrative duties by meeting the teaching schedule designed by the subject department. I was expected to use uniform teaching materials, such as short tests, worksheets and extra exercises, and to prepare students well for a standardised test. When playing an instructor role, I found that I emphasised playing a disciplinary, rather than a guidance role, so as to create a favourable context for my teaching, rather than for students' learning.

Secondly, the school attempted to control how the academic performance of students was assessed. A certain percentage of the mark that students had obtained in the standardised test would be added to their result in the final examination. Because of this arrangement, all teachers who taught Geography in the classes of secondary-three were involved in designing the paper.

Further, I was reminded to inform the class about the format of the standardised test, and to crosscheck the marks with the students after the standardised test so that it was ensured that the marks given to each student were accurate.

Since the classroom was controlled by teachers, tests, and the syllabus, teaching and learning had become academically-oriented, and their aims concerned not the process but the ends of learning, that is, an assessment of students' academic ability and achievement. For example, my field notes recorded how I split the learning process into means and ends and reinforced a concern for extrinsic rewards by saying to students, *'you have to prepare well for the standardised test because the mark you obtain will be added to your result in the final examination'* (B991024-Field notes).

In sum, in School B, classroom teachers emphasised discipline, rather than guidance in teaching and learning. The insistence on discipline was maintained and reinforced by students who held the view that classroom teachers should be *'hard'*, not *'soft'*. Furthermore, a classroom in School B was seen as controlled when classroom teachers met the expectation that they would fulfil the role imposed by the subject department, and then assess the academic performance of students. As a result of this, the classrooms had become academically-oriented whilst teachers were aware of playing both instructor and discipline roles, rather than a guidance role.

### **Streaming of students**

In School B, students were streamed into classes A to F with respect to their academic ability, as noted earlier. Routinely, high ability students were assigned to the A and B streams, moderate ability students to the C and D streams, and the least able students were assigned to the E and F streams. Among the three main streams, the E and F streams were described as *'the bottom classes'*, *'the bad classes'* and *'the terrible classes'*, whereas the A and B streams were seen as *'the top'* and *'the good classes'*. Teachers and students acknowledged that *'the low-stream classes'*, or E/F classes, were where *'the less able'* and *'the misbehaving'* came from. Among the low-stream classes, some were labelled as *'infamous classes'*. These included 3F, 2E and 2F. These classes had a notorious reputation for misbehaviour and for being hopeless in learning.

I was able to participate in a lesson with one of these *'infamous'* classes, 2E. This was a remedial class and had about 30 students. Two teachers were assigned to teach English Language. I was requested by the principal to substitute for one of these teachers and work with the other teacher, Mr Mong. Before entering the classroom, Mr Mong clarified to me that the students in this class, 2E, were notorious for misbehaving in lessons. He depicted them as *'the hopeless'*, who failed to learn and refused to engage in classroom activities. He then suggested that I could act as the disciplinarian during the lesson, and that what I needed to do was to patrol around the classroom and get students on task: there was no need for me to teach. Participating in such a classroom, I, as a researcher, found that I acted like a prison guard, whilst Mr Mong was like an instructor on the defensive, who needed constantly to struggle to play his instructor role. Most of the students did not work on their tasks, but continually performed misbehaviours, such as chatting with each other, writing personal letters, reading magazines, teasing each other, and pulling and pushing others. Even though my teaching experience in 2E might not be generalisable to an overall picture of low-stream

classes in School B, this experience led me to recognise that some students in the low-stream classes experienced considerable difficulties in learning, and that they mostly felt a sense of meaninglessness in the classroom (B991208-Field notes).

In short, in School B, classroom and students were divided according to the streaming policy. In the low-stream classes the students, especially those in *'the infamous classes'*, seemed to feel a sense of meaninglessness. They also seemed to see themselves as powerless to improve their performance, whereas teachers felt necessary to defend their instructor role by emphasising discipline rather than guidance. In the high-stream classes, students behaved well and had comparatively high academic ability. Here teachers were able to act as instructors. Teachers generally considered that guidance and discipline were more segregated in the low-stream than in the high-stream classrooms.

