



GROUP PROCESSES IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study observed group processes in the foreign language classroom. The four objectives were to describe group processes, identify pedagogical processes and impeding factors in foreign language team assignments and to characterize student experience of groups and learning environments in EFL classrooms at Silpakorn University. The researchers engaged students in group tasks and then assembled written evaluations by the sample group of Silpakorn university students revealing the meaning that they found in their EFL group work. This study is limited to the perceptions and meaning that students find in groups, and not so much in measuring either student satisfaction or their level of proficiency.

The sample consisted of essays of 517 bachelor degree students in English classes at three different faculties of Silpakorn University. The data was analyzed for typology, taxonomies, grounded theory, analytical induction, matrixes for causation of group processes and tasks, hermeneutical analysis and discourse analysis. However, computerized discourse analysis (vocabulary frequency and readability levels) proved less helpful for the current study despite its potential for quantifying language and proficiency levels.

The study found that cohesive, cooperative groups in the foreign language classroom are very meaningful particularly in the integration of language skills acquisition, interpersonal skills and professional skills. The group processes observed in this study followed Tuckman's five categories of forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning with L1 (Thai) characteristics and cultural considerations influencing group life at each step. For most students, this was their first positive experience of teamwork, because university classrooms tend to bundle students for games and activities, rather than create effective task-based groups. Leadership of groups proved to have an evolving and lateral hierarchy that stood in contrast with previous perceptions of Thai cultural ideas of leadership being authoritarian and reciprocal. Recommendations were given for assigning group tasks to provide scaffolding (particularly in helping groups to identify and divide up important functions or roles for the success of the group) and for controlling group assignment design. The complicated issue of criteria for marking group work and individual contributions is modeled. Significantly, conflict avoidance behavior hindered group cohesion and completion of tasks, so students reported greater individual benefits when their group overcame conflict in the process. Finally, the study identified 9 factors that could be useful for future studies to measure group cohesion and to correlate this with language proficiency development.

Keywords: groups, group processes, English as a foreign language, cooperative learning, group cohesion.

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CHAPTER I BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Students at the Faculty of Education of Silpakorn University often send us their lesson plans which they will use to teach English to school children. Occasionally lesson plans will give scant reference to ‘divide into groups’ in order to either practice speaking or writing a target structure or to discuss something and give a report. In other cases the groups are to play a competitive game against other groups. What do the students involved think about group activities in their English language classrooms? How is it meaningful? There always seems to be students who are either energized or dissatisfied. Teachers of foreign languages certainly gain from giving group work more thought.

This study is interested in how groups work in the language classroom. The authors’ previous experience with this included attempts to use theories like Paulo Freire’s praxis model of learning and Vella’s classic *Learning to listen, learning to teach: the power of dialogue in educating adults* (Vella, 2002). What was most helpful in trying those ideas out was being intentionally-formed into a team with others in the profession evaluating their own teamwork. Collaborative learning can work.

Although professional groupings helped develop the researchers as teacher-learners, the use of groups in the foreign language classroom has tended to focus on very small learning objectives such as to write or speak using a target grammatical structure or vocabulary set. It seems like pair and group activities in class often fail at enabling students to truly engage in the course content and obtain skills in the classroom. Other times, a successful group activity might

buoy a teacher's ego, but may not at all merit their sense of success. Therefore, language classroom groups are often contrived with no common identity outside of the class. Students in language classrooms at Silpakorn University in Thailand rarely share a common geographical proximity or professional identity. Many remedial students are mixed in with intermediate students and a handful of upper intermediates. Many come from primary and secondary school experiences where English was negative and whose experience with peer groups varied anywhere between energizing, frightening and downright maddening. What then do healthy groups look like in this situation? How do Silpakorn University students perceive their groups at the university?

1.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

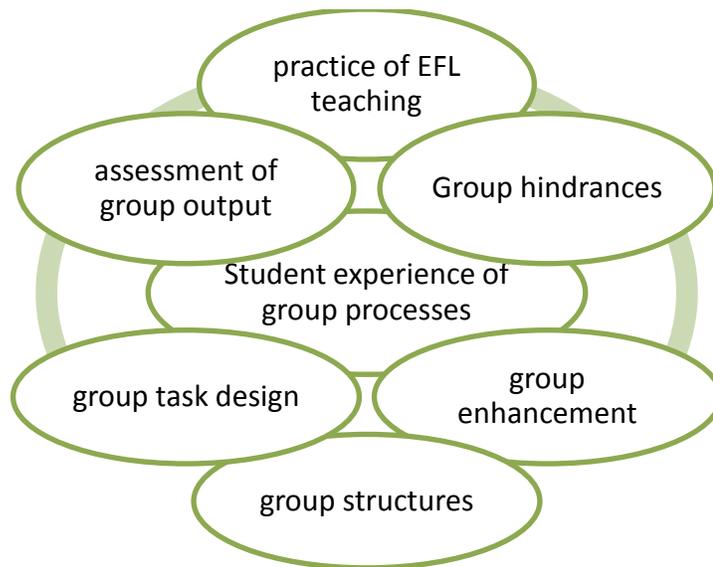
This study explores the perception and meaning that students find in groups in the university foreign language classroom. Our theoretical research design is based on combining practice and theory in praxis. Critical praxis in teaching and research has three movements, beginning with a thick description of the social learning environment of the classroom, discussion of relevant theory about it, and then integration into a proposed renewed theory and practice. This approach provides advantages for qualitative research. We attend in a methodical way to our practice of teaching by listening to the students reflect on their experience of groups in English language classes. We then integrate group theory in search of a pedagogical framework for our understanding of group processes in the foreign language classroom.

1.2 QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study asks initial questions about group processes in the foreign language classroom. The process of qualitative research attempts to answer and create more questions with great clarity and focus.

1. How were the group processes designed and implemented?
2. What processes can enhance groups in the foreign language classroom?
3. What processes can hinder groups in the foreign language classroom?
4. What criteria are useful for assessing the product of learning groups?
5. How do group processes inform or limit the practice of teaching foreign languages at Silpakorn University?

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework



Cooperative learning in this study considers four characteristics of group processes as follows: language competence, communication confidence, communication skills, and problem solving strategies.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Students are the primary source of information about group processes and learning environments and are responsible for their own learning.
- Students are able to characterize and evaluate their group language acquisition.
- Teachers using groups in the foreign language classroom may expect strengths and weaknesses in the group process to be revealed by student comments, creating learning for a revised praxis of teaching through groups.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

1. To describe how group processes were designed and implemented in foreign language classrooms
2. To identify pedagogical processes which enhance groups in foreign language classrooms.
3. To identify factors impeding groups in foreign language classrooms.
4. To identify criteria for assessing the product of learning groups
5. To demonstrate the relationship between groups and EFL learning environments at Silpakorn University.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

This study will show that students find cohesive, task-based groups in the foreign language classroom to be very meaningful to SU students for integration of language acquisition, interpersonal skills and professional integration.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Scope: The researchers will assemble and analyze written evaluations of group learning in foreign language classrooms by Silpakorn University students. These evaluations, coupled with observations made by the researchers, will reveal layers of meaning that students found in a variety of group learning tasks assigned in various English language courses at Silpakorn University.

Limitations: This study is interested in the perceptions and meaning that students find in groups, and not so much in measuring either student satisfaction or their level of proficiency.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Silpakorn University. Silpakorn University is a public university with three campuses, one in Bangkok and two in Western Thailand. This study focuses on bachelor's degree students at the Nakhon Pathom campus in the 2011 Academic Year.

Classrooms. Classrooms are places where students gather in order to learn. (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006)

Groups. Groups are social formations of people. There are essentially three potential group functions among students: to learn, work and make decisions. In the foreign language

classroom, structured groups are presented with a problem of accomplishing a task (working type of group), however the terminal objective of the group is learning language. Unstructured groups are ad-hoc groups that emerge among students outside of class as they face an individual assignment and seeking group support.

Group processes. Group processes in this study are procedures that may emerge after a task is initially introduced by a teacher in the foreign language classroom. They form, conflict, norm, produce and adjourn. They set goals, divide roles, plan and monitor members' performances. Students in the classroom work on the tasks individually or divide into teams of 2 or more students, depending on the task. Group processes produce something measurable related to the learning task, either written or oral. They occur both among unstructured (ad-hoc) groups outside of class and among groups that were formed in class with support from the teacher.

Foreign language. A language (L2) not spoken in the students' home (L1).

Acquisition. A measurable process of obtaining something. In language study, referring to the obtaining of communicative skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking in a target language (L2) for the purpose of personal and professional development.

Praxis-based learning. Praxis-based learning refers to an inductive methodology for developing theory and practice in a field of study through reflection upon experience and its social context or environment where the knowledge is used.

1.7 BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This study offers several benefits. First, the study builds discussion of group tasks in classrooms that leads to improvement of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language Program of the Faculty of Education, Silpakorn University. This has a direct effect on hundreds of English teachers in public schools in Thailand. Secondly, the instruments documenting student perceptions that were developed in this study can be improved for use in student evaluations of their courses and supervised field education in schools. Thirdly, the publication and presentation of the study will promote solutions and evaluation of group processes in international forums among English as a Foreign Language teachers. It will be published in an international TEFL journal. Finally, the study will identify issues for collaborative investigation in the future.

CHAPTER 2 RELATED LITERATURE

Six aspects of group process theory inform the practice of instruction in the EFL classroom using group tasks. They are language competence, communication confidence, group theory, problem solving strategies, dialogic learning and organizational behavior.

2.1 LANGUAGE COMPETENCE

There seems to be growing consensus that language competence relates to classroom processes. Research into these processes takes a close look at teacher and student roles. “Classroom-process research is primarily concerned with the investigation of the numerous factors that shape language acquisition in language classes. Classroom-process research aims at describing the linguistic and instructional environment which second language learners encounter in the classroom and how that environment might differ from what is available outside the classroom” (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006, p. 151). Fewer studies look specifically at group processes and studies of Thai students engaging in classrooms tend to be quantitative, rather than qualitative in approach.

2.2 COMMUNICATION CONFIDENCE

Foreign language learners working in groups face a creative crisis in their confidence. Fushino (2010) was interested in finding a path into student-based learning through groups and became interested particularly in the student’s willingness to communicate (WTC) with peers in the target language. What factors relate to this WTC? Fushino found that elevating student’s

communication confidence in L2 group work and beliefs about L2 group work could incite English discourse among students, consisting of mutual correction, listening comprehension, pronunciation and language acquisition (p. 717). The author also states that it would be better to encourage students to talk together so they get used to English conversation, thus changing their beliefs that hinder them. Fushino also says that learning of group or social interaction skills is valuable in and of itself for improving group products and effectiveness due to the need for high-quality interaction to promote effective cooperation (p. 719).

