

Chapter 2

Interrogating Collaboration: Discourse and Practice

Introduction

In Chap. 1, I have indicated that one of the overarching themes in this book is to develop a critical understanding of how collaboration is presented as a discourse in the context of professional development practices for school and university educators. In Chap. 3, I will critique some of the widely featured storylines of collaboration which have been presented in the teachers' professional development literature in Hong Kong as well as internationally (Brown 1998; Fairclough 2003; Foucault 1991). The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theoretical framework underpinning the study and to provide an overview of the key social theories, and research principles that I used to examine the discourses of collaboration in this book. I believe that an explanation of the theoretical framework will help readers understand why I adopted a critical approach to examine and theorise collaboration as a social practice, and how this research framework differs from some of the existing research on school–university partnership.

The theoretical framework used in this book deviates from the frameworks used in other studies about collaboration because it does not aim to present the collaboration as 'a cup of comfort' or as 'the poisoned chalice' (Hargreaves 1994). The main intention of my approach was to scrutinise some of the grand narratives about collaboration advocated in the teacher development literature and more specifically, I wanted to gain a deeper insight into how social identities, practices and relations are constructed in the context of collaboration. I also hope that this chapter will be useful for education researchers who are keen to engage with Foucault's ideas of critique and would like a more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework I adopted for my study. I would like to add that my own exploration of Foucault is still very much work in progress so this chapter does not claim to offer a 'method' for research, but rather a sharing of how I engaged with Foucault's ideas to examine an educational practice that is both highly featured and advocated in professional development discourses. When I started my work examining school–university

partnership as a doctoral student, I found the idea of using a Foucauldian inspired framework both exhilarating and frustrating because I quickly learnt that there was not a neat and tidy ‘method’ to follow. There were many bumps and tensions in my own research journey. So I hope this chapter will be a useful resource for other educational researchers who may be interested in engaging with Foucault’s ideas in their own research. I will explain why I draw on Foucault’s (1971, 1991) idea of genealogy (‘history of the present’) as a ‘method’ of inquiry to trace how school–university collaboration has been construed in teacher education discourses in the past four decades. So this chapter makes explicit the nature of my engagement with the issues concerning school–university collaboration—why and how I examined “not the spaces but the spacings”—what is said and not said about collaboration practices in teacher education discourses (Gregory 2004, p. 2).

Exploring the ‘Tropes’ of Collaboration

A genealogical approach was adopted to challenge ‘known’ truths about collaboration that are constructed in teacher education discourses. The storylines of collaboration will be critically examined in Chap. 3 to see why particular tropes have shaped some of the contemporary understanding of school–university partnership as a social practice in teacher education. According to Foucault (1985, p. 9), the purpose of adopting a genealogical approach to critique is:

...the endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known...to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.

Foucault’s idea of genealogy challenges the pursuit of the origin by disturbing what is considered to be fixed in the past. In the context of school–university partnership and the professional development of teachers, it means tracing the way discourses have been historically presented in teacher education literature to understand the different guises of collaboration. For example, we can trace the different guises of collaboration by examining what is foregrounded in collaborative action research studies; the loci of power in relation to the subject; what knowledge claims are established and defended, and what counter-discourses contest collaboration and so forth. Wetherell et al. (2003) point out that adopting Foucault’s genealogical approach is more than just studying specific language patterns in discourse, but it involves the analysis of the ways in which power/knowledge occur and are distributed:

To understand discourse we have to see it as intermeshed with power/knowledge where knowledge both constitutes and is constituted through discourse as an effect of power (p. 275).

So genealogy is employed as an approach to interrogate contemporary educational discourses about collaboration in this book with the aim of tracking its history and the regimes of power/knowledge involved in the construction of that history. So Foucault’s ideas are useful in educational research because they offer researchers a space in which to problematise the reasoning that is regulating particular educational practices. In addition to this, I also draw on the critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory offered by Fairclough (2003) to interrogate the tropes of collaboration as texts. So a critical and sociocultural theoretical framework was constructed to problematise how collaboration practices are constituted in various teacher education discourses to facilitate a broader analysis of collaboration practices than existing research studies. This approach was helpful for my study because I am interested in examining how different discourses and practices of collaboration are legitimised and how ‘rules’ of collaboration are negotiated and enacted in teacher education literature and policies.