### **Impact of the Discipline Department**

The third feature of teachers' and students' construction of classroom knowledge is that School B provided classroom teachers with institutional devices which aimed to support teachers in managing students' behaviour during lessons. In the Discipline Department, many teams were structured so as to enable these devices to function. The Team for Case Investigation was responsible for serious classroom offences, such as stealing, fighting, bullying and cheating, whereas the Detention Team was responsible for general offences, such as disrespect to teachers, failing to hand in homework and having no textbook for lessons. Habitual misbehaviour that interfered with the teaching process could be referred to the Team for Classroom Management. Also, immediate assistance from discipline teachers was available during school hours.

There are two identifiable implications of this. Firstly, teachers needed to generalise and categorise students' misbehaviour, and to adopt the language and categories of the Discipline Department in order to refer students to the appropriate team. Secondly, once a referral was made, misbehaving students would be decontextualised from where the misbehaviour occurred and engaged in a standardised and mechanical disciplinary procedure.

In the teachers' view, there were two functions underlying these devices. First, they were considered as *'the supporting service'*, which aimed to help teachers to manage classroom discipline and to create a favourable climate for teaching and learning. Second, these devices put the notion of justice and fairness into practice because they standardised the protocol procedures for handling students' misbehaviour.

In School B, teachers were in fact socialised to rely on such devices to discipline students, since, as they asserted, students could be managed in standardised ways. For example, when Miss Liang recalled her early teaching experience in this school, she revealed that an experienced discipline teacher, Miss Fook, recommended her to refer students with misbehaving problems to the Discipline Department, instead of developing personal strategies to handle such problems: referring the students made it likely that these students would be managed in fair and just ways. When Miss Liang described this event, she said,

Later on, Miss Fook reminded me of the vital thing when I handle this sort of case again. She assured me that it would have been a lot better if I could have reported this case to the Discipline Department, because this was regarded as the best way to make the girl [with behavioural problem] learn 'a lesson' (B991028).

In the students' view, these devices helped to achieve the claim of justice and fairness, but they admitted that once they accessed the routine of referral, the cause underlying their behaviour might not be realised by the Discipline Department. Sometimes, the referral aroused

negative feelings in them, such as the feeling of being unsafe, anxious, threatened and a sense of having been banished.

A secondary-seven boy accessed a routine of referral after he was accused of leaving the classroom without a teacher's permission. In the course of referral, the discipline teachers involved were concerned only with the consistency of application of school rules, but not with the cause underlying the boy's *'misbehaviour'*. The boy claimed there was no teacher whom he could ask for permission to leave the classroom when he needed to clean his face after a bad sneeze. This lack of attention to the cause made the boy feel misunderstood, irritated and frustrated, in particular when his form tutor, Miss Au, attempted to convince him to accept the verdict and sentence made by the Head of Discipline.

I chatted with Miss Au, a S7 form tutor, sitting at her desk and looking puzzled and grave. She told me that a boy in her class was accused of being out of the classroom without obtaining a teacher's permission after the morning roll call. The boy was caught and scolded by a discipline teacher, Mr Kam. He was then requested to stand for 15 minutes as a punishment in the first lesson, which was a RE lesson taught by Miss Shan. In the RE lesson, the boy complained to Miss Shan about what Mr Kam did to him, and strongly refused to stand, because the boy insisted that he did nothing wrong in leaving the classroom for cleansing his face after a terrible sneeze, especially when there was no teacher in the classroom whom he could ask for permission to do so. When the lesson finished, Miss Shan reported the boy's reaction to Mr Kam. Then Mr Kam got angry and reported the whole event to Mrs Liao, Head of Discipline. Mrs Liao was irritated enough to call the boy to see her at once. From Mrs Liao's point of view, no matter what the situation, it was wrong for the boy to leave the classroom without a teacher's permission. She also felt disgusted because the boy talked to her in a rude manner. In Mrs Liao's words, the boy was *'seriously disrespectful'* to her. Eventually, Mrs Liao made a sentence by sending him to the Detention Class. Correspondingly, a letter to his parent was issued, in which his offence was stated as *'leaving the classroom without a teacher's permission and being very rude to teacher'*. The boy was then ordered to leave.

