

Group work for autonomy in China:

From the perspective of teacher practice and cognition

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Outline

- Why this research?
- What to find out?
- Where and with whom?
- How?
- What's found out?
- What's next?



Autonomy in China

why

故圣人云：

我无为，而民自化；

我好静，而民自正；

我无事，而民自富；

我无欲，而民自朴。

Laozi (Tao Tzu) (6th C. BC)



Therefore the sage says:

*I **do nothing**, and the people, of **themselves**, are transformed;*

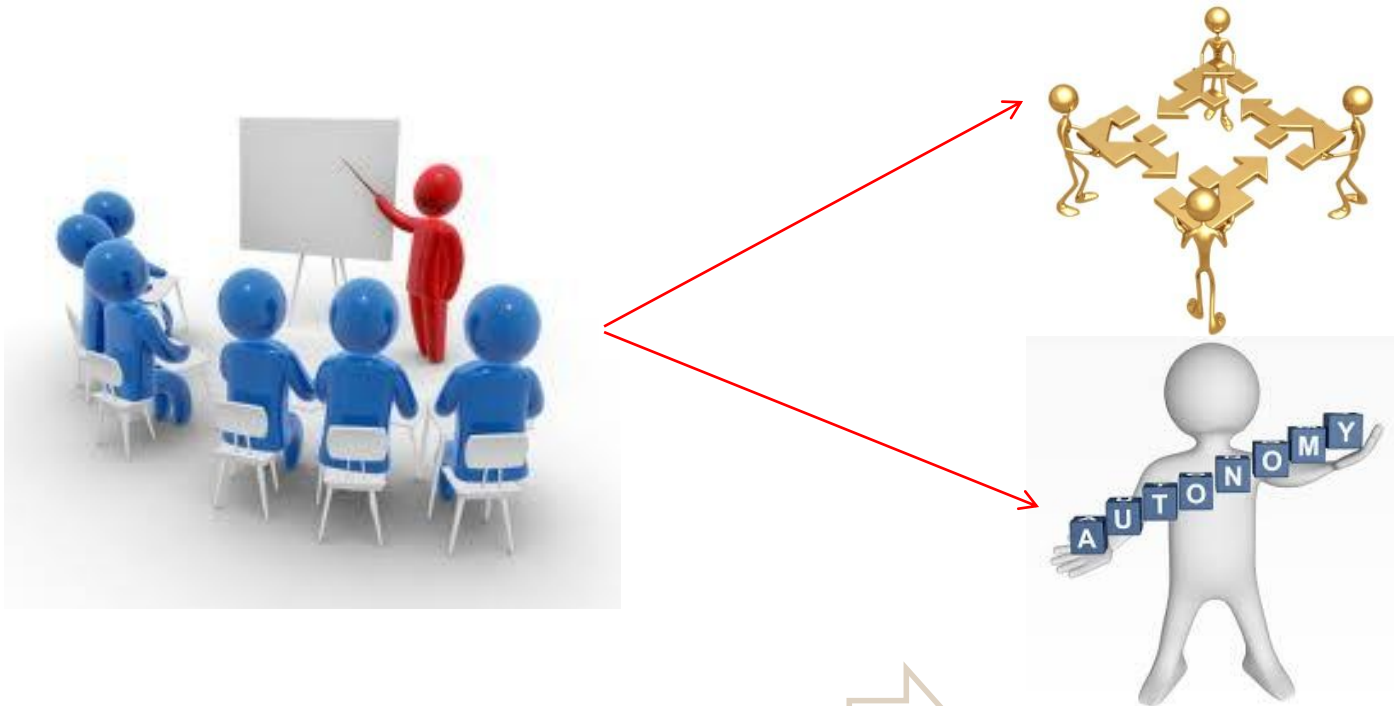
*I **say nothing**, and the people, of **themselves**, are corrected.*

*I **let go control**, and the people, by **themselves**, have all they need;*

*I **let go desire**, and the people, by **themselves**, remain pure and simple.*

why

Autonomy in Chinese curriculum



Not the sage on the stage!



But a guide by the side!