2.3 GROUP THEORY

This study employed participant observation to look at how students found meaning in the formation of learning groups to complete a task in a classroom setting. Vygotsky's theories emphasize the essential role of social interaction in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1993). Schmuck and Schmuck (2001) wrote their research review at the University of Oregon and Lewis and Clark College. The book begins with a helpful review of how research on groups has been put into practice since 1945, particularly by the National Training Laboratory through the 1970s. The action research model used in the 1950s in industry, social agencies and government was applied to classroom evaluation in order to promote student participation. Schmuck defines group theory as “the study of social situations with interest in improving the quality of action within them...action planning, action taking and for evaluating effects of the actions” (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 5). They go on to discuss four capacities of classroom groups: the capacity to welcome membership in the group, to share influence and establish

egalitarian relationships, to encourage and support one another and to adopt group processes for self-renewal (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 52).

The work of the group is composed of exercises (simulations) and procedures in which the students are expected to participate. Each exercise has a specific form of group behavior and content. Procedures, in contrast to content, are the sequence of activities that help the groups finish their tasks.

The authors suggest that group membership requires finding things in common and mutual recognition. Classroom cooperation often fails in this early phase of group formation because “bonding, inclusion, and membership” needs have not been met (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 53). The authors suggest the use of icebreakers in the classroom, such as a greeting circle (standing in an inner and outer circle to greet each person for 2 minutes), exchange of ID cards or human resource hunt/talent scout (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 54).

A second stage in group formation is establishing of shared influence. After the needs mentioned above have been met, the group can then venture into a period of conflict where control and influence is worked out. The teacher who attempts to hinder this conflict will quickly tire from the amount of policing they must do and their classrooms will put out students who feel alienated from the school and who obstruct the classroom. Rather we must recognize that this is common in all human interaction and that classroom groups that do not come to terms with how they share power do not become “effective in cooperation and collaboration” (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 57). Methods for helping groups handle this process better include rotating leadership committees, listening skills exercises/fishbowls, high talker tap-out

(in a discussion, a monitor looks for dominant persons and taps them out of the discussion) and buzz groups (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 58).

The pursuit of academic goals represents the third stage of groups that have moved beyond the formative stage. Groups must divide tasks and name roles for both tasks and for group maintenance. “Typical task roles are initiating ideas for the agenda, giving information, seeking information or opinions, clarifying or elaborating the topic, summarizing where the group is, and testing for group agreements on the topic” (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 59). Maintenance roles include encouraging others to contribute, checking others’ feelings, reconciling differences, compromising, inviting participation and setting standards for member participation and group performance. Among the many interesting classroom exercises that help groups at this stage are working trios (an information giver, summarizer and recorder) and a fishbowl arrangement with a four-person group in the middle that receives 3X5 cards with task or maintenance roles.

The final stage of the group is self-renewal. Members of groups that have learning as their main focus may face problems of feeling left out, unwanted, lack of voice or resentments or frustration with completing the task (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, p. 63). Strong groups accept responsibility for the quality of their group life.

Similar to Schmuck and Schmuck, Webb (2009) tries to identify how teachers can enable these groups through assessment. Webb draws from the theory of Vygotsky (1993) regarding dynamic assessment. Webb holds that the teacher can foster effective group work behaviors. Webb’s study found that teacher roles include fostering of group dialogue, preparing students for

group work, group formation and clarification of tasks. It emphasizes that students explain their thinking throughout the group completion of the task.

As shown in the following table, Atherton’s review (2011) of Tuckman’s now famous study on groups found that groups form, conflict, norm, perform and adjourn. These five processes structure interpersonal student relationships as they do group **tasks** (Tuckman, 2001).

Leadership and decision making styles, goal setting and planning, role differentiation and group monitoring are part of that formal process as well.

Table 1 Tuckman’s Stages of Group Development

	Group Structure: The pattern of interpersonal relationships; the way members act and relate to one another.	Task Activity: The content of interaction as related to the task at hand.
Forming: orientation, testing and dependence	Testing and dependence	Orientation to the task
Storming: resistance to group influence and task requirements	Intragroup conflict	Emotional response to task demands
Norming: openness to other group members	Ingroup feeling and cohesiveness develop; new standards evolve and new roles are adopted	Open exchange of relevant interpretations; intimate, personal opinions are expressed
Performing: constructive action	Roles become flexible and functional; structural issues have been resolved; structure can support task performance Anxiety about separation	Interpersonal structure becomes the tool of task activities; group energy is channeled into the task; solutions can emerge

<p>Adjourning: disengagement</p>	<p>termination; sadness; feelings toward leader and group members</p>	<p>Self-evaluation</p>
---------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------

(Atherton, 2011)

2.4 PROBLEM SOLVING STRATEGIES

A short summary of the literature on group processes identifies certain problems in cooperative learning. Group interpretation of the task is a first problem that requires integration of knowledge across disciplines. A second problem, conflict in developing norms, procedures and limits, requires an understanding of Thai student attitudes towards peer conflict and student-teacher conflict. Thirdly, coordination and distribution of tasks can present certain problems in groups. Fourthly, motivation and valuing the task and the members can pose problems that disrupt groups and cause lag or group failure to meet deadlines when other groups which work through this tend to complete tasks. A final problem is how groups develop task strategies for language acquisition and overcoming L1 barriers. See also recent studies from Japan (Nadasdy, 2010) and from China (Yeh, 2004; Zhang, 2010), respectively, that explore cooperative learning and techniques.

Slavin (1995) of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools of The Johns Hopkins University, discusses the largest body of research related to cooperative learning. Cooperative learning serves as the foundation or philosophical reason for group processes in the language classroom. Group processes can be defined in several ways that addresses these problems.

1. The instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).
2. Principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively. (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002).

The challenge Slavin explores is finding a balance between team goals and success and individual goals and success. He states that all cooperative learning methods share the idea that students work together to learn and are responsible for their own and teammates' learning (Slavin, 1995, p. 3). Although he studied middle school children, he believes that the theoretical insights about groups have a large degree of carryover to university students as well and that teaching with groups can increase student proficiency.

Should groups compete? Slavin found that intrateam competition was not the best practice to enhance group goals and individual accountability (Slavin, 1995, p. 29). He conveyed the importance of task specialization within groups through methods like exercises in Group Investigation and Jigsaw (p. 31). In contrast, cooperative goals and egalitarian grading "create peer norms that support high achievement...motivate students to try to get each other to do academic work, and thereby gets students to feel that their classmates want them to do their best" (p. 32). The degree to which students believe that their academic success depends on their own efforts is an important aspect of motivation.

Ahour, Mukundan, & Shameem (2012) compared the effects of cooperative and individual reading on writing skills among university students at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at Universiti Putra Malaysia. Their study used multivariate analysis of

covariance sampling of 41 and 40 students doing cooperative and individual reading respectively. It found that cooperative reading was more effective at enhancing writing fluency and accuracy than directed reading. It can help students acquire knowledge of second language writing and increasing or activate knowledge of content areas (p. 81).

One theory of collaborative classrooms is that they are built on shared knowledge and authority for learning (Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore, & Bakk, p. 6). Leadership of cooperative learning (CL) groups is facilitative rather than authoritarian. Evaluation of the success of the group process looks not only at student achievement, but also at the quality of product and evaluates the usefulness of the materials used to generate the activity. They claim that theories of CL emerged from studies of a math project in the University of Chicago in 1983 done at Joliet West High School, Joliet, IL, a reading program at Beaupre Elementary School, Aurora, IL and the American Forum program in Redwood Falls High School, Redwood Falls, MN.

2.5 DIALOGIC LEARNING

Bahktin, a Russian literary scholar and language theorist, spoke of dialogic learning as “a word, discourse, language or culture that becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things” (Bahktin, 1981, p. 427). Communication acts in dialogic learning may be both external (between two different people) and internal (between an earlier and a later self). In contrast, undialogized language is authoritative or absolute. This learning expresses itself in three skill areas: language, interaction and social transformation. Dialogic learning leads to environments in which words, or the ideas behind them, are malleable, the definitions of which are defined through their use in communication and by the communicators.

Vella (2002) explored quantum thinking and dialogue learning. She found the following twelve principles that are helpful in reducing problems in group processes for effective adult learning:

1. Group dialogue begins with learning needs and assessing resources.
2. Safety: creating a safe environment for learning
3. Sound relationships: using the power of friendship
4. Sequence and reinforcement: supporting their learning
5. Praxis: turning practice into action and reflection
6. Learners as decision makers: harnessing the power of self through respect
7. Learning with ideas, feelings, and actions: using the whole person
8. Immediacy: teaching what is really useful to learners
9. Assuming new roles for dialogue: embracing the death of the professor
10. Teamwork: celebrating learning together
11. Engagement: learning actively
12. Accountability: knowing how they know they know (Vella, 2002).

Bruffee (1984), a professor of English at Brooklyn College, defines three modes of collaborative learning: peer tutoring, peer criticism and classroom group work. A teacher in American colleges sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively (p. 637). He views collaboration as public talk. He implies that since thought is “internalized public and social talk, the writing of all kinds is internalized social talk made public and social again” (p. 641). Therefore, writing assignments should encourage a student conversation on their own “at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible. That conversation should resemble how we want them to write (p. 642).

The researchers’ experience adds to Bruffee’s idea: students can ask questions prior to learning that sets a learning agenda. The application is that students might engage in a pre-group conversation to define the proposed group, rather than being given an assigned task by the teacher.

Bruner's metaphorical term 'scaffolding' (CSCL, n.d.) has come to be used in group processes. Scaffolding refers to the gradual withdrawal of adult control and support as a function of children's increasing mastery of a given task.

Lewis (2011) proposes the following strategy for reducing the classroom scaffolding:

- Activating prior knowledge
- Offering a motivational context to pique student interest or curiosity in the subject at hand
- Breaking a complex task into easier, more "doable" steps to facilitate student achievement
- Showing students an example of the desired outcome before they complete the task
- Modeling the thought process for students through "think aloud" talk
- Offering hints or partial solutions to problems
- Using verbal cues to prompt student answers
- Teaching students chants or mnemonic devices to ease memorization of key facts or procedures

He suggests that teachers can frame group activity by preparing an example of each of these ideas to help engage students directly.

- displaying a historical timeline to offer a context for learning
- using graphic organizers to offer a visual framework for assimilating new information
- teaching key vocabulary terms before reading or listening
- guiding the students in making predictions for what they expect will occur in a story, experiment, or other course of action
- asking questions while reading to encourage deeper investigation of concepts
- suggesting possible strategies for the students to use during independent practice
- modeling an activity for the students before they are asked to complete the same or similar activity
- asking students to contribute their own experiences that relate to the subject at hand.

Finally, structuring of group tasks is discussed quite well by Nunan (1992), Nunn (2002) and Ohl & Cates (2006). Dialogic learning, therefore, gives students greater control over groups and allow for intercultural dynamics and differences in social and psychological development to the EFL classroom.