When Miss Au, the boy's form tutor, knew that the boy was released, she intended to have a talk to him. The boy was very irritated and complained with a strong sense of anger that he did nothing wrong when he left the room, and hence, the sentence for his offence was completely unreasonable. He complained about Mr Kam's bad manner and the verdict made by Mrs Liao. The boy moved on to blame Miss Au for leaving the classroom too early after a morning roll call, and Miss Shan for coming too late for the RE lesson. After hearing this, Miss Au was extremely irritated and assured him that he really committed an offence and should accept being punished as sentenced... (B991208).

At the classroom level, School B structured a set of institutional devices for discipline, which functioned as a referral system, and where students' misbehaviour – it was claimed – could be handled in fair and just ways. Teachers were used to relying on these devices for classroom discipline, and were socialised to maintain their operation, but this reliance reduced the teachers' autonomy in handling students' misbehaviour.

All in all, in School B, guidance and discipline tended to be disconnected in the classroom, and discipline was more dominant than guidance. While the classroom was controlled through teachers, tests, and the syllabus, classroom teaching and learning became academically-oriented. Such a classroom culture led teachers to pay more attention to playing a discipline rather than a guidance role, because, as they believed, good management of

classroom discipline was the prerequisite for effective teaching and learning. It was particularly true when teachers taught in the low-stream classes. In this academically-oriented culture, teachers in the classroom tended to specialise in teaching. They were socialised to refer all matters concerning the management of students' behaviour upward to the Discipline Department, especially when established devices for managing classroom discipline were available within the school system. Teachers' reliance on the department to manage misbehaviour partially reduced their autonomy in the management of students' behaviour, and led them to disconnect themselves from school discipline and guidance.

## ***In School E***

In School E, teachers' and students' construction of classroom knowledge will be summarised under three broad themes: the insistence on teaching and learning, the unstreaming of students, and discipline through personal strategy.

### **Insistence on teaching and learning**

Teachers in School E were able to perceive themselves as managers of learning. Although teachers perceived that maintaining classroom discipline was important in the process of teaching and learning, they were more concerned with how they could get students to learn and resolve their learning difficulties than were teachers in School B. Reciprocally, students in this school defined themselves as learners. Unlike the students from School B, they talked more about issues related to learning, such as their lack of ability in the use of English for learning, and the appropriateness of teaching methods, and less about teachers' discipline practices.

The insistence on teaching and learning in the classroom was evident in my teaching experience with 3B. The Geography teachers with whom I worked intended to help students cope with their learning difficulty by adjusting the curriculum and teaching materials for the subject. One teacher revealed to me that the Geography teachers intended to simplify the content of the textbook into note form in order to help students learn the subject. This teacher reassured me that the Geography test would not be difficult, since Geography teachers intended to help students to deal with it.

In contrast to my teaching experience in School B, when teaching in 3B I found that the classroom was less controlled in terms of the use of teaching materials and the need to fulfil the roles imposed by the subject department. I could operate my teaching plan without borrowing any extra lessons from other teachers in the way I had when teaching in School B. I also felt less pressurised to cover the assigned syllabus and to prepare students for the test.

It was also obvious to me, as a Geography teacher, that the classroom was controlled not only by the teacher's, but also by students' participation in classroom activities. For example, during lessons, students kept drawing my attention to their difficulties in using English for learning, frequently requested me to explain the English terms used in the textbook and lessons, and asked me to translate these terms into Chinese. Some students habitually refused to engage in classroom activities as a way of drawing my attention to their difficulty, and expected me to help them individually to resolve it. Thus, in 3B, both teachers and students tended to take part in exercising control the classroom: students' participation drew me, as a classroom teacher, into feeling responsible for meeting their needs.

As well as in my teaching experience in 3B, the insistence on teaching and learning was reflected in school participants' discussion about the policy of English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI). In students' view, this policy caused them to have enormous learning difficulties. Teachers shared the same concern as the students, and found that the EMI policy



constrained not only effective learning, but also the promotion of students' all-round development.