(MoE China, 2001)



新课标
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**New
Curriculum
Standards**

Autonomy in the west

- **Definitions**

- (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Dickinson, 1994; Benson, 1996, 2001)
- *'the ability to take charge of one's own learning'* (Holec, 1981, p. 3)

- **Origins**

- the Council of Europe's Modern Languages Project in 1971
- Rousseau' natural education (cited in Boyd, 1956), Kilpatrick's (1921) 'project method' and Rogers' (1969) people as 'self-actualizing' beings

- **Value to education**

- (Kenny,1993; Little,1995; Benson, 2001; Hurd, 2005)
- *Only when autonomy is practiced, is genuine education happening: anything less is conditioned education.* (Little, 2007)



why

Collaborative group work for autonomy



social
interactive
collaborative

- ‘Bergen definition’ of autonomy
- *‘A capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person’* (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Miliander and Trebbi, 1990, p. 102)
- Kohonen (1992): *Autonomy includes the notion of **interdependence**, i.e. being responsible for one’s own conduct in the social context* (p. 19).
- Little (1996): **collaborative group work** as an effective way to foster autonomy in classroom settings



why

Autonomy and teacher cognition

- *While autonomy has been defined and applied from different theoretical perspectives, **language teachers' views have not been awarded much attention** (Borg and Al-Busaidi, 2012, p. 283).*
- *In the field of teacher education, it is well established that **teachers' beliefs influence their instructional choices**, therefore an understanding of teachers' beliefs needs to be an integral part of initiatives that aim to promote change in what teachers do in the classroom (Wedell, 2009).*



why

Research questions

1. To what extent and in what ways are the teachers **using** group work in their class?
2. How do the teachers **interpret** their practice of using group work to enhance student autonomy?
3. How can the teachers' practice and their interpretation be **explained**?



what

The research setting



- Private
- Established in 2009
- Well-recognized principal
- Expert executive director
- Parents of mid/upper class
- Teachers selected by principal
- Class size 20-36

- *'An extreme and unique case as a **test bed**'* (Robson, 2002, p. 182)
- *If it cannot work here, it is unlikely to work elsewhere.*

where

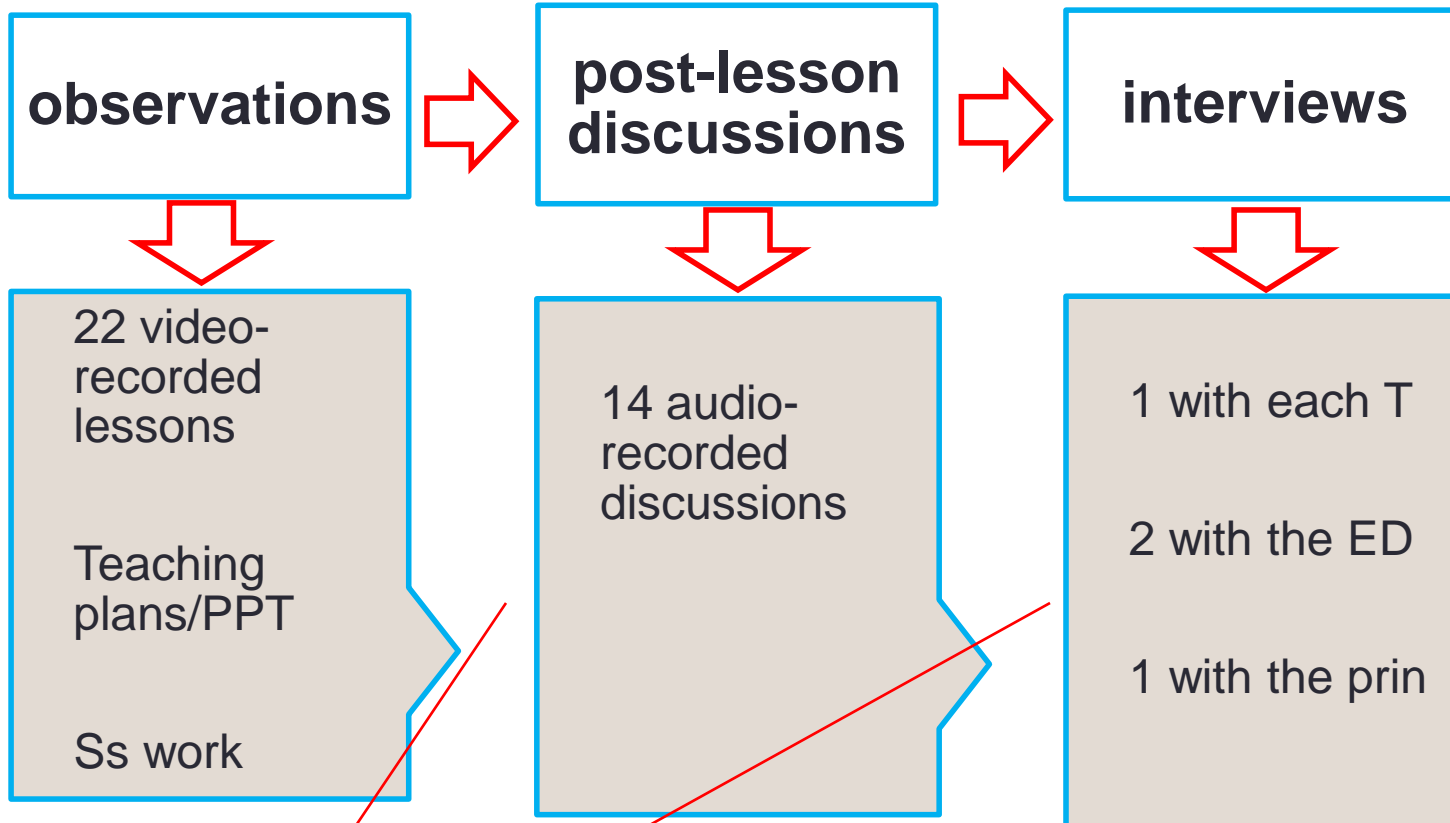
The participants (9 E Ts + ED +Prin)