2.6 ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

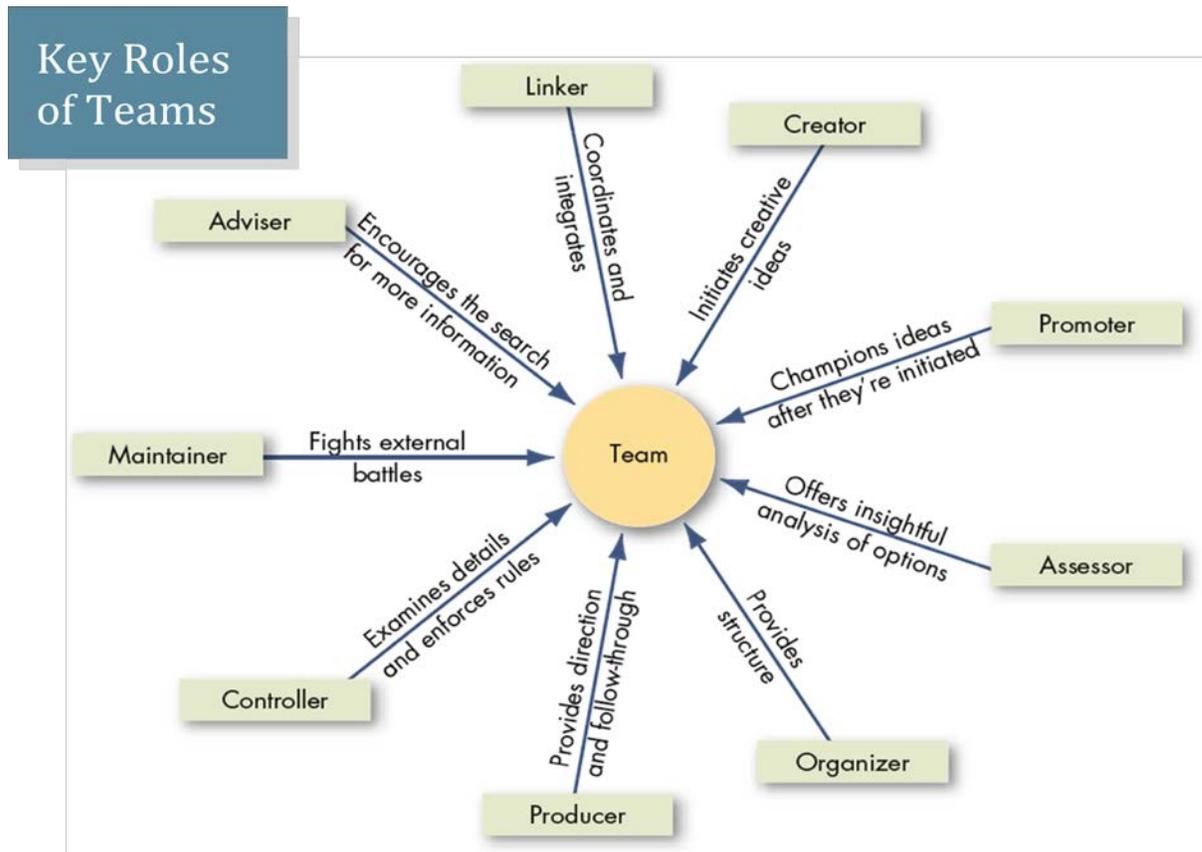
Group theory in organizational behavior can be a very helpful parallel to learn from modern corporations about the nature of groups, helpful processes and about team management techniques that might be helpful for teachers employing group processes in the foreign language classroom. In an organizational context, some groups are given work, learning or decision-making tasks. Robbins (1989) defines a work group as “a group that interacts primarily to share information and to make decisions to help each other perform with his or her area of responsibility” (p. 286). This is in contrast to a work team that is “a group where individual efforts result in a performance that is greater than the sum of their individual inputs” (p. 286). It can be said that educational tasks in the classroom involve tasks that are accomplished by groups. However, educational teams of students do not usually last long enough to become a cohesive team (p. 286).

How can a teacher form these teams? First, Robbins recommends small teams so they can cohere and hold each other accountable as they complete their assignment (p. 290). In the context of year-long duties, teams of 8-10 work fine. In the context of a language course during a semester, teams of 5 may be preferable. They must learn to communicate with one another quickly. Second, students should be put together who bring skills to the team such as technical, problem-solving and decision making and interpersonal skills.

What do students in self-managed teams do first? What does synergy look like? First of all, they develop a commitment to a common purpose and establish goals. Quickly arguments emerge and leadership and social loafing/accountability are dealt with. They learn to trust each

other, which Robbins says involves 5 dimensions of trust: integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty and openness (p. 294). These are affective learning goals that at face value seem unrelated to the presenting task of completing an assignment in an English class, such as creating an English-language website, preparing for a debate, etc. However, student evaluations showed that many had never experienced a team like that before and that it was highly valuable to them for their lives and motivated them to struggle with English language in order to accomplish the team objectives as per Figure 2.

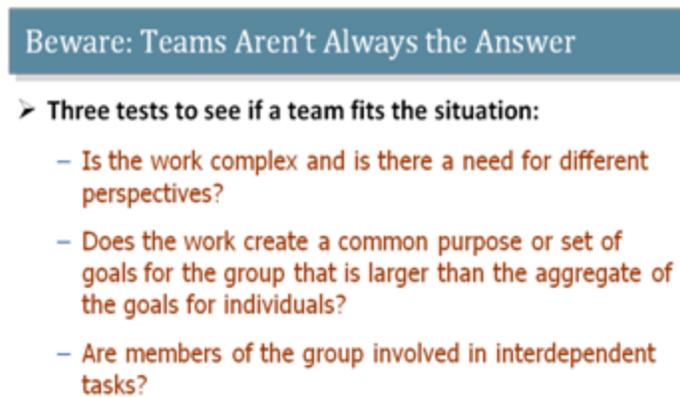
Figure 2 Robbins' Team Roles



(Robbins, p. 291)

The corporate manager of teams does many of the same functions that teachers do in the classroom to manage teams as they accomplish their tasks. In this sense, team work is not about creating (and micromanaging) teams and more about letting them produce on their own under supervision. Inevitably some teams will get stuck and the manager or teacher must be there to monitor team progress and to reenergize stagnant teams. There are certain times when team building is not appropriate and a more ad-hoc grouping is useful. Figure 3 below explains criteria for showing when to not use teams.

Figure 3 Limitations on Use of Teams



Beware: Teams Aren't Always the Answer

➤ **Three tests to see if a team fits the situation:**

- Is the work complex and is there a need for different perspectives?
- Does the work create a common purpose or set of goals for the group that is larger than the aggregate of the goals for individuals?
- Are members of the group involved in interdependent tasks?

(Cook, 2005)

Teachers may see many of these functions emerge in teams at differing points in their group work. In order to reduce social coasting, teachers should monitor, evaluate and reflect with teams early on in order to consciously assign tasks to different members, rather than bundling them. Teachers should also be mindful of the different stages involved in group formation and expect periods of forming, conflict, performance and adjournment.

The ideas outlined in this chapter formed the foundation for the study. These ideas informed the analyses and discussions of the data collected as they provide the context with which to understand group processes and the function of said processes in the foreign language classroom. They also influenced the design and methodology of the study, which are outlined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study collected data and made observations of students engaged in group work in foreign language classrooms at Silpakorn University. The last chapter provides a theoretical framework. This chapter explains how the researchers executed the study.

3.1 POPULATION

Silpakorn University claims a Bachelor's level population of 17,400 students (Educational Services, Silpakorn University, n.d.). This is divided into three campuses. This study took place only on the larger Tap Kaeow or Sanamjun campus, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand. The students at this campus were Thai citizens of mixed gender. There were no foreign students there at the time of this study, although there were some students of mixed Thai and foreign parentage. Classroom sizes at Silpakorn University varied from 24 -45 students.

3.2 SAMPLE

Based on the undergraduate population of Silpakorn University of 17,400 students, the Bernard's equation (Bernard, 1995, p. 74) was used to determine the sample size useful for a rapid study of groups in language classrooms in this social setting.

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{X^2NP(1-P)}{C^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)}$$

$$\text{Therefore } (3.841)(17400)(.5)/(.5)^2(17399) + (3.841)(.5)(.5) = 16708.35 / 44.45775 = (375)$$

The minimum reliable sample at the 95% reliability level is 375. The sample in this study was collected from undergraduate students in three different faculties as shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Sample

No. of Students	Course Type	Student Year	Faculty	Major	Data Collected
40	Listening	2/3	Education	English	40 Essays
31	Speaking	5	Education	English	31 Essays, 31 Videos
24	Academic Writing	4	Arts	English	48 Essays
76	Listening	2/3	Arts	English	76 paragraphs
346	Communicative English	2	Engineering	Engineering	346 Essays
517 Total Sample; 541 essays and 31 videos					

It should be noted that the Arts and Engineering students were involved in four-year degree programs, while the education students complete their degree after five years. Data was collected from the sample of 517 students in 5 different English courses at the Bachelor's level in Silpakorn University in the 2010 and 2011 academic years. These classes were chosen because the tasks for the courses were done in part through group processes. The data represents a highly varied sample of faculties and majors across this main campus of Silpakorn University.

3.3 SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF GROUP TASKS IN THE SAMPLED CLASSROOMS

LISTENING (EDUCATION AND ARTS)

Students were given individual assignments and were formed into debate teams. They had to research an issue and prepare to take a position in a formal debate in the classroom. They accomplished these tasks without instructor scaffolding for group work.

ACADEMIC READING AND WRITING IV (ARTS)

Students were formed into teams of 2-3 researchers to engage in field research and to report back in an academic presentation and an academic paper of 5-8 pages. One student found no team to work with and worked individually with the instructor's approval.

ADVANCED SPEAKING (EDUCATION)

Students engaged in individual speaking tasks by ad-hoc group work done outside of class with peer review. They videotaped their speeches. They also engaged in a team debate on the issue of university autonomy for Silpakorn University.

ENGINEERING

Student teams of 5 engineering students were formed to complete a web-based assignment. Students chose one another (so they started with the greatest amount of familiarity and homogeneity) but then checked their selections to identify who had technical skills with websites and graphics (the teacher distributed the web-skilled students). The teacher also made sure that teams had parity in gender and English skill levels. Top scoring English students were also distributed so they could peer check the websites for language errors. They alone were permitted to consult the teacher for advice about the language used in the writing of the website, to prevent

the entire group from forming a mob effect at the teacher's desk and to increase the identification with that group role. Groups were asked to research a company in Thailand and propose an improvement to the industrial processes of the company. The improvement should increase efficiency and/or limit the environmental impact of the company. The results of the research and the proposal were to be organized into a website and presented to the class.

