Life History
and Collective Memory as
Methodological Strategies:
Studying Teacher Professionalism

By Ivor Goodson & Pik Lin Choi

The life history method, which achieved a prominent position in the Chicago tradition of sociological research in the early 1920s, has been widely adopted for educational inquiries since the 1980s (Casey, 1995). Ball and Goodson (1985) pioneered a series of studies on teachers' professional lives and careers. Broadfoot and others (1987) in their comparative study explored the ways institutional structures, ideological traditions and policy initiatives mediate teacher thinking. Other life history researchers unveiled female teachers' oppressed experiences in the current of postmodernity (Choi & Tang, 2005; Middleton, 1989; Nelson, 1992). The power of the life history method in illuminating subjective teacher experiences in social historical contexts has made it 'probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world (Dhunpath, 2000, p.544).

In this regard, we made an attempt to employ the

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life history method to study teacher professionalism, an area of concern which has been increasingly tied up with educational quality and global competition at the turn of the twenty-first century. Individual life history has been useful in highlighting the uniqueness of personal trajectories in the institutional contexts. Nevertheless, as our study of twelve beginning teachers[1] gradually unfolded, we were challenged by a number of shared patterns of teacher professionalism manifested among the informants. This led us to experiment in using the collective memory method.

This paper aims at explaining why the combined methods of life history and collective memory are considered useful in analyzing teachers' professionalism. We first give a brief account of the study, which provides the background for the understanding of the methodological innovation. Then a few examples are given to illustrate how data analysis was carried out both at an individual and a collective group level. Finally we discuss the potentials of the combined use of life history and collective memory in educational research.

Development of the Study Design

The Life History Method

Our study is situated in recurrent context of concern about the quality of education and concern about teacher professionalism. There has been a general impression that teachers fall short of societal expectation in playing their professional roles (Choi, 2001). Thus we were interested in a systematic inquiry into the features of teachers' professionalism. The study was initially launched employing the life history method because it was deemed powerful for the analysis of individual beginners' subjective career experiences and the situational responses of the self to daily interactional contingencies (Denzin, 1989). We intended to gather some knowledge of what influenced the development of teachers' professionalism after they entered teaching and what contributed to the gaps. We purposefully allowed in the sampled primary school teachers variables such as initial commitment to teaching, gender, teaching subjects and types of schools in order that rich biographical and contextual data could be collected. The twelve teachers, who were classified into three groups according to their initial commitment[2] to teaching before entering the profession, were followed through in the two-year study. Four research questions guided the inquiry.

1. What are the societal expectations of a professional teacher as expressed in public discourses?

2. What characterized the teachers' concepts and practices as a professional teacher in their beginning years?

3. What are the factors contributing to the professional socialization of the teachers and what are the dynamics involved in the professional socialization processes?

4. What are the similarities and differences, if any, between the societal expectations and the realities of teachers' professionalism as a collective group?

Documentary analysis, which involved a number of widely representative policy documents related to teaching and school education in Hong Kong, was conducted to identify the public discourses on teacher professionalism (Council on Professional Conduct in Education, 1995; Education Commission, 1992; Education Commission, 1996; Education Commission, 1997; Education Commission, 2000; Education Department, 1997; Education Department, 1998). The understanding of teachers' professionalism was to be inferred from the life history interviews and documentary analysis. Five face-to-face semi-structured life history interview-conversations, which lasted for about one and a half hours each, were carried out with the informants in the two years.[3] An average of four telephone interview-conversations was conducted with most informants between the face-to-face interviews. Contextual data, including the informants' annual journal writing; interviews with the colleagues of the informants; questionnaires completed by the informants' students; and information about the novices' workplace contexts, were collected.

Life History and Collective Memory: The Combined Methods

When we examined the life stories of the informants, we came to an understanding of the twelve beginners' teacher professionalism as articulated and as career practice at an individual level by using the life history method. The rich narratives allowed us to see the interactive dynamics between teacher professionalism and the beginners' upbringing, educational background, initial commitment, immediate workplace as well as the wider social historical contexts. As data analysis went on, clear patterns of teacher professionalism were found in the career of the twelve teachers. This pointed to the need of analysis at a collective level. We became aware that the subjective nature of life history method was inadequate to take us further in explaining the inter-subjectivity of teacher professionalism manifested in various groups of teachers. The question of what constituted the collective similarities and differences with regard to these teachers' professional practices stimulated our search for a new analytical framework. The next sections detail the emergence of collective memory work as an epistemological and methodological tool, which was followed by a brief introduction of the findings these methods unveil.

The Epistemological Origin of Collective Memory

Qualitative research stresses understanding meaning within contexts. The career stories as remembered by the beginners are collective memories of culture and context as well as individual experience. Heschel's work (1965) sheds light on the epistemological and methodological power of memories.

> Ultimate meaning is not grasped once and for all in the form of a timeless idea, acquired once and for all. Securely preserved in conviction. It is not simply given.

