

Peer Relations in Group Activities: Teacher Instruction, Peer Leaders, and Group Work Rules

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This qualitative case study employed Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus to examine the construction of student group fields and group habitus in a junior high school EFL class in a southern Chinese metropolitan city. The data was obtained from observation and semi-structured interviews with seven students and two teachers; mixed code analysis was applied, yielding two major findings. First, the construction of student group fields and habitus did not start within, but from outside of, the groups: from national and school policies, and from the teachers' pedagogical practices. Specifically, (a) the construction of student group fields started from the implementation of national and provincial admission policies, and from the school's streaming practices, which in essence formed a power system external to the class; (b) in the classroom, the teacher's pedagogical practices, such as the seating arrangement, differentiated instructions and group work evaluation rules, reinforced the power system leveraging student group fields and group habitus, and facilitated center-periphery peer relations in group activities. Second, the findings also suggested that the construction process of student group fields and group habitus shaped the participants' roles and peer relations, and affected their opportunities to talk and be listened to, which inevitably affected the participants' learning in EFL classes.