Table 3 Comparison of group tasks needed to complete course assignments

<i>Courses</i>	<i>Language Editing Tasks</i>	<i>Research Tasks</i>	<i>Production Tasks</i>	<i>Group Tasks</i>	<i>Technical Knowledge Tasks</i>
Listening	X	X	X	X	
AcWriting IV	X	X	X	X	X
Adv Speaking	X		X		
EngEngineers	X	X	X	X	X

3.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The data collected for this study includes student essays, field notes on oral comments on digital recordings by students, written comments in reports by students in these classes and observations made by the researchers in the form of field notes (Spradley, 1980; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Field notes recorded as much actual speech by the sample as possible. Recorder insights were recorded separately. Domain analysis worksheets and digital recording were used for organizing the data.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected in written reflections by Silpakorn University students. Students were asked at the end of their course to provide an oral and written evaluation with no effect on their

grade. The researchers asked for clarification of unclear comments, being careful not to lead the respondents. English majors and listening course students at the end of their course wrote a 200-word essay about their group experience in the classroom and compared it to other English courses they have taken before. Student comments were transcribed and coded in a database.

The current study was done between April 1, 2011 and September 30, 2012. Data collection was accomplished for the Arts faculty materials on the midterm day (December 2011) and the finals (February 2012). Engineering data was collected in March 2012. Education Faculty data was collected in a classroom activity in February 2012 (Speaking) and in the final exam for Listening Skills Development (September 2011).

Some 16 hours were spent scanning the data into jpeg format. Sizing of files was the biggest issue that slowed this work down. In the future a scanner and software program would be required to handle large jobs. A consultant in computers may provide some suggestions. Data input of student writings involved approximately 21 hours of typing shared by student typists.

Field notes were reviewed from various presentations and question periods in the classes. One of the insights gained from the field notes was that although group work begins slower than individual work, group work finishes the assignment faster and more thoroughly.

3.6 PROCEDURE FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Seven of Ratcliffe's (n.d.) list of 15 methods of data analysis in qualitative research were employed in this research.

Typology started with the phrase *Group Processes* and worked out the variations that appeared in the data. This was then compared to other research results to suggest patterns that did not appear clearly in our data set.

Taxonomy was used to analyze individual domains. This produced a much fuller list of categories. The data was analyzed for domains according to the procedures set forth by Spradley (1980). Semantic relationships that were embedded in selected student phrases were considered for types and forms of relationships (p. 93). Then, field note entries were sorted in domain analysis worksheets (p. 94) to identify all domains. The next step involved theme analysis to list rules or norms about group processes in the foreign language classroom. This helped to identify and list components of the domain and make a schematic diagram of the ethos of this setting. This revealed how those domains intersect with some universal themes (p. 152) of social conflict, cultural contradictions, techniques of social control, managing impersonal social relationships and acquiring and maintaining status in groups. Therefore the perceptions of students of their group processes, language acquisition, interpersonal skills and global outlooks in their chosen profession were analyzed.

Grounded theory helped describe events and behaviors of students in the sample.

Analytical induction based on group debriefing comments was used to develop a hypothesis about the relationship of leadership to group processes. The data that proved our hypothesis about student ideas of leadership was then quickly contradicted by another data set. After several rounds of this redefining of the hypothesis, the researchers concluded that the data showed an 'evolving' understanding of leadership among students in groups from the beginning,

middle and end of projects. There was no static relationship there that represented the entire data set nor was there a conclusive process of leadership formation and adaptation of roles in the group.

A **matrix** was also developed to understand causation of learning of a foreign language in group processes. This matrix was used to identify resources used by students to solve group problems.

Additionally, **hermeneutical analysis** (hermeneutics being the act of making sense of a written text) as per Max Van Manen (Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore, & Bakk, 1990) and Freire (Darder, 2002) was done to identify and use student expressions in analysis, letting the participants of the study tell the story and bracketing out the researcher's frames of reference as much as possible. Nevertheless, when integrating student frames with previous research, a great deal of concurrence and overlap was found.

Discourse analysis was attempted by putting the student essay data into computer analysis programs to determine readability statistics, lexical analysis and frequency counts among other information. One hundred (100) essays answering the general questions were reviewed, showing the Lextutor analysis report for one group (the Speaking Group for Education Faculty English majors). We found that that report was helpful to learn that the vocabulary used by the students was exceedingly low for 5th year English majors. Their writing scored a Flesch Kinkaid Grade Level of 6.8. We also determined that 86.63% of the words used by students were from the easiest 1000 words in the English language covering only 83 out of 565 word families. The researchers tried to see if individual words used by students helped in organizing a processes

chart. No omissions in the chart were found and the specific word report did not add anything to this study's attempts to identify relationships of terms. Furthermore, words choices were checked to describe group processes that were omitted from the students' writing. Again the result was inconclusive. This revealed something of interest, however: the Lextutor report indicated that the types of words used to describe group processes were divided into function and content words (53.8% of the words in the K1 list were function words or verbs). In spite of obvious grammatical struggles, more attention should be paid to the choices of verbs made by students to complete the task. Individual comments and narrative analysis by students proved more helpful than discourse analysis at deriving meaning and identifying threats to group processes and finding how students handled them.

Using individual comments by students in the sample, an organizing chart was produced which provides important contours for group processes using the words of students. Categories were added to the chart in order to organize the data and cross-checked to see if other students added any other data to the list of items in each category that were being studied. The chart raised several focus questions to be applied to the rest of the data. This signaled the end of the initial part of the study. Nonetheless, this sampling of data and the initial analysis raised more questions for which further work was required in the larger data set using the following *focus questions*:

1. What do students understand about leadership? What qualities are raised up and what is the attitude to that quality? Furthermore, what evidence is there that members of groups conflicted with leaders? How did leadership emerge? What styles did they indicate? What descriptors did students have? Were there strong Alpha type leaders?

2. Roles can be divided into process roles and task roles. Some person emerged in many groups whose job it was to assist communication, recognize individual contributions to the team and to play technical/skill roles. How then did groups divide up these roles? What process of division of roles was discovered?
3. There seems to be a contrast in student assessment of their experience between highly structured, loosely affiliated and individual tasks. What is the difference between these?
4. What is the difference between a discussion and an argument?
5. What benefits do students perceive?
6. Observation: There is little data about how student groups adjourn.
7. What causes poor performance and low cohesion in groups?

Data analysis continued in identifying answers to the questions and was organized in Chapter 4 according to the terms of the study objectives.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Chapter 3 discussed this study's methodology and the initial survey of the collected data. Answers to additional questions (*focus questions*) that came up during data analysis at the end of chapter 3 are placed under the appropriate objective.

1. To describe how group processes were designed and implemented in foreign language classrooms.
2. To identify pedagogical processes which enhance groups in foreign language classrooms.
3. To identify factors impeding groups in foreign language classrooms.
4. To identify criteria for assessing the product of learning groups.
5. To demonstrate the relationship between groups and EFL learning environments at Silpakorn University.

Student reporting of group processes were not uniformly of good quality or length, making it difficult to isolate differences between groups of different courses, years of study or faculties. Consequently, the results are organized according to the study objectives. Therefore, chapter 4 begins by describing the group processes used by the sample. Then, elements that worked to enhance these group processes are outlined. Next is a description of the various factors that hinder said processes. Following that, the benefits that students identified as a result of working in groups is discussed. Finally, observations about the interaction between language acquisition and group objectives weremade.

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT GROUP PROCESSES

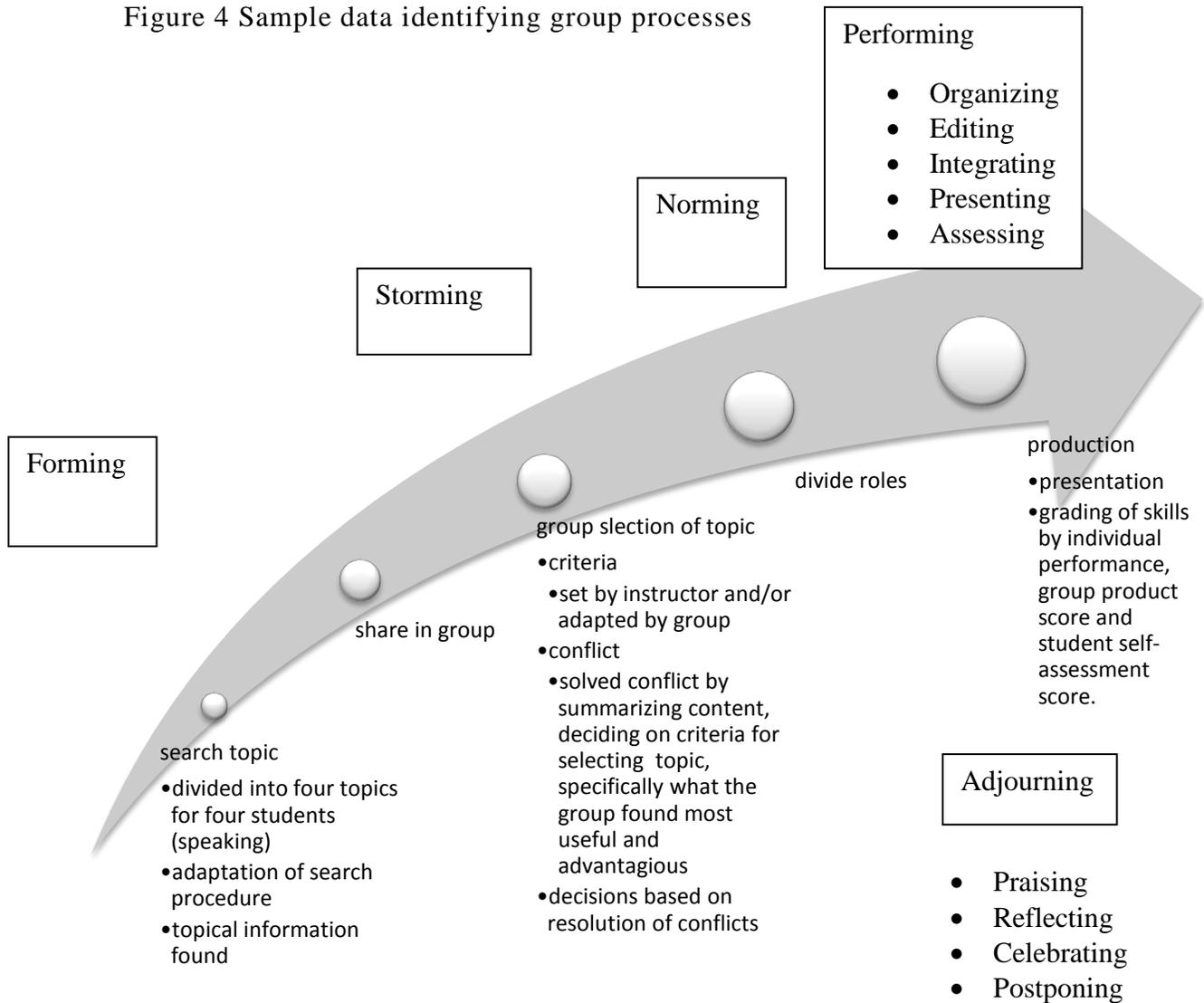
GROUP PROCESSES

.An important distinction was made by the researchers between group and task processes. A task process is essentially the establishment of actions that must be taken to arrive at the assigned product (developing a website, giving a presentation, having a debate, making a speech, producing a video and/or writing a research report). The creativity that each student and each group brings to the task is informed by personal experiences, attitudes and interests. Group processes are those agreements and behaviors that enable a group to function.