> It comes upon us as an intimation that comes and goes. *What is left behind is a memory, and a commitment to that memory.* (Italics are the authors' emphasis) Our words do not describe it, our tools do not wield it. But sometimes it seems as if our very being were its description, its secret tool. The anchor of meaning resides in an abyss, deeper than the reach of despair. (1965, p.79-80)

In this sense life stories told by the beginners are memories (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). What individual teachers remembered are significant episodes and such engagement with the past indicates an ongoing search for the understanding of their selves and the environment (Thomson & Holland, 2005). Shared memories found among the teachers pointed to the existence of different versions of collective memories, which could be understood in relation to these beginners' professional identities. The close relationship between memory and identity has been clearly explained by Maurice Halbwachs in his 1950 book *The Collective Memory*:

> we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually re-produced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. (Coser, 1992, p.47)

Putting this in the context of teachers' professional socialization, the memories of the beginners were not merely random accounts of their life experience, but constituted their interpretations of what kind of teachers they were. Shotter (1990) highlighted the socially constructed nature of remembering. As such, the recollected accounts of the teachers were not merely a description, but an aid to their perception. In other words, the recollections are the lived realities as experienced by the beginners since remembering is "'embodied' within us as a part of who we are" (Shotter, 1990, p.135). Orr (1990) further related storytelling of community members to identity and community memory. He found that stories served to celebrate with themselves and other people's identity, that is, the stories show that they are members of the community and contributors to the shared community memory. Moreover, collective life stories do not occur in a social vacuum but are embedded in collective social conditions. Coser (1992) noted that people draw on a specific context to remember and recreate their past. The novices, like each of us as collective beings, are subject to shared opportunities and constraints at a particular time and space. Thus the use of collective memory as a conceptual frame helps us see the shared patterns of teachers' identities as professional teachers and their relations with the contexts in which they were collectively situated.

On the other hand, the way teachers interacted with their immediate school communities was mediated by the novice's different versions of collective remembering about teaching. These versions could be related to the teachers' biographical trajectories or cultural configuration (Ho, 1996; Nias, 1989). Halbwachs explains clearly the interactive relationship between family as an institution, and the wider society.

> Each family ends up with its own logic and traditions, which resemble those of the general society in that they derive from it and continue to regulate the family's

relations with general society. But this logic and these traditions are nevertheless distinct because they are little by little pervaded by the family's particular experiences and because their role is increasingly to insure the family's cohesion and to guarantee its continuity. (Coser, 1992: p.83)

By employing collective memory as a conceptual tool, we were able to uncover how teachers from different 'families' of teacher beliefs or leading dissimilar life trajectories, were engaged in the negotiation of their identities in the process of professional socialization.

Research Findings Unveiled by the Combined Methods

A key feature of qualitative research is that the researchers do not enter the study with pre-set hypotheses or theories in mind to prove or disprove. But rather, they engage in dialectic rather than linear process of describing, analyzing and interpreting the empirical evidence (Wolcott, 1994). We studied the life stories of the twelve informants in contexts and made constant comparison across different cases or within the same case at different phases of the study. Various themes emerged from the data when the workplace contexts were analyzed. The structural contexts in different school groups and across these sampled school groups constitute certain collective contexts, which were considered to have contributive impact on the collective memories of different groups of teachers.

On the other hand, the life stories of two pairs of informants who worked in the same schools also revealed to us that individual beginners could have different lived experiences in similar workplace contexts. The career stories as remembered by the beginners, and represented in different versions of collective memories, illuminated their negotiation of professional identities in their early professional lives. The collective memory method fitted in well to illuminate how variations of the beginners' self-identities interplayed with the workplace contexts in the process of professional socialization, thus leading to variations in their professional practices and teacher professionalism.

Four axes of teacher professionalism were then conceptualized and these will be described as selectively exemplified in a late section which provides case illustration. The realties of teachers' professionalism were compared with the societal expectations as projected in the public discourses. In consideration of the focus of this paper, we will not go into details the procedures related to the findings of the gaps between societal expectations and the teachers' professionalism. But rather, we focus on the processes and techniques that enable us to understand the features of the teachers' professionalism both at an individual and a collective level.

Combined Methods in Action: Processes and Techniques

Methodologically a study with life history and collective memory methods involves subjective/ inter-subjective as well as contextual/ inter-contextual data

interpretation. Life history and collective memory studies involve a relatively large number of informants, thus a computer package, Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing and Searching and Theorizing (NUD.IST) was employed to facilitate systematic data storage and analysis. Data analysis of the combined-method study consists of three cycles, which involve potential innovative combination of the techniques of categorization, constant comparison, translation and synthesis respectively (Doyle, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Noblit & Hare, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Categorization

The life stories of the informants collected at each stage were transcribed verbatim. Then the texts were categorized into broad categories. This preliminary categorization was similar to the open coding of the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). When data were transcribed into text, relevant information was clustered into categories with a code. Texts might go under more than one code when they were considered to have multiple perspectives. This helped systematic data analysis. The creation of the first level codes such as 'Biography' and 'Workplace' was informed both by previous theoretical understanding of professional socialization, the researchers' contextual understanding as life historians, as well as appropriate emergence from the data. As data collection proceeded the first level codes were further refined, in accordance with their dimension and properties, to build up the second level codes such as 'Biography/Family,' 'Biography/Teacher Education,' 'Workplace/ Principal Leadership,' and 'Workplace/ Colleague Relationship' when data appeared to increase in diversity and complexity. In some cases, the categories were even extended further to the third level (For example, Workplace /Colleague/ Support and Workplace/ Colleague/ Dispute). Chunks of verbatim were then stored in NUD.IST. for easy retrieval and data display. The life histories of each of the twelve informants, which involved a contextual understanding of the life stories told by the beginners, were formulated and presented by twelve informant profiles. By the end of the first cycle of data analysis, the unique portrayal of each of the twelve informants gradually took shape.

Constant Comparison and Translation

Constant comparison and translation characterized the second cycle of data analysis. The life history method allowed us to capture the uniqueness of each informant when we built up the informant profiles. As constant comparison was made possible between the twelve informants with the assistance of the NUD.IST, we noticed distinctive axes of teacher professionalism in the collective memories of the informants. The process of 'translation' took place. Noblit and Hare (1988) provided a precise explanation of the strategy of translation:

> In its simplest form, translation involves treating the accounts as analogies: One program is like another except . . . On the other hand; translation is more involved than an analogy. Translations are especially unique syntheses, because they protect

the particular, respect holism, and enable comparison. An adequate translation maintains the central metaphors and/or concepts of each account in their relation to other key metaphors or concepts in that account. It also compares both the metaphors or concepts and their interactions in one account with the metaphors or concepts and the interaction in the other accounts. (p.28)

Translation of the twelve cases involves collaborative interpretation between the researchers and the researched. When sections of information were compared and translated, both commonalities and uniqueness were identified. We observed that certain exemplary aspects of teacher professionalism, such as the nature of teacher commitment and coping strategies were identified from their decisions and actions made in their professional lives. Analogies of teacher professionalism were established as a result of translation and the distinctive features of four axes of teacher professionalism were differentiated.