Interrogating Collaboration in Hong Kong CAR Case Study

To further theorise school–university collaborative practices conceptually and methodologically in Chaps. 4–6, I draw on Foucault’s (1991) concepts of power/knowledge, discourse and identity to problematise the data collected from the Hong Kong collaborative action research case study to examine how power was diffused through the prevalence of various discourses in the Hong Kong socio-cultural context (Dean 1994; Kendall and Wickham 1999; Locke 2004; Mills 2003; Walshaw 2007). To make explicit what I mean by the term problematisation, I use this definition of critique by Foucault (1997, p. 32):

Critique is the movement by which the subject gives itself the right to question truth on its effects of power and to question power on its discourses of truth...in a word, the politics of truth.

So Foucault’s ideas of power, identity and knowledge are used in this book to problematise how certain knowledge about collaboration is established as facts or truths in society, while others are discredited (Foucault 1991; Mills 2003; Walshaw 2007). Foucault sees discourse as associated with relations of power (Foucault 1972, 1991; Rabinow 1984) so collaboration in this book is examined in terms of its knowledge—how collaboration is legitimised as systems of beliefs in the historical developments of education in one sociocultural context (see Chap. 4); its power—how interpersonal (social) relations are constructed in collaboration within this context (see Chap. 5); and identities—how teachers and researchers are positioned in the school–university collaborative research discourse (see Chap. 6). Figure 2.1 below, illustrates how the three dimensions of school–university collaboration as a professional practice for second is examined in this book:

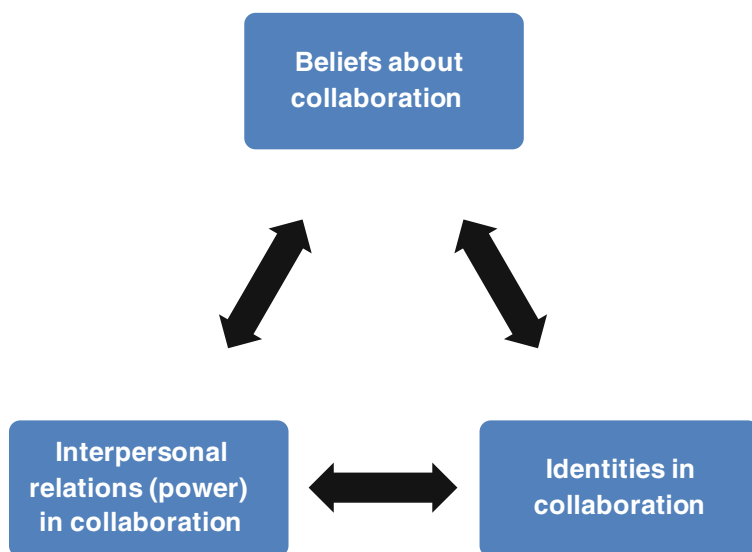


Fig. 2.1 Examining school–university collaboration as a social practice

In Chaps. 4–6, I will also examine how each dimension (beliefs, identities and interpersonal relations) is construed in the complex construction of school–university collaboration in the Hong Kong sociocultural context. Collaboration as a social practice is examined through a critical lens to analyse what Dean (1994) calls the “practices of truth, power and the self”. Popkewitz and Brennan (1998, p. xiii) posit that engaging with Foucault’s ideas of critique in the context of educational research allows educators to ask questions about the conditions of the construction of our field, and “the power/knowledge nexus represented by that construction”. Central to this approach is the understanding that language is never neutral and that it is used to negotiate identity, relations and practice in organisations (Talbot et al. 2003). The theoretical framework adopted in this book can facilitate the examination of how the textual expressions of power, conflict and resistance in the context of collaboration relate to broader social structures and change. For example, how collaboration practices are constituted through discourses in the context is Hong Kong.