who

P	G	Q	Ys of T by 2012	Join ZIA since	Previous experience
T1	F	BA	6	2009	Tertiary T
T2	F	BA	11	2011	Tertiary T / T of another school of the Prin
T3	F	BA	6	2012	Private institute T
T4	F	BA	10	2011	High school T
T5	F	BA	5	2010	Secondary school T
T6	F	BA	12	2011	Tertiary T / private institute T & management
T7	M	BA	20	2012	International private institute T & Management
T8	M	BA	5	2009	High school T / secondary school T
T9	F	BA	6	2012	Secondary school T
ED	M	BA	~10	2012	Program leader / deputy principal in a school in south of China
Prin	M	PhD in US			Founder and principal of 3 schools in China / intl dept director in US

Methodology

How



grounded analysis
(Charmaz, 2006)

**Let data talk,
and themes
emerge.**

Findings_1

What's
found out

1. To what extent and in what ways was group work used in class?

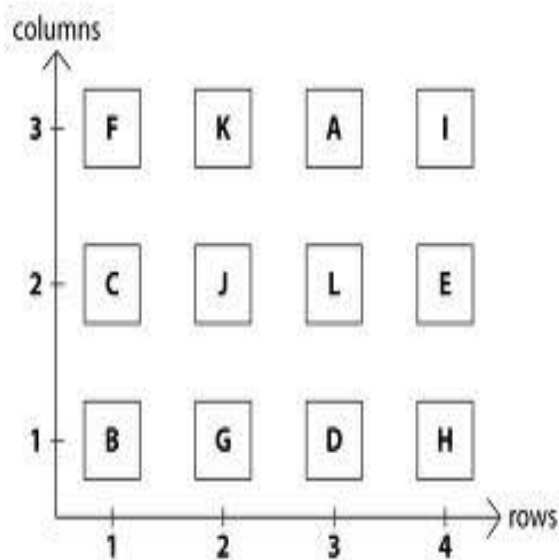
1.1 *All the observed classes were organized in groups;*

- 4-6 ss in each group
- mixed levels in terms of overall academic records
- Mainly home teachers' job to do the group division (who in which group)
- Groups remained stable across subjects and over a period of time (a month, a term, or longer)