Synthesis

The final cycle of data analysis is achieved by means of synthesis. By the time we arrived at the four axes of teacher professionalism, we had groups of life histories which were actually collective memories. Collective memory researchers then took the role of a meta-ethnographer to make sense of the four versions of collective memories through constant comparison and synthesis. Synthesis, as elaborated by Noblit and Hare, is enabled when researchers make comparisons between sets of large translations to examine if types of translations or if some metaphors and/or concepts are able to encompass those of other accounts. Then the researchers are able to distinguish whether it is a 'same practice hypothesis' or 'different practice hypothesis' and subsequently created an explanatory 'puzzle' (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Turner, 1980).

To explain this process with the present study, it is when translation differentiated the professional practices that a need for the explanation to the differences took place. In other words, we studied the collective memories to find out the factors contributing to the informants' variation in professionalism. Through constant comparison, we switched to and fro from the contextual to the inter-contextual analysis, as well as from the subjective and inter-subjective data analysis to identify the collective contexts for the collective memories. By means of synthesis, we found some answers to the 'puzzle' we sought to explain, i.e., what contributed to the manifestation of different axes of teacher professionalism.

Unlike positivist research, which aggregates data for analysis, synthesis in qualitative studies is achieved by induction and interpretation. When the collective memories of the twelve informants were compared against each other, the interpretations of different informants represent multi-perspectives of social reality. Noblit and Hare equated the power of synthesis of different cases with Geertz's (1993) view that interpretive explanation helps us understand how things might connect and interact, thus holistic meaning can be drawn from the multiple perspectives. Through the process of synthesis, we were able to attend to the individuals' subjec-

tivity as well as the inter-subjectivity as illuminated by their collective memories. This finally led to a holistic understanding, which explained the puzzle.

Combined Methods in Action: Case Illustrations

We now give some examples to elaborate how the combined methods actually work out down to the substantive findings. A couple of exemplary cases are selected to illustrate the data analysis processes through which the axes of teacher professionalism are arrived at and how the factors contributing to the similarities and differences of teachers' professionalism were identified.

Identifying Different Axes of Teacher Professionalism

Categorization

In the first cycle of data analysis, the process of categorization and writing up the informant profiles helped us understand the personal and professional lives of each teacher in an organized way. Understanding is an inter-subjective, emotional process (Denzin, 1997). Categorization as the foundation of a holistic understanding of the informants' personal and professional lives involves inter-subjectivity between the researchers and the researched. In the interview-conversations, the teachers were eager to talk about events that were significant to them. With the collaboration of the researchers, the informants were able to provide contextual information related to their workplace and other relevant personal lived experiences. The textual data, like those shown in Table 1, of each informant were coded after each interview and assembled in the computer under four broad areas, namely, biography, workplace, perception of teacher professionalism and career events.

Summaries and Informant Profiles

Summaries highlighting each informant's critical career events and related contextual information were then drawn after each phase of data analysis. They informed the next phase of data collection and led to the compilation of the informant profiles. Twelve informant profiles recording the unique life histories of each beginner were established alongside the coded verbatim. This allowed cross-referencing among the raw data, the informant profiles and the coded chunks in the NUD.IST all the way through the three-data analysis processes. We are able to preserve the uniqueness and complexities of each informant's life histories for two reasons. First, the data stored in the NUD.IST kept the unabridged details of the informants' utterance. Second, the informant profiles organized under the four broad areas provided us a holistic understanding of individual informants' life trajectories in the socio-historical contexts.

Constant Comparison and Translation

When we examined the informants' life histories through the informant profiles,

Table 1. Categorization.

Text	Codes
(Sue, Interview 3) Now I understand that the most important thing is not to say anything. Even when people ask for your opinions, you shouldn't say too much or make suggestions.	Career Events/ Coping
(Carol, Interview 5) The change is to become more tolerant and to accept the reality. I may lower my expectations over time.	Career Events/ Coping
(Jane, Interview 3) ...the procedures of my teaching were like this - I spoke an English sentence, then I wrote the meaning in Chinese on the blackboard. This was to help the students understand what I'd said. After I'd written down the meaning in Chinese, I rubbed it off as soon as possible, as I was afraid that someone might find out what I'd done.	Career Events/ Coping
(Frank, Interview 5) Sometimes, I seize the chance and talk to the students in the lessons about what I've learned in the university. This helps me revise those stuffs in the exams. I'd say I take advantage of those opportunities. After all, it's also a chance for me to see if those things work for the students.	Career Events/ Coping

we noticed certain commonalities and diversities among the beginners. Then we began the second cycle of systematic data analysis, by means of constant comparison and translation. As educators and researchers, we made sense of the twelve informants' lived experiences both as insiders and outsiders. Translation resulted in the formulation of four axes of teacher professionalism with distinctive features. They were coined as 'Teacher Professionalism of The Successful, The Suffering, The Strategic and The Struggling.'