In problematising collaboration as a social practice, I also draw on Giddens’ (1984) conceptualisation of structure and agency. Giddens (1984) argues that structure and agency are inextricably linked. For example, I take the view that beliefs, power relations and the construction of identities enacted are shaped both by collaboration discourse (structure) and individual actions (teachers’ and facilitators’ actions). So the theoretical framework in this study reflects Giddens’ (1984) point about the mutuality of structure/agency in the construction of social practice; that people are not ‘outside of’ social structures and vice versa. This approach aims to avoid a deterministic view in examining the factors hindering successful school–

university collaboration. From this perspective, the theoretical framework moved away from a simplistic examination of the problems of collaboration which only focuses on the contextual and personal factors, such as teachers' workloads or personal traits, but rather I tried to relate collaboration to a more holistic model that incorporates social systems, rules for collaboration, social order and social reproduction to examine collaboration as a social construct, and a product of human actions. Furthermore, Giddens' concept of power reflects Foucault's notion of power in that both Giddens and Foucault perceive power to be in a constant state of evolution. This means to understand the tensions at play, the framework for examining collaboration has to allow us to go further than examining the contextual challenges of setting up collaborative practices, it has to consider how teachers and facilitators, as social actors in the collaboration process, play a role in shaping the power structures. So adopting Giddens' conceptualisation of the 'structure/agency' dichotomy can help us do this.

To summarise, the theoretical framework used in this study is 'critical' because the approach draws on social and critical theories to examine the hidden ideologies (e.g. tropes of collaboration) and power relations in social and discursive practices. So the decision to draw on Foucault's ideas is to problematise school–university collaboration as a social practice within an educational setting. The theoretical framework used to problematise collaboration in this book aims to 'expose' the different tropes of collaboration saturated in institutional discourse. In the next section, I will provide an explanation of why combining the ideas of Foucault to a critical discourse analysis framework adds more rigour and depth to the examination of collaboration as a discursive event.

Exploring Collaboration as Discourse

The theoretical framework was constructed to facilitate the critical examination of both the *texts* and the *context* in the collaborative action research case study. Figure 2.2 shows the three key levels of analysis of collaboration in this study.

Figure 2.2 draws on Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework and shows collaboration analysed at three different, but inter-related levels (Fairclough 2003). The framework aims to help us understand how collaboration is a form of social practice which constitutes the social world, and is constituted by other social practices (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). Fairclough's CDA ideas were used because he views texts as specific social events and his approach to textual analysis aims to bring a social perspective into the core of the text. Thus as social practice, collaboration discourse is in a dialectical relationship with other social dimensions in the discourse—it not only shapes other practices but also reflects them (this is indicated by the arrows in the framework). In this context of the case study in this book, it is argued that collaboration practices enacted cannot be analysed in isolation—they can only be understood in relation to the web of other discourses (texts) circulating in the Hong Kong sociopolitical