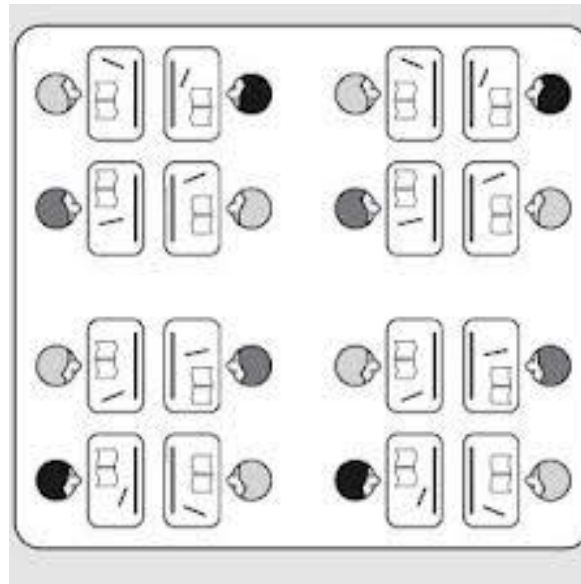
What's
found out

1.2 Group was used as classroom management unit;

- Ss were grouped and numbered within groups (T1- T9)
- Ss were awarded bonus points for individual and/or group work



in-rows seating
(T1, T7)



in-circles seating
(T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T8, T9)

Group	Points
G1	+1+3...
G2	+2+3...
G3	+1...
G4	+4+1...

Group points
(T1, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8)

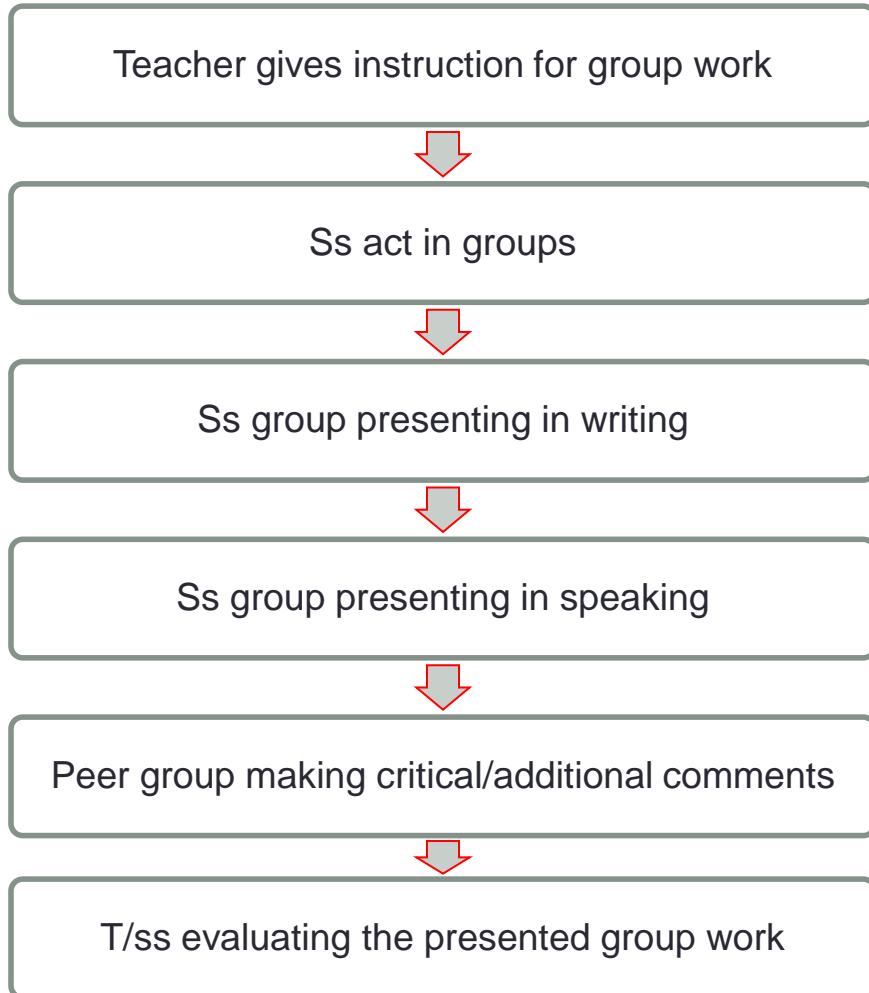
1.3 A variety of activities were conducted under the name of group work at different phases of a lesson period;