'The Successful' showed satisfaction with their progressive professional learning. They were able to negotiate their roles in a productive way. Teacher professionalism as displayed by 'The Successful' was an enhancement of professional knowledge in the school communities. They gradually developed a commitment toward teaching as a career. Teacher professionalism of 'The Suffering,' however, was characterized by unfulfilled goal of service ethics to pupils. They were forced to comply in the workplace. Restricted participation in the school among 'The Suffering' was an attempt to preserve personal values in teaching. There was developing detachment to the workplace. The collective memories of 'The Strategic' were dominated by strategic compliance. Teacher professionalism of 'The Strategic' appeared to fulfill accountability as expected by the public but with problematic service ethics. They attached to the workplace for self-interest. 'The Struggling' were filled with constant principled deliberation in their role negotiations. Their professionalism was distinguished by

their attachment to professional accountability and principled service ethics. They were gradually developing a commitment to teaching as a profession.

Below we describe, as an example, the career events of four informants, Sue, Jane, Carol, and Frank to illustrate how translation worked through texts to unfold two different versions of collective memories and the conceptualization of the professionalism of 'The Suffering' (the cases of Sue and Carol) and 'The Strategic' (the cases of Jane and Frank).

Sue and Jane began their teaching lives in the Jone's Primary School but we saw them fall into different axes of teacher professionalism. A critical career event related to lesson revision with students for the school examinations illuminates these diversities. As the academic achievement of the students was highly stressed in the Jone's Primary School and students were ranked in a league table within their respective grades, many teachers drilled the test items with the students. Both Jane and Sue conducted revision with the students before the examinations. Yet it was Sue who was so 'unlucky' to be caught, and was accused to have breached 'the code of professional conduct'. As a result, Sue received a warning letter from the school. Jane and Sue performed exactly the same practice in revising test items with the students by means of worksheets. Yet Jane's revision act was not 'discovered' and no disciplinary measures were taken against her. Jane attributed her 'narrow escape' to luck and Sue's unfortunate experience to 'having offended somebody' in the school. Pondering the situation afterwards, Sue also believed that her experience was a penalty for her expressiveness as a new entrant in the school.

> We (Sue and the other new recruits who received warning letters) like to express our opinions and ask questions. So other colleagues paid attention to us…At the very beginning of the academic year, I thought I could share my ideas in the meet- ings. (Workplace/ Feelings & Concerns/ Stress—Sue, Interview 2)

Biographical data showed that Sue was an assertive person who is active to raise questions and seek help from people. However she perceived the inappropriateness of such practice after working in the school for half a year.

> When I'm in a new environment, I tend to ask questions. I used to ask someone first when I don't understand. But here people may take me as a trouble- maker. This is the worst of all . . . Now I understand that the most important thing is not to say anything. Even when people ask for your opinions, you shouldn't say too much or make suggestions. (Career Events/ Coping/ Compliance—Sue, Interview 3)

Sue decided to leave the school, physically, at the end of the first year teaching. In fact she emotionally withdrew from the school community by remaining silent in the workplace after she received her warning letter. She chose to stay away from the senior colleagues as far as possible and even did her marking in an empty classroom rather than the staffroom with two other colleagues. Sue's restricted participation to the school community and her detachment to the school was obvious to us.

> We don't want to stay in the Staffroom as we are awfully worried that we may say something wrong. The atmosphere there is suffocating and scaring. It's good to join this school for fortifying oneself, but one year is enough. (Career Events/Restricted Participation; Career Events/Commitment—Sue, Interview 3)

Sue's career experience was better understood with more contextual data. She was heavily involved in the coaching of the school basketball team for inter-school competitions in the second semester. Subsequently she was not able to pay equal attention to the teaching of Chinese Language for her own class.

> I was exhausted after extensive coaching every day. It was so hot in the afternoon that I really wanted to sleep. But I couldn't and must finish marking students' exercise books. I kept marking and marking and didn't have enough time to prepare the Chinese lesson well. My Primary Five class students who I teach both Chinese and PE are very loving. Some girls tried to cheer me up when we got the first runners-up in the basketball competition. I love them so much but I feel sorry for them. The lessons were not well planned. Physically I just feel worn out. (Career Events/ Service Ideal—Sue, Interview 3)

Sue's account revealed that she considered herself being unable to fulfill her service ideal. Sue' professional experiences were permeated with helplessness and a desire for withdrawal. By means of constant comparison, we found that these features, together with others, were also evident in the life stories of some other informants. Carol's case guided us to see inter-subjectively the professional lives of 'The Suffering' novices, and the creation of the translation—Professionalism of 'The Suffering.'

The school where Carol started her teaching was also intensively involved in educational innovations. The Principal promoted a caring school climate and discouraged strict disciplinary measures. Carol had difficulties in dealing with the unruly behaviour of the students. She found herself helpless as the Discipline Master was not supportive to inexperienced teachers. He told Carol directly that it was she who would be held accountable to the parents for the behaviour of her classes. Carol was overwhelmed by the fear of having accidents in her Physical Education lessons. Carol was disturbed, from time to time, by nightmares of being prosecuted by the parents.

In addition to student discipline, Carol also felt helpless to cope with students' diverse learning needs in the way she expected herself to do.

> Among the thirty students, there are some who can't catch up and it always seems that they're dreaming in class, and don't know what they're doing. They're quite helpless and it's very difficult for them to pay attention in the class. It seems that they don't want to be there and they can't learn at all. (Workplace/ Feelings & Concerns/ Stress—Carol, Interview 5)

> I always think if I can help them one by one after school, they can benefit more than just sitting in the class; this can help more…But there're so many of them that each of them falls far behind from the class and I don't know what to do. The change is to become more tolerant and to accept the reality. I may lower my expectations over time. (Career Events/ Service Ideal; Career Events/ Coping/ Compliance —Carol, Interview 5)

Carol wished she could join the Discipline Committee to help establishing a school ethos that was conducive to learning. She also hoped that the Subject Panel Chairperson would reduce the curriculum contents for those less able students. However, she felt isolated and was reluctant to take action.