This perception partially led teachers to play the role of managers of learning in the classroom, who ought to help students overcome their learning difficulties. For example, an English teacher, Mr Rowans, tried to modify the curriculum and teaching materials in order to help students to cope with the English language and to pass school examinations. By doing so, he intended to enhance their sense of success in academic performance, and avoid any possibility that students might give up engaging in classroom learning because of their difficulty in using English in learning. Miss Chong, like Mr Rowans, intended to enhance individual students' motivation to learn by creating a safe atmosphere and by lessening the formality of the teacher-student relationship (E991124).

In short, the classroom in School E was not as controlled as in School B, in terms of teachers' fulfilment of the roles imposed by the subject departments, and of the academic performance of students. Further, in the classroom both teachers and students emphasised teaching and learning, rather than discipline, and were concerned with the impact of the EMI policy on students' learning. In relation to this, teachers became aware of a need to modify teaching materials and parts of the curriculum, in order to help students overcome their learning difficulties and to create a favourable context for teaching and learning.

### **Unstreaming of students**

In School E, students were not streamed. According to the principal, the rationale underlying the unstreaming policy was to actualise the ethos of Whole Person Education, and to create a positive environment for teaching and learning. Specifically, it was intended to reduce the possible effect of labelling students according to their academic performance.

Teachers generally welcomed the unstreaming policy, but they insisted that it intensified the distinction between the more able and the least able within a class where students varied very much in terms of their academic ability, learning motivation and classroom behaviour. Consequently, teachers found it difficult to meet the diverse needs of very diverse students. A History teacher, Mr Tans, highlighted this point by saying,

I think most students are very attentive in the class. But some have very low motivation in learning. There is a wide range of academic performance indeed. Some are very good but some are really poor. Some want to learn but they haven't the necessary ability. They want to work hard but their foundation is so poor. They find it hard to catch up (E991124).

Teachers experienced considerable difficulties in fulfilling the needs of the great variety of students. Some teachers declared that they could only care for the more able, but not provide the least able with sufficient help and support.

Students' talk about their classroom also reflected the impact of unstreaming. As many students said, *'students with different academic abilities were mixed up in all the classes'*. Students asserted that students within a class were divided into sub-groups of the more and less able, and of the well-behaved and the misbehaving, and they found that there were some conflicts between these sub-groups of students, who had opposing aims of schooling, and contrasting patterns of classroom behaviour.

In sum, in School E, the classrooms were unstreamed, but students were still divided according to their academic and behavioural performances. In an unstreamed classroom, teachers felt that it was necessary to play different roles when interacting with the two

distinctive groups of students. Students themselves noticed that classes were characterised by the great diversity of students, who had opposing aims of schooling, and who presented contrasting patterns of classroom behaviour.

### **Discipline with personal strategies**

The third feature of classroom knowledge is that teachers in School E were accustomed to using their own personal strategies for disciplining students, and perceived that discipline was their own responsibility. They rarely accessed any institutional device for discipline, or referred misbehaving students to either the Counselling or the Discipline Teams.

In contrast to School B, School E provided teachers with very few institutionalised devices for discipline, except the Guideline for Managing Students' Misbehaviour, included in the Teacher's Handbook. In teachers' views, the guideline served as a reference, and they felt very little official responsibility for its enforcement. In parallel, the unavailability of institutionalised devices for discipline was evident in another phenomenon: students in School E rarely mentioned any institutional devices for discipline when talking about the classroom. Instead, they discussed how teachers maintained classroom discipline by using their personal practices.

Consistent with the students' accounts, teachers declared that they preferred taking responsibility for discipline rather than referring students with misbehaviour problems to any school teams. Chinese Language teacher Mr Stage ascertained that the discipline system in the school was invisible, loose and flexible: he preferred helping students resolve their behavioural problems and personal difficulties with his personal strategies, rather than referring them to a team of other teachers. He talked about his relation with the discipline team and how he compared his teaching experience in School E with the school where he had taught previously:

Mr Stage told me that in School E, the discipline system is really flexible. Within this system, enormous space is left for teachers, where they can deal with students' offences in their own ways. Mr Stage then described the team as having no system. To explore what he means by 'no system', I invited him to tell me something about the procedure for issuing demerits to students. In relation to my question, he instantly became hesitant and seemed to know nothing about the procedure involved. He looked puzzled and explained to me in a sort of unsure tone that a form should be completed and then passed it on to Mr York, Vice Head of Discipline. Further Mr Stage explained that when students do something wrong or act disruptively, he feels responsible for managing their problems by himself rather than passing it on to the Discipline Team; he assured me that this is the *most proper way for helping students to resolve their difficulties* (E990924).