Ss were asked ... in groups

- **to peer check the grammar rules**
 - **to find answers to the questions**
 - **to fill in the chart**
 - **to drill the sentence patterns**
 - **to share with each the timelines**
 - **to discuss the given questions**
 - **to talk and guess**
 - **to make a dialogue**
 - **to make a story**
 - **to conduct a survey**
 - **to do gap-filling exercises**
 - **to rewrite a paragraph**
 - **to peer review each other's writing**
 - **to identify new phrases**
 - **to summarize grammar rules**
 - **to peer teach**
-
- recapping
- before new input
- during new input
- after new input
- after-class group work

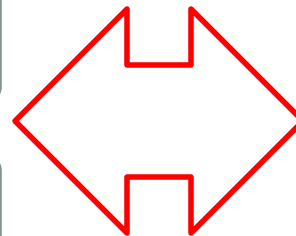
- **1.4** *The way in which each activity was conducted varied greatly;*

It can be as complicated as this ...



OR

as simple as this ...



T: ... you can discuss in groups...

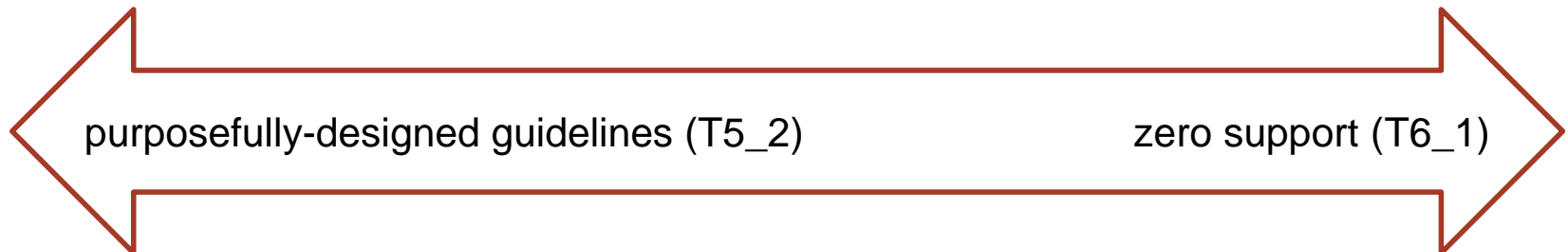
SS: (silence for 30")

T: OK, let's come back...

- **1.5** *The extent to which ss take control in the group work diverged markedly;*



- **1.6** *The way teachers facilitated group work differed considerably.*



Findings_2

What's
found out

2. How do the teachers **interpret** their practice of using group work to enhance student autonomy?

- *2.1 How have the teachers been coping with group work?*

(school promotion starting from August 2012)

- *Had been using it before the school project, had been exploring and adjusting (T1);*
- *Used it → disliked it and gave up → resumed it as required → messy → getting better under ED's guide → sure better and better (T4);*
- *Resistant at the beginning → found sth good → indeed sth good (T2);*
- *Started it as required and loved it (T3, T6);*
- *Started it as required → believing it must be good, exploring and adjusting (T5, T9);*
- *Started as required (Do as Romans do when in Rome) → hard to say good or not in a short time (T7);*
- *Started as required → still not used to it (T8).*

- *2.2 Does group work lead towards autonomy?*

- Yes, when...

- *There is already some autonomy (T2, T6);*
- *Ss think independently first (T6);*
- *T provides with good guide (T2).*

- Yes, because ...

- *Ss like group work and they are more engaged (T1, T3, T4, T5);*
- *Weak ss ask for help from strong ss more easily than from ts (T1);*
- *ss want more points for their group, so they try harder (T1, T4);*
- *When helping others in groups, they feel like 'teachers' (T3);*
- *Weak ss work harder to contribute to group in order to be recognized or at least not be excluded (T1, T6).*

- No, when...