> My level of acceptance is higher now. It's difficult to change. Even if I've changed, the school will still not change! There'll only be a change if the Principal and the middle management are changed . . . I prefer doing private tuition and teach those who are really interested in learning. (Career Events/ Coping/ Compliance —Carol, Interview 4; Career Event/ Commitment—Carol, Interview 4)

Constant comparison facilitated us to see inter-subjectivity across cases and we were able to identify the similarities with regard to the stressors and emotional responses between Carol and Sue. Both beginners shared a similar difficulty in gaining participation in the school community and did not have support from their senior colleagues when they had problems. As shown in Table 2, the responses of Sue and Carol towards the work situation were similar. Both of them felt obliged to change their expectations or behaviors. Sue became reluctant to inquire or express views whereas Carol forced herself to live with the fact that she could not help her students catch up with learning. The coping strategy they adopted was characterized by involuntary compliance.

On the other hand, constant comparison reveals diversities. We observed that Jane was also caught in a variety of problematic situations but she approached them differently. The school intended to promote an image of 'high' expectations in English. It had the English syllabus one grade more advanced than other schools and adopted the 'all English in English lesson' policy. At the very beginning, Jane was tempted to supplement the lessons with some Chinese. Yet she soon made an adjustment after her Subject Panel Chairperson told her that the Principal was keen on monitoring teacher performance by patrolling in the corridors.

> It might be that one of my Subject Panel Chairs has reported to the Principal that I didn't speak all English during English lessons . . . Another Chair alerted me of the situation. After this, I use English all the time throughout the lessons no matter whether I could express accurately or fluently. Although some students looked at me with puzzle, I kept speaking in English. And the procedures of my teaching were like this—I spoke an English sentence, then I wrote the meaning in Chinese on the blackboard. This was to help the students understand what I'd said. After I'd written down the meaning in Chinese, I rubbed it off as soon as possible, so that nobody could find out what I've done. (Career Events/ Coping/ Strategic Compliance; Workplace/Colleague Relationship—Jane, Interview 3)

In the respect of student achievements, Jane understood the implications for her and her students if they had a high failing rate in the examination league table. To be answerable to the parents and the school, Jane adopted similar strategies as what had been practiced by many other colleagues in the school.

> Fewer students failed in the final test and the exam. Before the exam, I had revision

Table 2. Translation.

Codes	Constant Comparison	Translation
Career Event' Coping	Now I understand that the most important thing is not to say anything. Even when people ask for your opinions, you shouldn't say too much or make suggestions. (Sue, Interview 3) – Compliance; Restricted participation	Professionalism of The Suffering
	The change is to become more tolerant and to accept the reality I may lower my expectations over time. (Carol, Interview 5) – Compliance; Unfulfilled service ethics	
	...the procedures of my teaching were like this - I spoke an English sentence, then I wrote the meaning in Chinese on the blackboard. This was to help the students understand what I'd said. After I'd written down the meaning in Chinese, I rubbed it off as soon as possible, as I was afraid that someone might find out what I'd done. (Jane, Interview 3)- Strategic Compliance; Distorted accountability	Professionalism of The Strategic
	Sometimes, I seize the chance and talk to the students in the lessons about what I've learned in the university. This helps me revise those stuffs in the exams. I'd say I take advantage of those opportunities. After all, it's also a chance for me to see if those things work for the students. (Frank, Interview 5) Strategic Compliance; Distorted service ethics	

them. I asked them to stay behind during the recesses. Sometimes I even didn't teach them music during the music lesson but revised English with them. (Career Events/Coping/Strategic Compliance—Jane, Interview 3)

Jane taught her lesson by speaking in English but writing the translation on the board. This coping strategy kept her from administrative penalty and seemingly helped her students get a better understanding of the lessons. In a situation that seemed to satisfy all parties, the learning opportunities of the students were misshapen. In the case of the school-mandated medium of instruction in English lessons, it seems that

the teacher was concerned about the learning of the students. However, the quality of student learning suffered considerably. What made their teacher professionalism different from that of the others was that they handled the discrepancies pragmatically, which led to distorted accountability and service ethics.

Teacher professionalism of 'The Strategic' shared similar characteristics with 'The Suffering' in the respect that the beginners were conscious of the unfavorable aspects of the working conditions of their schools. However, they differed in their subsequent actions. Sue and Carol would have preferred leaving their schools had the employment opportunities been better. Jane had no less criticism about her school than Sue or Carol. However, she decided to stay in the unsatisfying schools with a positive outlook. Ever since the time she signed the contract, she kept a positive perspective of having obtained a teaching post in a famous school near her home. Although she cried, with mixed feelings of fear, doubt and worry when she described the fact that three other teachers received warning letters from the Principal, she decided not to take a transfer to another school, as Sue chose to do.

> Just like I said last year, I'm not the kind of person who can adapt to a new environment and change easily. I have to attend many courses during these years. I realize that I need more time for sleep. I don't like to try hard and travel a long way to interview for a new job. I just try my best not to be fired. Although the situation is far from satisfactory, I'd rather stay. I think I know how to protect myself and feel safe. (Career Events/Commitment—Jane, Interview 5)

Constant comparison of the informants' life histories that beginners like Jane was able to get access to the school communities more successfully than others and was able to adopt different coping strategies. This is the same case for Frank, a novice who was good at Information Technology. Frank was able to build up good interpersonal relationships in the workplace because he was a resource to solve the hi-tech problems of his colleagues.

> They (other colleagues of the IT Committee) have all worked in the school for a long time, and they're also willing to help people. But when our colleagues have any problems, I'm the first person among the 5 members in the IT committee that they'll approach. (Workplace/ Colleague Relationship—Frank, Interview 4)

Like Jane, Frank's personal career decisions stood independent of his poor evaluation of the school. When he anticipated a tough Bachelor of Education program in his second year of teaching, he decided to stay in the school although its facilities were badly below standard.