Unlike School B, School E provided teachers with very few institutional devices for discipline. Teachers in School E were used to taking responsibility for managing students' misbehaviour, instead of referring students to any school teams. Also they held individual views of issues related to school discipline, and had some experience of acting against discipline policies in order to safeguard students' welfare.

All in all, in School E guidance and discipline is better connected than in School B. In the classroom teachers felt less obliged to fulfil roles imposed by the subject departments: also, they were expected to help students to overcome their learning difficulties corresponding to students' expectations. Such a classroom culture created a favourable context for guidance, though classroom teachers still emphasised the importance of discipline. Such classroom culture was reinforced by the unstreaming policy and the unavailability of discipline devices.

The former policy made classes less divided from each other according to students' academic and behavioural performances. The latter arrangement enabled and required teachers to manage students' misbehaviour with their personal strategies, instead of referring students upward to any school teams.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, I have contrasted how the knowledge of teachers and students in two Hong Kong secondary schools related to the theme of guidance and discipline. It is noticeable that teachers and students in these two schools constructed their classroom knowledge in different ways. The study confirms that in Hong Kong as elsewhere schools make a difference, in that the relationship between guidance and discipline differs from school to school. Apart from situational factors, the reasons for such differences lie in organisational factors, such as methods of grouping students, the structural arrangement for guidance and discipline, and school culture.

This study has two implications. Firstly, teachers' and students' constructions of classroom knowledge are closely connected to school policy on academic affairs, the grouping of students and the structural arrangement for guidance and discipline. As others have found, explanations of students' classroom misbehaviour must be made in relation to both the situational factors, and to the organisational context where the classroom is located (Watkins and Wagner, 2000). Similarly, Souter (2001) states that any behavioural and emotional problems of students can be seen as an indication of dysfunction of school system: hence, whenever managing these problems, teachers need to consider both the personal factors of students and the context of the school wherein these problems arise.

The second implication is that how school practitioners talk about the classroom is associated with school culture and management. The features of the organisational context of the school and the structural arrangement for guidance and discipline closely relate to how school participants depict their school lives, in terms of guidance and discipline. Research has shown that there is a close relationship between everyday conversation or talk and how individuals construct their knowledge of social reality. For example, Witherell and Noddings (1991) claim that examining stories which people tell each other everyday can help us to understand how people make sense of their work on both an organisational and individual basis. Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) suggest that the process of storytelling in human conversation is a fundamental feature of personal and social growth because through this process, individuals construct meaning and make sense of new life experiences, which, in turn, influence how they construct their knowledge of social reality.

School managers, at the reactive level, may therefore need to consider how far these structural arrangements and the organisational climate affect teachers' and students' everyday talk about their classroom experience, with respect to guidance and discipline, what stories they tell and retell among themselves, and how such talk in turn contributes to the existing classroom and school climate. At the proactive level, 'positive' talk among teachers and students needs to be intentionally promoted in the process of teaching and learning, through all contexts of schooling, such as the classroom, staff meetings, sports days, and educational activities. By promoting 'positive' talk among teachers and students about their school lives, the school may create a positive classroom and school climate and a favourable context for connectedness between school guidance and discipline in the classroom.

The organisational context of each school in this study had a profound impact on the relationship between guidance and discipline in the classroom, and contributed to making the classroom culture differ between the two schools. It is hoped that the broad findings from the experience of the two case schools will illuminate the practices of other secondary schools,

and help teachers, school managers and educators to promote the integration of guidance and discipline in the classroom, to adjust the arrangement for teaching and learning, and to restructure and reculture the organisational context wherein the classroom is located.

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