- *Ss chat off topic and distract each other (T1, T7);*
- *Lazy ss turn to others for answers before thinking hard (T7);*
- *Ss are not interested (T9).*

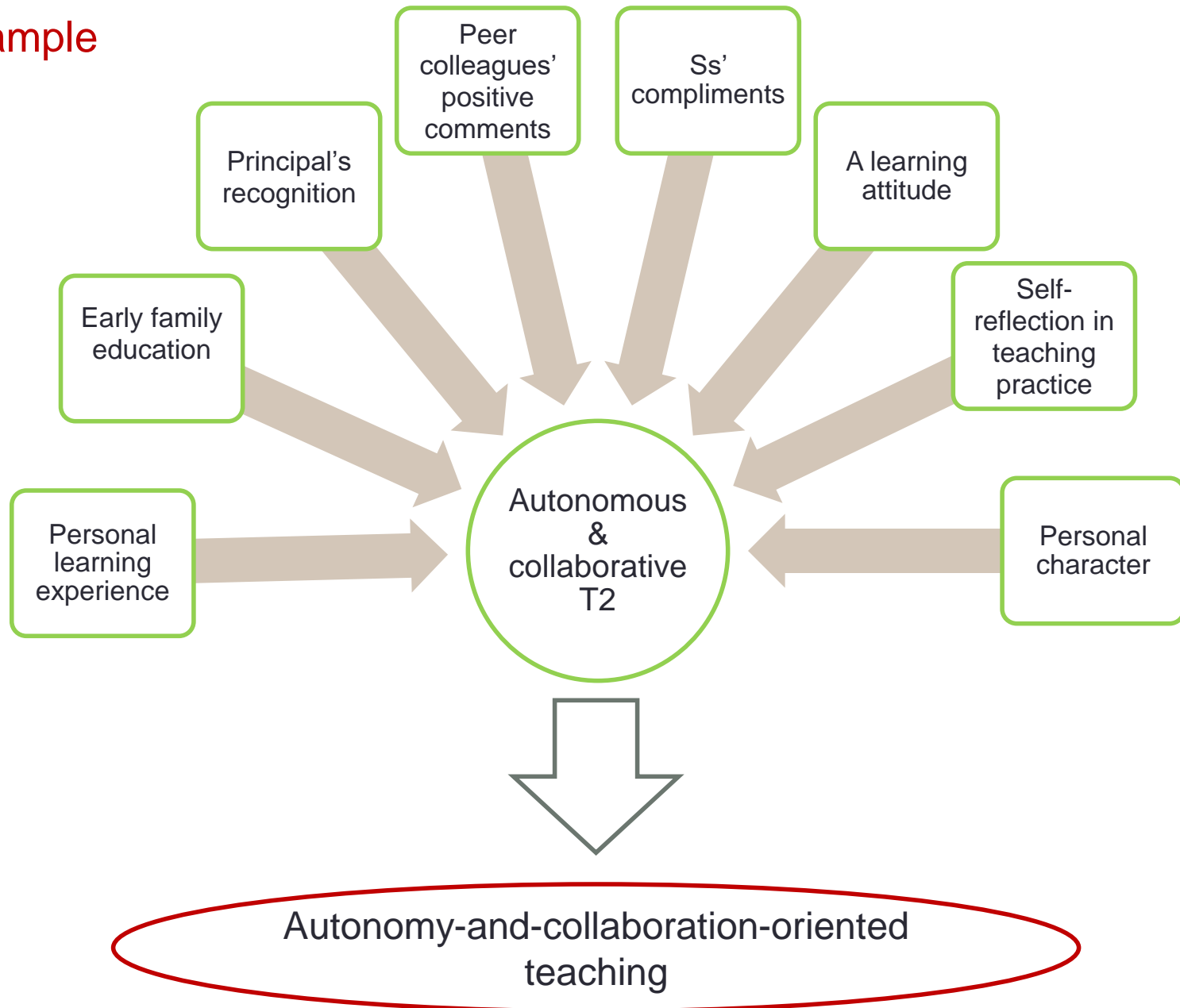
Findings_3

What's
found out

A tentative explanation between Ts' practice and cognition

- More convergences in confident teachers (T2)
- Divergences in less confident teachers (T5, T3)
- Divergences in over-confident teachers (T6)