> I wouldn't choose this school if I had another chance. There're thirty-seven pupils with only three volleyballs for a P.E. lesson. I advised the fresh graduates to think twice before they came to teach in this school. …But I won't quit now. The good thing is that the school is less demanding than most other schools . . . I can imagine I'll have a lot of assignments to do in the coming three years when I study the part-time B. Ed. (Career Events/Commitment—Frank, Interview 3)

Frank would like to give his class the best. As a class teacher, he had close relationships with his students because he taught them from Primary Five to Primary Six. However, he found himself unable to assume professional accountability when he was occupied by his own examinations in the second year of his teaching. Frank was conscious of the ethical dilemma in his motives of teaching his students what he had learnt in his degree program; but he needed to defend his service ethics to the students.

> Sometimes, during lunch, I was so tired that I fell asleep when I was eating! My students were really good. They asked their English teacher if I was sick and why I seemed to be very tired recently. She told them I have to work very hard for my studies and my work. They were so understanding that once they saw me sleeping, the whole class kept very quiet because they didn't want to wake me up—even when they wanted to get something…Luckily, my students are very understanding. (Career Events/Teacher-student Relationship; Workplace /Colleague relationship—Frank, Interview 5)

We could share Frank's feeling of guilt when he talked about his relationship with his students.

> Actually this year, I feel that I failed my class of students. I regret that in their graduation camp, I couldn't be with them most of the time. I had to take my exams in the evening. When I got back to the camp, many of them had gone to bed. And then in the morning, I had to give a ride to the Principal, or the ECA Teacher. Then I had to drive some students to see the doctor. I kept driving to and fro during the camp and had very little time to stay with my students. (Career Events/Service Ethics—Frank, Interview 5).

Frank experienced role overload when he had to cope with his duties in the school and his demanding degree study. The way he managed his multiple role demands was similar to that of Jane's.

> Now, I feel that the study has had a great impact on me. I didn't expect that the study would cause me so much pressure and I'd have to spend so much energy and effort on it…Sometimes, I seize the chance and talk to the students in the lessons about what I have learned in the university. This helps me revise those stuffs in the exams. I'd say I take advantage of those opportunities. After all, it's also a chance for me to see if those things work for the students. (Career Events/Coping/Strategic Compliance—Frank, Interview 5)

Strategic compliance was used to denote the professional practice of Sue and Frank, which was characterized by distorted accountability and service ethics. In conjunction with other features such as their attachment to the workplace, these features distinguish collective memories that were qualitative different from those of Sue and Carol. Two sets of translation were then created, the former as Professionalism of 'The Strategic' and the latter, Professionalism of 'The Suffering.'

Identifying Encompassing Factors for Axes of Teacher Professionalism

When sections of information, as highlighted above, were compared, we became aware that informants shared different versions of collective memories. We use Professionalism of 'The Suffering' as an analogy to denote the professional characteristics of beginners such as Sue and Carol and Professionalism of 'The Strategic' was used to represent professional practice of Jane and Frank. As shown in Table 3, the professional lives of informants such as Sue and Carol were characterized by suppressing their personality or abandoning their service ideals. They led unsatisfying professional lives because of unfulfilled goals of service ethics to students. These teachers restricted their participation in the school and would made attempts to leave the workplace. On the other hand, Jane and Frank employed strategic compliance to handle their role demands. They appeared to fulfill accountability as expected by the school or the public, yet with problematic service ethics. Unlike 'The Suffering' beginners, they chose to stay in the dissatisfying workplace because of perceived favorable conditions that met their personal and occupational needs.

These findings readily brought us to the inquiry of the factors contributing to the different axes of teacher professionalism. The epistemological understanding of collective memories informed our interpretation of the phenomena, together with the technique of synthesis; we began a higher level of data analysis. Influenced by Halbwachs' memory work, we came to understand that the memories of the teachers disclosed their professional identities. The stories they told not only showed who they were but also what kind of teachers they would like to be. 'The Suffering' and 'The Strategic' beginners preferred, as much as other counterparts, to be able to fulfill service ideals and professional accountability in their professional lives. Yet their professional practice varied. These variations stimulated us to look into the social historical contexts, as collective memories never occurred in a social vacuum (Coser, 1992). By means of constant comparison, we worked through the twelve cases to examine the four axes of teacher professionalism. This allowed us to differentiate the biographical and workplace variables at a collective level.

Constant Comparison and Collective Biographical Contexts

The use of translation and synthesis, which are strategies of handling meta-ethnographical work, is capable of handling large sample sizes. We found similarities and differences from the biographical data of the informants. Jane and Frank demonstrated good knowledge about the work contexts. For example, Frank was aware of the policy concerning the upgrading of teachers' professional qualifications. Therefore he planned to obtain a degree as soon as possible. His understanding of the contexts guided him make a choice to teach in a school with sub-standard P.E. facilities. Similarly, Jane was observant about the 'monitoring system' in the Jone's Primary School. She was suspicious of the group leaders assigned to 'support' the teachers.

Table 3. Synthesis.