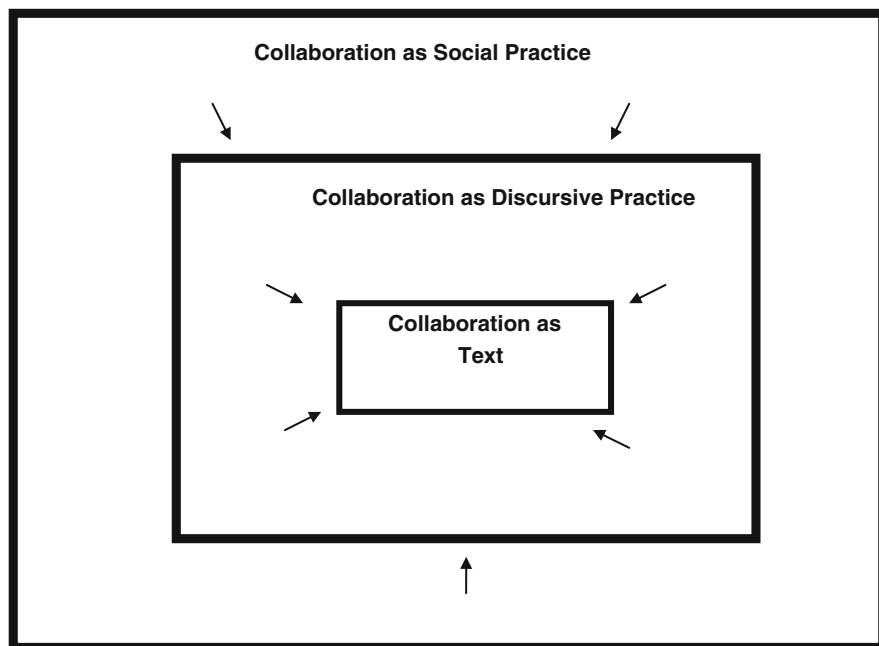


Fig. 2.2 Three-dimensional CDA framework for the case study

context (Fairclough 1995; Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). I found Fairclough's detailed analysis of the distinctive linguistic and social functions of text most appropriate for analysing the interviews, transcripts of meetings and emails in the case study because I was able to analyse, for example, the choice of vocabulary, grammar, text structure and genre in the textual data at one level and then examined the impact of these texts in shaping social practice at another level. In Fairclough's (1995, 2003) three-dimensional model for discourse analysis, he distinguishes between the text, discursive practice and social practice. Fairclough's (1995) argues that a particular discursive event has three facets or dimensions. The three facets are shown in the Fig. 2.3 (Fairclough 1995, p. 98).

I will now explain how I analysed the data as text, discursive practice and as social practice in the case study. The first level of Fairclough's framework focuses on detailed textual analysis (Fairclough 2003). Fairclough's (2003) CDA framework draws on Halliday's (Halliday and Hasan 1976; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) systemic functional linguistics theory to identify the three 'metafunctions' of language (ideational, interpersonal and textual) that operate in discourses. I used the following headings to guide the process of textual analysis:

- Vocabulary: what lexical choices dominate the text and what words are foregrounded in the text?
- Grammar: how words are combined into clauses and sentences such as the use of modality (could, might, may, would, etc.).

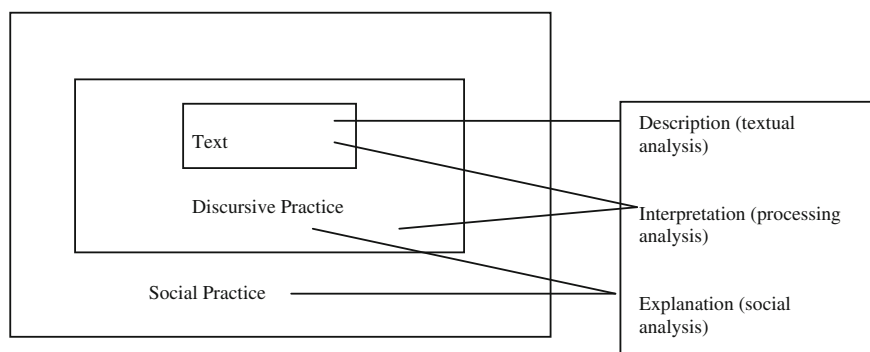


Fig. 2.3 Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for CDA

- Cohesion: how clauses and sentences are linked together as a way to analyse how connectives are used in argumentation or presentation of viewpoints.
- The use of overly polite forms in spoken text, why?
- The use of hedging and mitigating devices when presenting viewpoints (e.g. making suggestions, giving advice to group members)?
- Indirectness in conveying intended message.

In addition, I also draw on Martin and Rose's (2003) discourse analysis theory to identify how attitudinal words were used in the texts to illuminate how interpersonal relationships were represented in the Hong Kong school–university collaboration case study in Chap. 5. For example, I identified the positional and relational sources of attitudinal statements in the texts to analyse how power relations between the teachers and the facilitators were negotiated and managed in the email data.

The second level of analysis is discursive practice. At this level of analysis, I examined what discourse was produced and consumed. Fairclough (1995, p. 134) argues that at this second level, the analysis involves “both detailed moment-by-moment explication of how participants produce and interpret texts, which conversation analysis and pragmatics excel at, and analysis which focuses upon the relationship of the discursive event to the order of discourse, and upon the question of which discursive practices are being drawn upon and in what combinations.” Analysis of discursive practice means examining the specific production, distribution and consumption of a text within the social event. For example, I examined what text production conditions prevail. These are some of the questions I used to guide the analysis of discursive practice at this second level (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002):

- What kinds of processes does a text go through before it is written or spoken, and what changes does it undergo during those processes?
- What intertextual chain of texts is apparent? Has the text appeared in other texts?