Although some students were more descriptive in their explanation of group processes than others, the procedures described by the sample for completing group tasks can be grouped into five main steps for which there was very little deviation. Groups among students of each faculty were formed by the students themselves in response to a problem or task with only a general topic as a guideline (anything related to the themes of the course).

The current study confirms the theory of Tuckman regarding 5 basic procedures in groups. What was quite extensively described in the current sample was Tuckman's first (forming) stage of the students' groups, as shown in Figure 4

Figure 4 Sample data identifying group processes



*MAJOR FINDING 1: THE CURRENT STUDY
CONFIRMS TUCKMAN'S THEORY OF GROUP STAGES
AMONG THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENT GROUPS.*

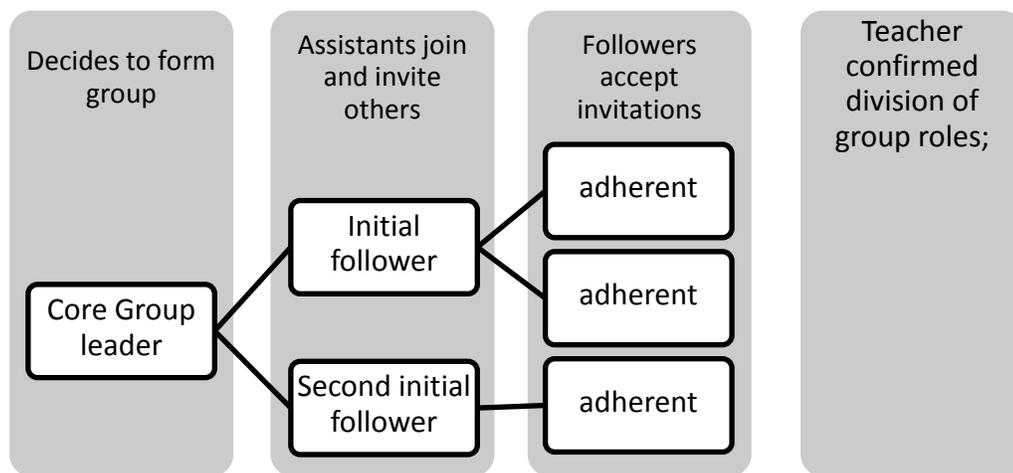
GROUP SELECTION PROCESS

The first process discerned was group member selection. In all classrooms of the sample, students were asked to hear an introduction to their assignment and they were given a sample of the product expected of them. They were then told to form into teams of a certain number of students (typically 3-5 students). The teacher provided initial scaffolding as follows:

To complete this task your group will require a coordinator (to get people together), web designer, industrial process analyzer, a grammar checker (who will take the group work to check with the teacher) and a researcher (to find out information about the company).

Figure 5 shows the process for group selection that was observed.

Figure 5 Process for group selection



Rules of group formation were already assumed by the students. Students were generally quick to look around. They stayed seated until identified with a group, and then moved together. There was inviting, usually by students who perceived themselves as a core (a leader with an

initial follower) and to which the loners/single students would be attracted and identified as adherents to a new group. Are these core people aware of themselves as group leaders prior to the classroom assignment? Will these individuals later take on group leadership roles? Will they continue to dominate the direction of the group? The field notes do not indicate a clear answer to these questions, however, no discussion of group tasks or topics was observed during this stage of the process.

Leader-follower relationships and friendship loyalty seem to carry over from the students' previous experiences. Language of discourse was all Thai (L1). Groups that have already gathered together but are lacking in skill will NOT change members. They will select a member who must learn that skill on the job. This indicates a high context or assumed group culture that can quickly adapt to new tasks that may be transferred from one class to the next. It can be concluded that pre-existing relationships and rules of group formation in L1 university culture were applied and predominated in the formation of the new group for the classroom assignment.

MAJOR FINDING 2: PRE-EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS AND RULES OF GROUP FORMATION IN L1 UNIVERSITY CULTURE WERE APPLIED AND PREDOMINATED THE FORMATION OF THE NEW GROUPS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENT.

Impression setting behaviors of Thai university students during group selection that were observed included friendliness, non-verbal smiling or looking/non-looking, cross-gender flirting, joking and there was a subset of behaviors among invitees including inhibition, shyness,

hesitance and nervous behaviors such as bowing heads down, scratching and rubbing and pen/pencil twirling while taking notes.

All of these behaviors tended to confirm or indicate a need for confirmation of self-worth, mutuality and a precarious but false sense of power void. There were clear agenda setters and others in these emerging groups who had a previous loyalty. Student comments showed concern when they found themselves in a group of strangers. Some groups had larger pre-classroom loyalty networks, but the limitation of the group forced them to break up for this project. The group selection process required the teacher's support in a few cases where students found no group in which to participate, which was handled cooperatively by the teacher asking a group with an inadequate number of students whether they would like to work with a student. In most cases, the group agreed to take on the student in their group. In isolated cases groups with small numbers reserved a space for someone not attending class that day but who they expected would join them. This served as a reason why they would not add another student.

Some classrooms had input from proactive classroom heads, who are students selected by their major to coordinate with the students and the teacher of each course. That person would tell the student, "go join [x's group]." This shows that although there is considerable student autonomy in group formation, *loyalty structures, class heads and teachers still represent final authority structures.*

Independent-minded students tended to have low group identification and indicated some resistance to group work. Nowhere was this clearer than among English majors in the 5th year of the Arts Faculty program engaging in student-initiated research. One such student who worked

alone writes, “Because of different raising, each member has different attitudes...This disagreement affects the time of doing the research, they have to spend time on solving relationship problem instead of working on the research.” The diversity of opinion and experience that can often be an asset to a group is seen by this student as a waste of time. She goes on to write, “Doing research alone helps the researcher improves academic writing and reading skills because the researcher does it by his/her own hands...my reading skill is improved because I had the experience to read the academic essay.” The comments do not make the origin of the student’s opinion of group work clear, nor if they were caused by her independence or vice-versa. But considering that this student chose to work alone, it stands to reason that she had them in place before this assignment.

GROUP ROLES

After groups have formed and dealt with various inter-group conflicts, literature suggests that the groups should designate roles for its members. These group roles, clearly outlined by Robbins and noted in chapter 2, work to help the group function and increase group cohesion. They are not necessarily related to dividing up tasks or work and may not be overtly assigned as much as assumed.

The data shows a lack of designated group roles and/or understanding of the value and importance of these contributions to various group processes. Even if the students did not know the names or proper descriptions of group roles, they should have been familiar with the expectation that group members do things to help the group, things that weren’t necessarily

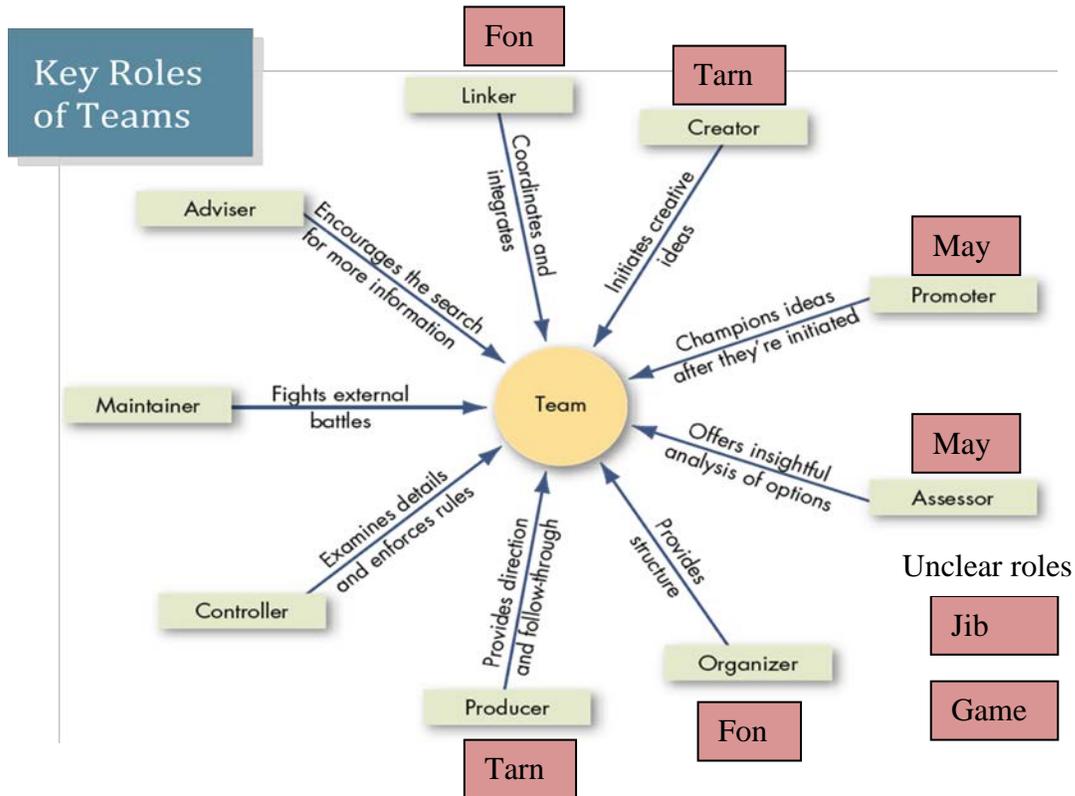
related to the task of the group. Yet, in the data, there was little mention of the contributions of group members outside of the task assigned.

One of the few examples of students filling group roles comes from the Engineering majors. In this reflection, there are the beginnings of what could be considered group roles.

In my team I really know just Jib. She's my closed friend from High school and 4 of them that I never talk with them before. It's make me know many people in a short time. I started to talk with fon first, she's so friendly and talkative. But I think she is a really good girl. Fon always help us to join together she opened and created a group in facebook for everybody to talk together. She's always do a thing when we have assemble and helpful all a time. It make me think she's so lovely. I'm glad to work with her. Secondly, I know Tarn, She's a kind of beautiful girl. She has a lot of jokes to tell us and then we'd laugh together. She make everybody happy always. "SCG Paper" is a topic from Tam that she presented to us and everyone agree with her think. I think she has a creative imagination. If this topic is great, It's really mean our project is cool. Tam always help everyone to do a project. She decided to we an "easy web pro" as a website design program. This program is easy to use, we spend a few time to learnt it. Then our website is completely. The third man in our group is Game. He's a handsome guy. He always come to assemble with everybody. But his work is less. I meant he can't do something but something he is good. From this project I learnt to participate with everyone in my team. I know a people more than I knew. When we work together everyone are always happy. I love to work with them.