Professional-ism	Sets of Translation	Constant Comparison	Synthesis
The Suffering Sue Carol	• Coping by compliance • unfulfilled service ethics • restricted participation in school community and detachment to the workplace	• beginners had strong self-identity but limited knowledge of work contexts (collective biographical contexts) • inadequate personal & professional support for beginners (collective workplace contexts) Professionalism of The Suffering results from the disharmony between teachers' situational self-identities and the substantial self-identity	The conditions of teachers' self-identity, their knowledge of work contexts & the availability of resources for personal-professional development in the workplace are the crucial factors contributing to the features of teacher professional-ism.
The Strategic Jane Frank	• coping by strategic compliance • distorted accountabi-lity and service ethics • attachment to the workplace	• beginners had a fluid self-identity & comprehensive knowledge of work contexts (collective biographical contexts) • sufficient social but inadequate professional support for beginners (collective workplace contexts) Professionalism of The Strategic results from teachers' success in accommodating situational self-identities and conflicting situational values with the substantial self-identity	

This teacher checks if their group members give homework to students and how many exercise books they mark, etc. They check the homework diary in the classroom. Teachers sit together in accordance with their group . . . I think these monitoring group leaders will not break the rules of this system. They are very loyal to the monitoring system. If teachers miss filling in the homework diary, they will fold the page of the diary. They treat this matter very seriously. They may ask if you have missed filling in the homework diary . . . Actually they've already made their judgment. They may have reported to the Principal secretly. (Workplace/ Colleague Relationship/ Micropolitics —Jane, Interview 1)

Jane gained comprehensive stories about the teachers who had resigned before she was recruited to the school. On the contrary, Sue showed little awareness of the

political structure in the Jone's Primary School. She noticed that there were four other new teachers who joined the school with her and she could only relate it to teachers' retirement. Sue's inadequate knowledge of work contexts was reflected by another fact that she could not recognize all her three Subject Panel Chairpersons even after the warning letter issue.

The family upbringing and education experiences strongly influenced informants' personality. Sue stressed that it was difficult for her to become a 'follower' like Jane. The structure and culture of the workplace posed a great threat to Sue's substantial self. This affected the strategy she adopted to cope with the problems in the workplace. Carol shared similar biographical contexts, in which we identified the development of her strong self-identity. Being a self-disciplined person in school and in the family, Carol had high expectations on class ethos, valued good discipline as well as teaching and learning outcomes.

As a collective group, we found that 'The Suffering' beginners had strong self-identity but limited knowledge of work contexts. 'The Strategic' beginners, on the other hand, had a fluid self-identity and comprehensive contextual knowledge of their work contexts.

Constant Comparison and Collective Workplace Contexts

Schools have their structures and cultures before the teachers join them as their workplace. The properties in the workplace influence the beginners' professional practice and development. For example, novices who worked in a school that is actively engaged in educational reforms became more conscious of public demands of professional standards. In contrary, beginners in less reform driven schools had more room for their own professional learning. We also found that teachers could be personally exposed to very different workplace contexts even though they worked in the same school, as we can see from the cases of Jane and Sue.

Jane was able to get social support from her supervisors. Firstly, her examination revision act was not 'discovered'. Second, one of her Subject Panel Chairpersons was eager to protect her from a potential accusation of speaking Chinese in English lessons. Nevertheless, Sue did not enjoy any social support in the school. This was crystal clear to her after she received her second warning letter.

> After I got the second warning letter, an additional senior teacher other than my group leader, was assigned to check the exercise books I marked. I thought she is there to help me but later I realized that she only keeps a record of the mistakes I've made in my marking. (Critical Events/Sue, Interview 3)

The collective workplace contexts for 'The Suffering' share a common characteristic, which is the lack of social or professional support. There was also limited professional support in the schools of 'The Strategic.' However, as we can see from the cases of Jane and Sue, the teachers were able to solicit social support form their colleagues, who to a certain extent, reinforced the distorted service ethics.

Synthesis: Encompassing Factors

Synthesis helped us explain the similarities and differences of teacher professionalism. When the collective contexts of the four axes of teacher professionalism were compared, we could scrutinize the interactive dynamics between the beginners' self-identity, their knowledge about the work contexts and the support provided in the workplace work in different versions of collective memories. The collective memories of Sue and Carol showed that they suffered as they failed to achieve a professional identity which could harmonize with their substantial self-identity. Compliance could not harmonize the situational self-identities with their substantial self, as they wanted to preserve their strong substantial self-identity. Specifically Carol gave up hope of changing the school whereas Sue physically withdrew herself from the school community. Restricted participation in the school was an attempt to preserve their self-identity. The unfulfilled goal of service ethics to students and the disharmony between substantial and professional selves contributed to a developing detachment from the school. These characteristics are distinctive different from those of 'The Strategic.'

'The Strategic' showed extraordinarily good sensitivity towards organizational structures and cultures. They were able to analyze the complex power relationships among the actors in the school. With a fluid self-identity, their substantial self could, on one hand, flexibly and momentarily incorporates the values of different situational selves; on the other hand, the multiple situational identities in their professional lives could depart rather comfortably from their personal identity. Thus they managed to accommodate contradictory values in their professional lives. Professionalism of 'The Strategic' results from teachers' success in accommodating situational self-identities and conflicting situational values with the substantial self-identity.

Through the examination of the interactive dynamics between the biographical and workplace variable within an individual informant's life history and across different versions of collective memories, we finally arrived at the procedure of synthesis. We were able to explain that the conditions of the teachers' self-identity, their knowledge of work contexts on one hand, and the availability of resources for social and professional development in the workplace on the other, constituted the essential factors that contributed to features of the beginners' teacher professionalism. Through synthesis we were able to give a holistic view of the sampled teachers without sacrificing the specificities of individual lives.

Conclusion:
Evaluating the Potential of the Combined Methodology

Life history approach has an important role to play in illuminating human subjectivity. Collective memory method, used alongside the life history method can honor both subjectivity and inter-subjectivity in social inquiry. The creative use of the combined method in the study of teacher professionalism, as shown

above, was able to illuminate the interactive dynamics between workplace and biographical contexts of the teachers. They help us acquire a deep and broad knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the persons and the systems both at an individual and a collective level. We argue, and our rationales are given below, that the combined method is able to overcome the constraints of the life history and has the potential to reunite the separate emphases on social psychology and sociology, which have been segregated artificially because of different research and disciplinary biases.