An example



Issues for further thinking and action

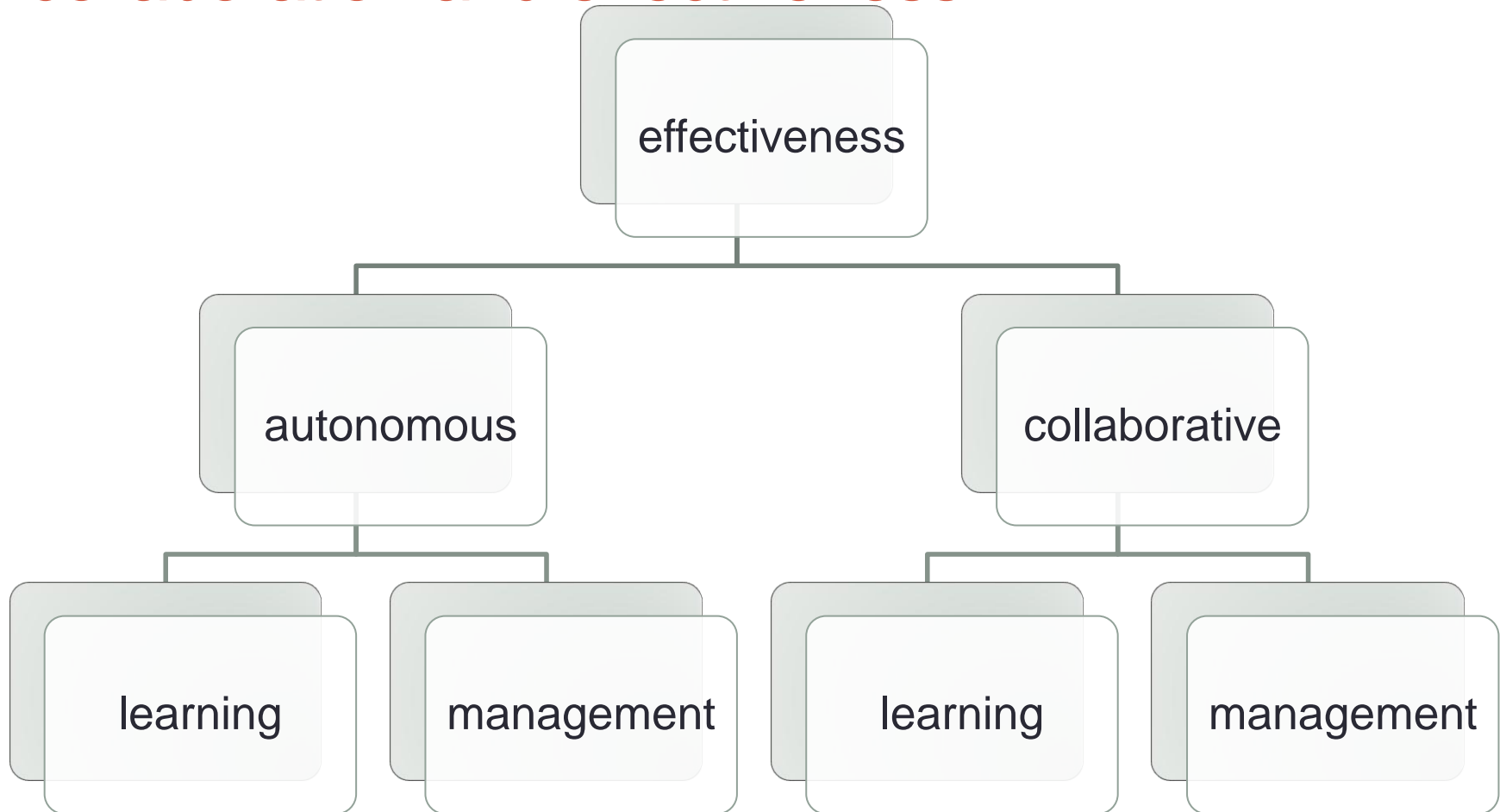
What's next

- Superficial changes and real changes
- From teacher collaboration and autonomy to student collaboration and autonomy

References

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The school project: Towards autonomy, collaboration and effectiveness



The suggested model