Robbins' group roles are used in Figure 6 to analyze descriptions by the above student in her group.

Figure 6 Description analysis of group roles



The student goes through three of the five members in the group and describes their contributions to the group not in terms of the work they did on the task, but in terms of the things they did to make the group's experience more enjoyable and effective. The first group member mentioned makes the group members comfortable and does things to ease communication. Robbins would label her a "linker" or perhaps an "organizer". The second group member, while also making the group members comfortable, provides the inspiration and ideas of the group, similar to a "creator" or "producer". The student herself, named May, might be considered a "promoter" or "assessor". This student doesn't have the discourse to properly describe the roles that the members of her group are filling. While the student understands that the fact that these members performed in this way made the experience more enjoyable, it is unclear whether or not

the student will look for people to fill these roles in the future. Clearly this student had a positive experience. But the fact that these types of comments are so rare in the data suggests that most of the other students either did not notice or took these skills for granted.

It is worth noting that while many students seemed to value the experience they had with and the opportunity to develop teamwork abilities, few of them seemed to have those skills coming in to the exercise. The lack of teamwork skills points to a surprising revelation within the data: many of the students had never been in these sorts of structured, long-term, high-stakes kinds of groups before. They had never had to move through Tuckman's Stages of Group Development, because they had never been in a group long enough or important enough to need to form those types of bonds and social structures (Atherton, 2011). They may have experienced "bundling" (Cook, 2005) where they were asked to work with other students temporarily and on a task that could be completed individually. As a result, many students have never had to develop group working skills or an understanding of group roles.

LEADERSHIP

While the students showed little understanding of group roles, there was one role that came up frequently within the data: *the leader*. Many groups seemed to understand that they needed someone to take a leadership position within the group. This need for a leader seems to echo other parts of Thai culture, in which authority is granted to specific individuals or groups based on factors ranging from age to socio-economic status to gender and so on. In line with Thai culture, there were a number of instances where students divided their group into a "*leader*" and "*followers*".

This recurring description of the leadership dynamic within the students' groups is in direct conflict with the ways in which many students describe the decision-making processes within the groups. Most students describe groups in which the members bring their ideas before the group and a consensus or compromise is reached. This process (discussed below) is often referred to as time consuming. Very rarely is there any mention of a leader interrupting this process and making a decision independently. It is as if the leadership dynamic described by the students does not actually control the group, and certainly does not exist in the clear, well-defined way in which it is described by the students. The data points to two reasons why this is true.

CHOOSING A LEADER

The first reason why the leaders of the group do not seem to actually exert any authority over their groups is related to how they become leaders, or, more precisely, how they are chosen to be leaders. The leaders of these groups are chosen by the other members of the group, often against the wishes of the person who becomes leader. Some who are chosen to be leaders express fear and nervousness about assuming the role. Some also mention that they have often tried to avoid a leadership role because they don't want to give orders to the other group members. One student writes, "I just have ever been a follower because I am nervous and fear to order the other." Nevertheless, these group members are chosen by their group mates to be the leader and they feel obligated to do so.

Considering their reluctance, it stands to reason that they are not chosen for their leadership qualities or abilities. They do not seem to be assertive or dominant personalities. They are chosen not for their ability to lead the group members, but for their skill at completing the task at

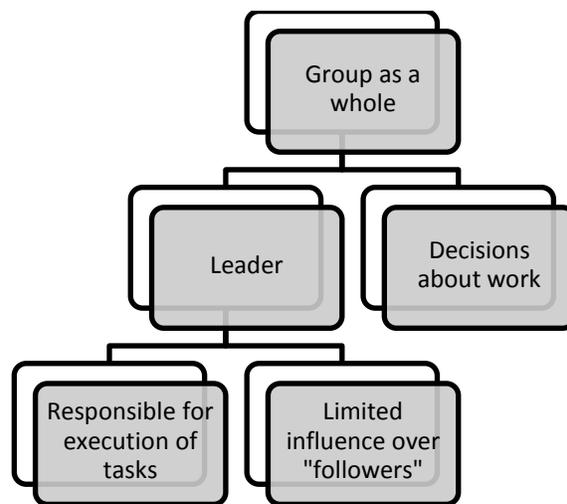
hand. Whichever student is the best at addressing the needs of the task is made leader of the group. In fact, there is some evidence that the role of leader is a fluid one, changing hands when the tasks facing the group change. One student writes, “Sometimes I was leader and sometimes I was follower. I was leader of work in my part...I was follower in work of others part.” In this, the group leaders are actually leaders of the tasks, and not leaders of the group members. Their responsibility is to the task and not to the people executing the task. As a result, their authority over the group is limited.

One student writes “First problem faced me when my friends, co-worker, did not pay any attention to our work. Moreover they are my closed friends, I did not want to strict them so much. So I decided to do the project myself.” This student was elected leader and then charged with completing the task. As the student had very little leadership ability or control over the group, the student opted to try and complete the task alone. This outcome can be seen as a failure of leadership, which can be attributed to the leader’s lack of leadership skills. The student finally had to go back to the group after the work proved to be too much, and writes, “I decided to call my friends and appointed them for meeting. I told them the problems and divided works to them. Finally our web project was finished on time.” Only after struggling to the point of being overwhelmed, when all other measures had failed, did this student exert leadership over the group by holding a meeting and dividing up the work load. This group was only marginally successful because of low group cohesion and improper execution of group roles. This is one of the few instances in the data when a leader has authority.

DECISION PROCESS

Despite the many limitations of the leaders in these groups, it was clear that most groups felt the need to designate a leader. It is the only group role, aside perhaps from the role of “follower”, that the students seemed know by name. Yet the execution of the leader role did not seem to coincide with the priority it received. The functioning of the groups was generally far more democratic than having one clear leader would allow. These group dynamics on execution of leadership are illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7 Overview of leadership dynamic in groups



Note that the leader in this model provided by students does not have direct control over the decisions about work. While the leader has some influence, much of the group remains autonomous.

Klausner (1997) studied Thai culture and addressed the changes in the social and political attitudes towards leadership. Thai cultural change has seen traditional values being challenged including replacement of unquestioned deference and obedience to those in authority to one of

transparency and accountability. However, this study shed light on the need to reinterpret groups, not just leaders of groups. Strong groups develop distinguished roles and haggle not only over how to accomplish a task, but how to be together. Leadership in such groups no longer assumes the role of setting policy but take on oversight of processes being done by various parts of the group. Members must not withdraw if another member or the group leader attempts to assert themselves and their agenda on the group. They must confront one another before they can develop a constructive relationship for the group members to go together. “Argumentative friendship, fractious trust and earned respect may well be oxymorons, but they capture the essence of this proposed new set of values.” (p. 20). Group processes in the classroom are a way to model these emerging national values. The current study confirms that university students are responding to the opportunity to develop new patterns of working together at an extremely affirmative level.

In one sense, the changing social and political attitudes towards leadership within the greater Thai culture may be influencing the attitudes among Thai university students, specifically the ones observed in this study. In another sense, the changing behaviors that have been observed may be the influence, or part of the influence, that is changing the greater Thai culture. What might be happening is a combination of the two, where the changing social attitudes are encouraging students to look at social structures more democratically, which in turn encourages them to question society’s views towards leadership. So this study looks at these changes on the small scale of the classroom which may only be a piece of the greater cultural change.

While there is little mention of the group roles existent within the sample, there is more information about the skills that were used to complete the assignments. The assignments used in this project were designed to encourage the groups to assign tasks to members with different abilities. Aside from the obvious need for English language skills, there were needs for researching, giving surveys on assignment topics, designing and building web sites, and use of various media equipment, including video cameras. The assignments were very different from class to class, and therefore the groups had to employ different skill sets to accomplish their tasks.

There was evidence that the groups in the sample were able to recognize previous experience and skills and assign tasks accordingly. For example, one student wrote, “My duty is make website. I used to make website for tour-phetchabun in high school...” This student was apparently chosen to handle the web design because of his/her experience with that skill set. An Education major, writing about how to learn English, wrote, “Talk with people who fluency in English (not only foreigner) to make you dare to talk and easy to listen.” While it was not clear if this student found people to “dare to talk” with within her group, she was certainly demonstrating the ability to recognize what skills she needed to accomplish the task. There were examples of this type of recognition of skills throughout the data.

There were also many examples of recognition that the group did not possess the skills necessary for the task at hand. One student wrote, “Our poor grammar skill was another problem that take our time. We could not find some new words for the article.” This group could recognize that their lack of English abilities slowed their work down. They searched for

appropriate vocabulary. Similarly, one student stated, “About listening skill of me I think it’s very terrible.” But this student went on to describe the things he tried to improve. The most common example of this was in the Liberal Arts majors. They had to study a topic of their choosing and present their findings to the class. While it is somewhat clear that such an assignment would need skills including the ability to conduct research, to survey when needed, to write-up their findings and speak English during the presentation, many of the groups seemed to grapple with exactly what they wanted to do and how they wanted to do it. They were not told to designate certain responsibilities, as the engineers were. As a result, the groups addressed this assignment in a number of different ways, and the skills required to do so varied accordingly. Their group size was small. The way they formed their group ended up promoting conflict and reducing cohesion.

There was also some evidence, however, that the groups did not focus on certain skills within the group members, but instead divided the labor evenly and indiscriminately. Many groups seemed to work together as one, approaching each task ahead of the group in succession, dividing up the labor involved in that task and performing the task equally before moving on to the next task. One student wrote, “My research team will have to go in the field to gather the information by ourselves...Since my team are already the user of some social networking website such as Facebook, we will post the message about the topic.” In this case, there seemed to be little recognition of skills available within the group. As the group worked together on research, all the members searched equally. When the group moved on to writing about the findings, all the members wrote, regardless of skills. This reduced quality of the final product.

4.2 ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENT GROUP PROCESSES

Enhancement of student group processes included five elements: teacher scaffolding, purposing, role differentiation, norming through an emerging peer review and problem-solving process. Teacher scaffolding included content, feedback, assessment, and cohesion enhancement, as well as advising on educational technology, as per the matrix below.

The matrix in Table 4 (below) describes the various aspects of a group-based assignment that a teacher needs to consider during class preparation. Not only does the teacher need to account for what content, resources, support, and assessment to provide to the groups and individuals over the course of the assignment, he/she also needs to consider what the groups and individuals were adding to the experience. All of these are pedagogical concerns that work to enhance the cohesion, functionality, and overall benefit of the groups doing the class assignment.