- How are the structure and the content of the text formulated?
- How does the writer/speaker want the text to be ‘read’/interpreted?

The third level of analysis is social practice. At this level, the text is examined in the wider context of institutional and social practices such as examining the relationship between social practice and the order of discourse. For example, I examined the way researchers and teachers talked about collaboration and analysed how the texts draw on wider reform, institutional and teacher education discourses currently in operation in the Hong Kong sociocultural context. The following questions guided the analysis of the data as social practice (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002, p. 86):

- What kind of network of discourses does the practice belong to?
- How are the discourses distributed and regulated across the text?
- What kind of institutional and economic conditions is the discursive practice subject?
- What social and cultural theory can shed light upon the social practice in question?

In doing critical discourse analysis, it is useful for the researcher to construct headings that are appropriate and relevant for the research context, but there is not a bounded set of rules on how the analysis should be done or what headings are used. In my framework, I borrowed some of the headings from Fairclough (2003) and Phillips and Jørgensen (2002), and I also added questions of my own, which were relevant to my research context. The sets of guiding questions presented in this section for the three levels of analysis are intended to be a starting point, further questions and headings should emerge as analysis develops.

To illuminate the various tensions and complexities in negotiating school–university collaboration as a social practice, I applied the tools of CDA to trace how beliefs and knowledge, social relations and social identities were discursively embedded in the textual data, for example how the texts support or contest particular social practices of school–university collaboration. I also examined how the school and university educators made sense of the collaborative action research discourse as ‘collaborators’. For example, to examine how professional identity is a position within discourse by analysing how language is constructed and use to position researchers and teachers working together in a CAR project. The analysis aims to illuminate the construction of a particular set of relations between the teachers, researchers, institutions and society (Benwell and Stokoe 2006; Fairclough 1995). To summarise, the textual data were examined in terms of the language, the process for school–university collaboration, and as instances of discursive events in the Hong Kong sociocultural milieu. In the next section, I make explicit what I mean by negotiation of collaboration as systems of beliefs, interpersonal relations and identities in school–university collaboration. The aim is to provide a detailed explanation of how the data were analysed in Chaps. 4–6.

Exploring the Construction of Beliefs in Collaboration in Chap. 4

Examining collaboration as systems of beliefs and knowledge means examining the texts from a representational point of view. The purpose of the approach was to understand how collaboration was represented as an event in the context of the case study. Fairclough (2003) argues that elements of social events are selectively ‘filtered’ by the producers of the texts and they impact on how concretely or abstractly social events are represented. In Chap. 4, I identify what beliefs about collaboration were foregrounded, backgrounded or suppressed by the teachers and researchers in the case study. I also examine which elements of the collaborative action research project were present/absent in the textual data to identify what beliefs and knowledge about collaborative action research were given greater or lesser prominence by the facilitators and teachers (Fairclough 2003). I also examined how collaboration was explained/ legitimised (reasons, causes and purposes) and constructed by the teachers and facilitators. Using Fairclough’s term, the aim was to examine the ‘presence’ of collaboration in the text to see how it was represented and to identify the ways in which language was used to assign meaning to the school–university collaboration experience in the Hong Kong sociocultural context.