The postmodern world has brought a revival in research using biographical methods since the 1980s. This renewed interest was coupled with an interpretative approach of studying culture and human group life (Denzin, 1997). Many educational researchers engaged in studies of teachers' lives accept the shared assertion that a teacher's personal life is crucial for the understanding of his or her teaching. These methods of study, as pointed out by the first author elsewhere, lie in their capacity to illuminate complex human subjectivity, and counteract the power embedded in the so-call objectivity of quantitative data aggregated under the assumptions of the researchers (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). In the educational field, a variety of life related narrative methods such as autobiographies, biographies, personal narratives and life stories have been widely used. Nevertheless, we soon find a more fundamental problem of life studies is that they can be over-indulgent in looking and at celebrating the idiosyncrasies of individuals. Indeed even though personal agency has been honoured in the postmodern era, postmodernity cannot deny the fact that society always pre-exists people. As Bhaskar (1998) argued, society constitutes a necessary condition for people's activity. We notice that the more the scattered voices at the periphery seemed to be sponsored with people's ignorance of the social reality, the more concentrated the power at the center is reinforced. Writing biographies has been criticized to be a trivial pursuit without relating life to history or the social sciences (Dhunpath, 2000)

The life history approach has been advocated and widely used to address such problems (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Kelchtermans, 1993; Stroobants, 2005). As distinguished by the first author, the life story is the life as told by the person who lived and experienced it whereas life history involves the story teller telling the story and the researcher work with the story teller collaboratively to produce the inter-textual and inter-contextual account (Goodson, 2005). Thus biographical studies following a life history approach capture not only personal experiences but also the systemic contexts in which the lived experiences are located.

While there is ample evidence that life history method focusing on individuals is useful for us to understand the uniqueness of human trajectories in social contexts, there are constraints of life history in terms of its power to the collective social impact on groups of members in society. The sources of constraints inherited in life history study are at least two-fold. First when a small sampling size has to be used

as a trading point for the thick description in meaningful contexts, it is difficult to see the pattern of impacts, and even commonalities existing behind the individuals' private interpretations (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). Secondly, life history has been regarded as producing no definite results; it seems irrelevant to studies that emphasize group attributes and their interconnections (Becker, 1970).

Collective memory method has the potential to overcome these constraints. The use of translation and synthesis, which are strategies of handling meta-ethnographical work, has demonstrated to be capable of handling large sample size. The unique method of comparison involved in the process of translating a reasonably large number of life histories opens new ways for us to examine if there are varied types in the translations, and if these translations can be synthesized under overarching concepts. As the combined methods adopt purposive sampling strategies to collect life stories, it can bring to light reasonably rich variations. The strengths of thick description in narrative studies can be sustained with the assistance of computer packages. The systemic analysis is thus more illuminating than narrowly conceived biographical studies in the qualitative paradigm. Moreover, from the life stories told by teachers as individuals, and the researchers' interpretation and translation of them as collective memories, it is possible to tap into both the subjectivity of individual informants' role negotiations and the connection to the inter-subjectivity of the teachers' role negotiations as a collective group. The capacity of the combined method for locating the wider collective contexts of collective members thus helps us to make the transition from sponsoring individual voices to reflection about systemic issues.

The combined method could also aid the ongoing revival of the life history method since sociologists gave up its use in the late 1920s. At that time, sociologists separated the field of social psychology from sociology, which focused more on the 'structural' variables. Social psychology is aligned with life history to study factors related to personal life experience (Becker, 1970). When we examined the informants' life stories and worked collaboratively with them, we were engaged in a process of sociological analysis of the collective contexts. Common features of the collective memories reflected the impact of collective social conditions, as lives embedded in biographies are simultaneously personal, cultural, institutional, and historical (Cole & Knowles, 1995). Collective memories led us to see the kind of teaching professional the informants wanted to be. They unveiled the extent to which these young professionals could be flexible and transcend the current social conditions, as well as the beliefs they adopted from their early socialization. On the other hand, life history provides insight into the collective impact of structure, without missing the uniqueness of the interactive dynamics between personal agency and the structural contexts. The combined method can explore the subjectivities, ambiguities, complexities and problematic experiences in one's life situations (Denzin, 1989). In other words, it creates an avenue for the dual analysis of subjective person and objective social structure, and it readily draws on frameworks from

the disciplines of social psychology and sociology. As such, the different levels of analysis, which had once been segregated artificially because of different research traditions and disciplinary biases, could be reunited by the combined use of life history and collective memory methods.

A great difference between the combined method and other positivist study methods, is that while typologies such as the 'Teacher Professionalism of The Suffering' emerge through the process of translation, the rich description of collective life stories in collective contexts still allows vivid portrayal of individual life histories in a holistic context. The collective memory method does not de-contexualize causal relations as that in the positivist tradition, but has them understood within a system of relations (Doyle, 1990). Our study has shown the potential of the combined use of life history and collective memory methods in educational research. Through the integrated use of the two methods and the innovative use of data analysis procedures, extended knowledge and understanding of the relationships between the persons and the systems can be obtained. The epistemological and methodological functions of the life history and collective memory methods thus warrant further development and wider application to the study, as well as in exploring the wider social world of teachers, teaching and professionalism.

Notes

[1] Although throughout this paper we are referring to 'beginning teachers', from now on we will use the generic title 'teachers' to designate teachers who are at the beginning of their career.

[2] Twelve primary school teachers were purposefully sampled for this project after a pilot study. These informants showed different level of initial commitment to teaching. Three of them were highly devoted; four were reluctant to join teaching while the other four were ready to be a teacher.

[3] One of the informants, Sue, was only interviewed three times as she left her school in the second year of teaching and withdrew from the study.

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