The content of the course assignment was considered by the teacher. The main question was who should provide the content for the assignment. There were three possibilities: teacher assigned content, collective choice of content, or student/individual choice of content. In the former case, teacher assignment of content, such as a debate topic in the listening class, reduces conflict over choice of content. In the latter case, surveying the students for similar interests can result in interest groups working on content together. A collective choice proved slow but valuable for building group cohesion. Along with the teacher assigned content, groups also introduced their own content or foci, causing them to find and interact with language-related content.

Table 4 Pedagogical enhancement matrix

Types	Content	Feedback	Assessors	Cohesion level	Cohesion enhancement	Educational technology
01	Teacher Assigned	Peer	Teacher	Low group identification and functionality	Role identification/ clarification	Online exercises/hot potatoes online research social networks Website editing programs
02	Collective choice	Teacher	Group	semi-functional	Review assignment	Blogs/peer editing/ google.docs/ turnitin.com
03	Individual choice	Automated	Peer	High identification and functionality	Group motivation and encouragement	EFL interactive games
04			Self	Classroom-wide groups benchmarking	Regular reporting mechanisms	Teacher-produced class materials
05					Group crisis intervention and mediation. Resource identification	Projectors & Power Points, Microphones/ speakers in class Video recording
06						Voice recording/ editing (headset), recording software
07						Textbooks
08					Observation	Interviews

The teacher also considers issues of feedback classified as peer, teacher, and automated feedback types. Group work emphasized peer feedback within and between groups and as a whole class. Teacher feedback responded to issues identified by students, such as how to summarize, how to order adjectives or use clauses. Therefore, the teacher should be prepared to coach the groups along, rather than instruct about content. Automated feedback was limited in this study, but could include a range of activities, such as online quizzes, spelling and grammar checkers, vocabulary analyzers, and more.

Assessment provides a grade on the product of the group assignment. Quality can be measured by individual contributors to a group project through a self assessment essay. Peers can provide an assessment, but were not asked to do so in this sample. Groups can assess themselves and their product in a report. They can even be asked to assign a grade to themselves. This study did not do that. Teachers provide grading criteria. Students beginning an assignment must know the criteria by which they were graded for their group work. Teachers must give significant thought to content feedback and assessment of groups prior to

Clarifying purpose and roles

The framing of the assignment is one way that the teacher enhances the group process. The Engineering majors were given a very clear task. They had to research a company and determine how to improve that company's processes. They had to present their findings on a website using proper English. This assignment involved a clear set of skills the group would need: researching, problem-solving, web-design and English writing. These classes were also told that they needed to have group members assigned to specific tasks within the group. This made the skills needed for the assignment clear to the students, because they needed someone to be a "web-designer" and someone to be an "English checker" and so on.

giving the assignment. Furthermore, teachers require skills in group cohesion enhancement and advising students on educational technology as shown on Table 4.

Norming is a process by which groups set expectations for behavior. Time management was one problem in norming. The other major problem of groups was conflict related to topic selection. It helps to clarify roles and purposes. Furthermore, teachers can enhance norming through regular reporting and, in cases where groups have low functionality and identification with the group, intervention. In this way, groups that were struggling behind the rest of the class could be supported. Throughout this study, the researchers had to intervene periodically as teachers with many groups seeking direction. However, groups with severe conflict occurred once among the seventeen groups of Arts majors, once among the fifty groups of Engineering majors, and three times among the approximately fifteen groups of Education majors. In all these cases the group was able to finish the assignment by addressing conflict directly, compromising, and through discussion. This ability to survive conflict and finish the job together proved to be a memorable experience for many students.

4.3 HINDRANCES OF STUDENT GROUPS

ARGUMENTS

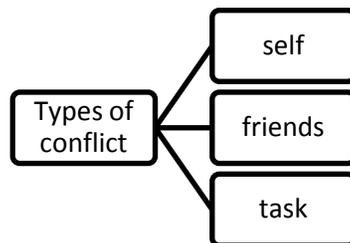
There was one problem that seemed to come up only in one set of the data. Among the Liberal Arts majors there was repeated mention of “arguments”. This is in keeping with Tuckman’s second stage of group forming: “storming”. How did students in the sample distinguish between argument and discussion?

A number of students in the Arts classes claimed that their groups underwent time-consuming arguments that often led to “bad feelings”. From these feelings, most groups moved on to a stage of resolution and compromise that seemed to fit with Tuckman’s third stage of group forming: “norming”. There were, however, a few groups that did not seem to find a way past this stage. Their groups performed poorly and obviously had low cohesion. It is interesting that the Liberal Arts students were the ones who mentioned this the most. Among the Engineering majors there were often mentions of discussions, but not arguments.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

As shown in Figure 8, the conflict described in the data related to three psychosocial aspects of groupness: personal conflict with oneself, interpersonal conflict between different members of

Figure 8 Types of conflict in data



a group and structural conflict related to clarity about the task, teaching roles, field of study and institutional requirements and assessment.

PERSONAL CONFLICT

Self or personal conflict was expressed as **apprehension** towards knowing new people through their contrived EFL classroom group. A student previously cited said, “In my team I really know just Jib. She’s my closed friend from High school and 4 of them that I never talk with them before. It’s make me know many people in a short time.” This student was pleasantly surprised about her own ability to get to know new people.

A second internal conflict related to feelings of **inadequacy** for the task at hand. In an engineering group assigned to create a website a student felt confused “because I don’t know about this website before.” After a stranger on her team helped her to understand, she said at the conclusion of the project “I feel more confidence, funny and like to work with everyone. I’m so glad to work with them who is a stranger before.”

Fear was another internal conflict. Students were elated to find that their expectations of pain were not realized: “In this course, I make web project with my friends. The first time I know that I must to do web project, I think it’s too difficult. But I able to succeed it because of teamwork.” Another concluded “In the web project. I think is hard to do it. When I try to do it. I found that it easily that I think.” Another respondent said, “As I work on it, I feel happy and very funny. I was impressed of my professor and group mates because they guided and gave me advice to any problem. The group members were so friendly and very cooperative.”

Some learned the hard lesson that teams can complete a complex task at a higher quality and more efficiently than individuals. “I can not do everything by me. I have to friends for fulfill.” This infers that individuals might be overwhelmed without a group context.

Do these comments about internal conflict of students in group tasks correlate with the internal conflict factors among individual learners? Is the processing of that apprehension, inadequacy and fear more easily done in groups? The current study's data correlates with the research by Fushino (2010) that building of confidence as well as teacher modeling and reinforcing of group work contributes to willingness to communicate in foreign language group work. However, **the present study of Thai university students demonstrates that peers are actually reinforcing confidence in group work without teacher intervention.** Breaking the ice and finding one's place (the role the group gives a person as well as recognizing limitations) are so important for a student facing internal conflicts. The study suggests that peers may be more significant than teachers for this process.

*MAJOR FINDING 3: THE STUDY OF THAI
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DEMONSTRATES THAT PEERS
ARE ACTUALLY REINFORCING CONFIDENCE IN GROUP
WORK WITHOUT TEACHER INTERVENTION.*

Students sometimes confessed upon entering the English language classroom to a predisposition or negative **attitude towards English** subject and EFL. One engineering student said that this class reduced this negative attitude, saying "I feel funny in my class don't worried to English." Another states that "I feel stress when my teacher order homework about web project." Apparently this student had a negative project experience in a previous English course. What happened? "Because term ago I used to make English project that I strain and tired." Students worried about their ability to give sufficient time to English class, especially if it was not their major. It's hard to do something one is not particularly skilled in.

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Interestingly, students commented on interpersonal conflict and personality clashes but did not go into the details of the conflict. They tended to let go and allow their friend to dominate. They spoke of the conflict in general terms and did not identify a person as being an obstacle to group goals (selecting a topic) and in taking responsibility for the group. Students who failed to meet group expectations were reprimanded. This conflict appeared in student reporting about group work when frustration was expressed that students who did not contribute shouldn't get the same grade.

TASK OR STRUCTURAL CONFLICT

Task or structural conflict was represented by voices among education and arts students when involved in complex tasks without the support of formal groups. Occasionally a student was **against the task itself**. The student sought confrontation with the teacher over the assignment and to exert control over it. In such cases, the teacher was in the difficult position of explaining the task to relate institutional and course requirements to individual student needs and the needs of the classroom participants as a whole. Other times, the task itself was complex enough that it required some discussion, which the students helpfully challenged in order to bring discussion in the class. Teacher roles in such direct confrontation in the university classroom referred back to the course objectives with willingness to negotiate a settlement with the class as a whole. More thought should be given to task design, negotiation with respect to different teaching and learning styles.

A second structural problem in groups occurred related to schedules. **Time management problems** were addressed through development of more **efficient processes for thinking and discussion**. “When my team have a problem or sometimes we don’t have time for do it, we use brainstorm and we pass it together.” Another student reflected that “it is important that a working group keep the membership informed of its activity and process, we must take care of each other.”

Although our time wasn't some but we tried to find the time to meet each others. We often do and discuss our project on the weekend when my friends have problems, I always help them solve the problems and give good advices to them. So this made us closer. For me, the important this to studying in this project isn't for good grade or good score. But the important is experience with my friends and it is good memory. I can't find everywhere else. And the experience can help me a lot when I work in the future.

Some used online resources to address the problem of time management.

“Our group have five members, there from third grade and two from second grade. We had different free time but we can made a good work because we chatting and sharing everything in facebook and we met together on Saturday and Sunday.” Grade here represents the students’ graduating class. The group had 2nd and 3rd year students with different academic schedules. 2nd year courses are institutionally placed at the same times

In addition to structural conflict over the task and time management, groups also conflicted over selection of content or topic in the initial formation of the group and setting of goals. This was merely a presenting issue. Upon further examination, individuals were found to have a conflict with **group norms**. One student describes the group’s approach to a speaking task as follows:

In our group, we divided the content of this topic into three parts. The first part is general purpose. Second part is the core message and the third part is the scope of presentation. First, we decided to search the topic individually. Then, we share the topic together and choose the most interested topic. Next, we tried to understand the content together and divided the content to three parts for each members of our group. Finally, we drew lots for each part of content and prepare for presentation. There are a little conflict when we do this task together. The conflict is happened when we share the topic together. We cannot divide that which topic is the best one for our presentation all of us think that our topic is better one but for myself I have the conflict with myself because I have the problem when I have to speak in front of the class. Although I well prepare I will forget when I stand in front of the class. We summarize the content of each other topic together. And discuss about each content. Finally, we decided to choose the topic that we can use well and how more advantages for our friends. We learn how to solve the problem when we work together and help each other. If I work with no team, there aren't any opinions to help me involve any decision.