Exploring the Negotiation of Interpersonal Relationships in Collaboration in Chap. 5

In Chap. 5, I examine the discursive construction of interpersonal relations in collaborative action research to identify how power was mediated and constituted in the context of this case study (Foucault 1978). To analyse the discursive construction of interpersonal relations, I draw on what Fairclough calls ‘ways of acting’ in the collaborative action research project textual data (Fairclough 2003). Fairclough (2003) states that analysing the ‘ways of acting’ in the text (informing, advising, promising, warning, judgement and so forth) is a way to understand how social relations are enacted. The aim of examining how social relations were enacted and co-constructed by the teachers and facilitators in the texts was to address some of the broader questions about the role of language in constructing collaboration as a social practice in a particular sociocultural context. A major theme surrounding this study is that collaboration operates in a sociopolitical context of competing discourses, and analysing ‘talk’ is a way to identify how these discourses were contested in the textual data. Furthermore, by examining how facilitators and teachers negotiated collaboration in the textual data (e.g. the collaborative action research meeting transcripts and emails), we can begin to understand the distribution and interplay of power within the collaboration relationship, for example, how notions of mutuality

and equity are constructed and contested in collaboration discourse. In the context of this study, power is conceptualised to mean asymmetries between the teachers and researchers in discourse events (Fairclough 2003).

Exploring the Construction of Identities in Collaboration in Chap. 6

A major theme in this study was to examine the complexities of identity formation in school–university collaboration. Johnson (2006, p. 213) points out that “identity is represented and shaped through the social and discursive practices that are available to individuals and groups at particular moments”. In examining the formation of identities in the context of this study, I draw on the Foucauldian understanding of identity—identity in collaboration is perceived to be fluid, transient and institutionally constrained (Clarke 2008; Mills 2003; Walshaw 2007). For example in Chap. 6, I examine how facilitators and the teachers recognised the self and others in the collaborative action research project. Foucault problematised the notion of identity and the politics which surround it. As previously mentioned, analysing identity formation is a central tenet of Foucault’s work. For Foucault, subjectivity and power are intertwined and our identities are constructed through our dialogical relations with others—our subjectivity is not given, but constructed through discourse (Clarke 2008). So in Chap. 6, I examine the interplay of power and identity in the collaborative action research textual data to identify how collaboration identities were constructed, accepted, contested and negotiated (Gee 2005). Thus the framework for analysing identity formation in the context of this study was constructed to examine collaboration identities in terms of how the English language teachers and researchers ‘accounted for themselves’ and others in the school–university partnership project (Chan and Clarke 2014; Clarke 2009; MacLure 2003). For example, how teachers and facilitators ‘authored’ their identities at the different stages of the collaboration process. The theoretical framework aims to show that the processes of identity formation are intricately linked to the discourses and the social contexts that we work within (Clarke 2009). Miller Marsh (2003) describes this as a continual process of ‘fashioning and refashioning our identities by patching together fragments of the discourses to which we are exposed to’ (p. 8). To illustrate, I examined how the teachers’ identities in the Hong Kong collaborative action research project were shaped by the reform discourses which positioned them as ‘technicians’ of reform practices. The analysis of the data also showed the different ways in which the teachers became or contested the identities constructed in the texts. Thus identities in collaboration are partly given and partly negotiated, so examining the co-construction of identities in collaboration practices is a useful way to see how the boundaries between our social and individual identities overlap (Clarke 2009). Chapter 6 illuminates that identity formation for teachers and researchers is highly complex and ambiguous in school–university partnership.

Summary

School–university collaborative research is often constructed in education policy documents in an enticing way and is neatly defined and ‘packaged’ as a meaningful professional development activity conducted by school educators and university researchers working as partners. However, in reality school–university collaboration is frequently characterised by tensions and complexities (Chan 2014; Chan and Clarke 2014; Johnston 2009; Stewart 2006), but there is also currently a lack of studies which examine some of the very real challenges that educators face during the collaboration process. So although school–university is often presented as a useful professional development opportunity in teacher education literature, achieving successful inter-institutional collaboration is not easy. This chapter makes explicit the nature of my engagement with the issues concerning the discursive construction of school–university collaboration as a social practice. I have provided an overview of the theoretical principles I used to problematise the dominant narratives or tropes of collaboration, on which this book is based. I have argued that a CDA theoretical framework and the ideas of Foucault can provide a much needed space for interrogating the discourses and practices of school–university collaboration as a way to ‘debunk’ the grand narratives about professional collaboration in the context of teacher education. The next chapter employs the notion of genealogy to trace the dominant tropes of collaboration in teacher education discourse, and I will trace the origin of collaboration by examining the different forms and meanings the word has taken in different contexts through history.

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