She suggests a procedure for doing the task: 1) search individually for topics, 2) share in the group, 3) group selects topic based on the “most interest(ing) topic,” 4) draw lots (means of division of labor) and 5) individual preparation. Conflict events occurred at a certain time. The time of conflict was in sharing/dividing topics (2, 3 and 4 above). They solved the problem by summarizing the content of each topic (each individual’s contribution) and deciding what could be useful and advantageous (indicating the two criteria the group used for selection). The teacher suggested these criteria in class when discussing the assignment. The group agreed to adopt these criteria before they could resolve their conflict. The student DID hint that perhaps making this selection alone would be far easier and effective. The group experience had problems, showing that teacher framing of the group processes and roles is needed to complete the task.

Nowhere was conflict with the group task clearer than in the education speaking class. A student said that “for the conflict in debate, I think there are many conflict or problems in debate. First, the topic is rather difficult because all of students is not interested in the topic enough because we never talk about on this topic before. Moreover, there are not enough sources for support the issue to debate ...there are many difficult words or vocabularies for using in speaking...The last conflict is the member in our group can't to decide which one is the leader, which one is the opposition or the propose number 1,2,3.” This debate group failed to accomplish the task effectively and the assigned debate topic was blamed.

Teachers facing this kind of conflict must be aware that this may not be the real story. One ad hoc group of 3 separated from the larger Speaking class group. They had a greater sense of cohesion and ease in the task. The other group had at least 5 people recording together and it was less successful. Therefore, conflict with the task itself or with the teacher can be used as a diversion by university students struggling with other issues. The design of group tasks needs to be simple and clear to reduce this area of conflict.

On the other hand, a structural conflict emerged in an individual task for which the education students consulted outside of class and bundled into their own work groups. The task was to produce a process video.

The thing that we learnt from this activity is harmony together and teach me to know the good will from my friends because I never believed before that I will get the wonderful experience from group. However, I think I prefer working individual to group's working because I am a strange person. I don't like to do the work with other people and I always most the problem when I work in group. So, I think I will be happy if I work alone. Therefore, when

compare to previous English speaking courses with no teams. I think it is proper for me than I work in group. Maybe I will show my ability, work's efficiency, and my effort to do the best in my work. In addition, I think group work isn't suitable for Thai students because some of them are lazy to do the work with friend and some of diligent students will be discouraged to do it. I know everyone meet face the problem after graduating. However, I extremely insist on working alone because I don't want everyone looks down me when I do the work better than them and I don't want to see some indolent people get advantage in working. From my experience, I used to see and get this bad from my friend. Beside that, I don't want to express my bad feeling, mood, and emotion to my friends. So, there are reasons why I enjoy working alone than working in group. The one thing that I would like to tell you, I would like you to have an certain criteria when you assign the group project because Thai students like to participate in group, but they don't like to do the work one another in group.

The above individual's task motivation was high to achieve higher speaking proficiency (pronunciation, accent, information). The group played a role in improvement of output through rerecording. Only the recording of the video was done with friends. Yet the conflict here was that the group norms tried to force this student to do more mediocre work. Her solution was to work alone.

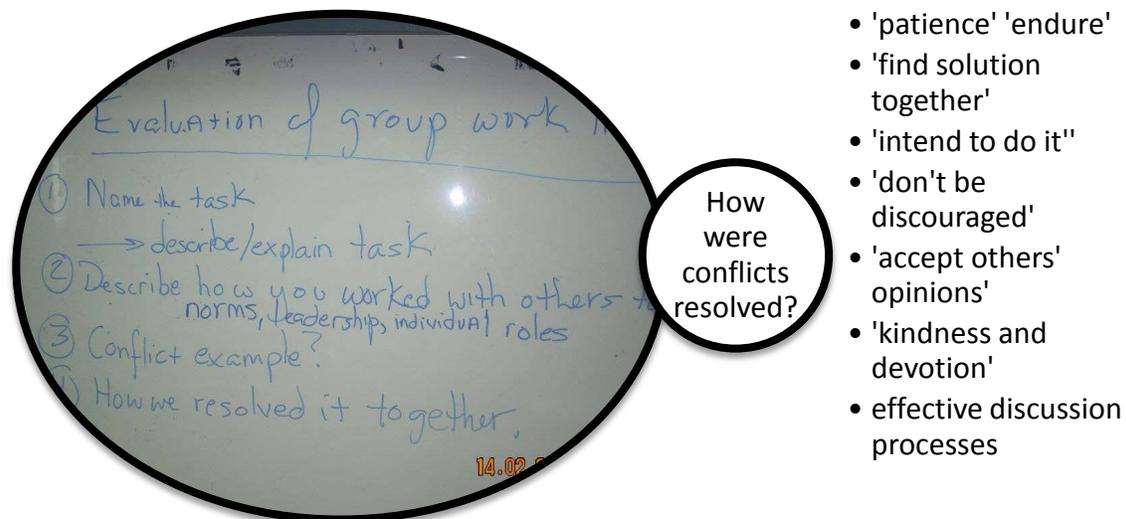
MAJOR FINDING 4: IT IS MORE IMPORTANT TO HER TO AVOID CONFLICT WITH HER CLASSMATES THAN TO ACTUALLY HAVE TO RELATE TO SOME OF THEM.

Her suggestion was that when designing group tasks, teachers should develop criteria for assessing the group project. In fact, there were very clear criteria for grading of the project. However, the group this student was in chose to reinterpret the criteria and reduce the performance. Perhaps she was looking for a division of grading between group and individual scores. Students in the speaking course were asked to answer the following questions: 1. Name

the task (Describe or explain it), 2. Describe how you worked with others to develop norms, leadership and individual responsibility, 3. Give an example of conflict, 4. How was it resolved.

Figure 9 shows samples of the results of that evaluation.

Figure 9 Speaking Course Group Work Evaluation

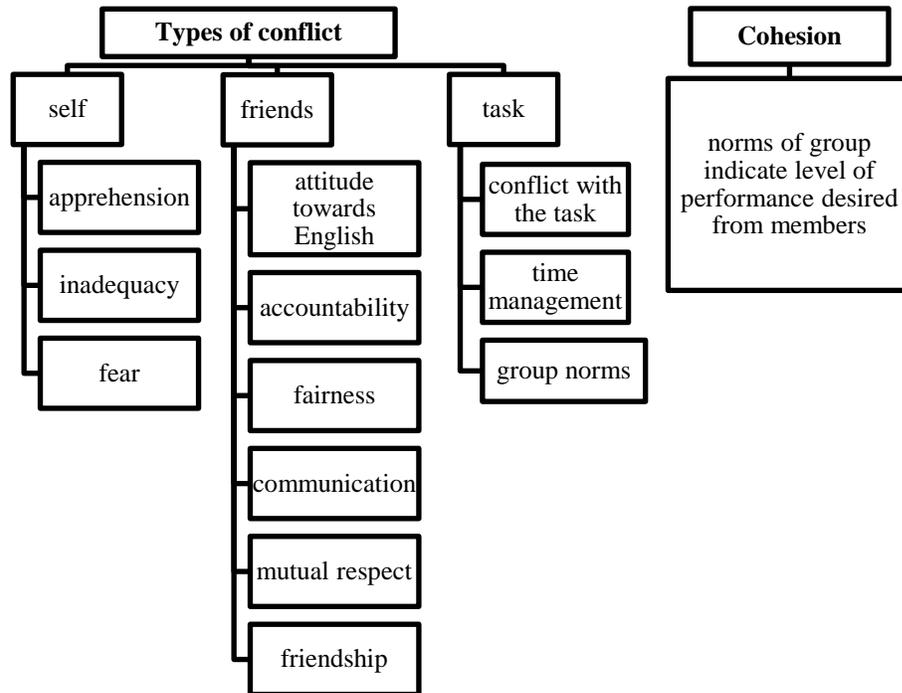


What approaches to overcoming conflict in groups proved helpful to students? One student's attitude towards the group work (web project) reveals a variety of elements to conflict management.

Web project I get some good stuff such as planning in my work, considerate, punctuality help from my team It told me that, sometime we should trust other. Everything works must be plane and assemble. I must forgive my team when they make mistake we should have a same goal because it help us for eliminate problems and different opinion. I must make myself useful for my team and something that I have gotten from my team is friendly that very well and a heart of group work is a team because it is a very essential that will help your group work. And your product is very well.

In summary, this study expands the understanding of conflict in personal, interpersonal and structural terms as per Figure 10.

Figure 10 Conflict processes



GROUP COHESION

The antithesis of conflict is group cohesion. This refers to a group that has found ways to incorporate its members and work together.

In his study on group dynamics, University of Richmond's Donelson Forsyth (2010) states that "group cohesion is the strength of the bonds linking members to a group. Cohesiveness is an indication of the health of the group and is related to a variety of other group processes" (p. 116) He also asks why some groups, but not others, become cohesive. He concludes that researchers

have identified factors such as attraction, stability, size and structure, adding that "even though cohesive groups tend to outperform less cohesive groups, this relationship is strongest when members are committed to the group's tasks. If group norms do not encourage high productivity, then cohesiveness and productivity are negatively related" (p. 140).

Size and attraction were not obvious factors in this study because the size was determined by the teacher and attraction was governed by the norms set in previous relationships. This study identified *goal setting* (clearly marking group tasks), *communication* (developing mechanisms for coordination and setting time to voice opinions in the group), *time-management* (choosing people with similar schedules in formation of the group and investing in the goals of the group by taking time for group needs), *division of non-overlapping roles* (these groups had higher cohesion because they needed each other to finish the task) and *conflict resolution* (problem solving, direct discussion of disagreements in the group and addressing hurt feelings) as the main processes contributing to cohesiveness.

Although it is difficult to measure cohesiveness, we can observe in our data that the group norms of the Engineering and Arts writing students required high performance because their individual grades for the course depended on it. However, just the opposite was found among 5th Year Education majors, whose groups amounted to **bundling** for completion of individual assignments. The problem with bundling was that students did not perform well in the processes above. They tended to avoid the setting of group goals and attempted to flock around an activity. Where they were in teams, bundled students simply divided the material into parts that each would develop and present on their own. There was very low group coherence and even less

coherence in the product of the group. **They never actually formed functioning groups, but expressed open conflict with the task, as per Forsyth's insight.**

An attempt was observed by some students to reduce the performance of the best students in order to manipulate the grades they would receive. Few students outperformed their classmates in this scenario and they paid a social price for it with their friends. Perhaps there was a strong relationship between student's level of desire for high assessment from the teacher and the level of their productivity. Students not interested in getting a grade or who caved in to group pressure in a lower-performance group tended to slack off, indicating that the group in question had norms that did not stress high performance. The worst experience for the highly motivated student was a group that had low norms of motivation and performance or that failed to win teacher recognition for their product. Praise or recognition from the teacher at the end of presentations was absolutely critical as a conclusion to the group processes.

4.4 STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND GROUP WORK

BENEFITS

The students mentioned a number of benefits that they saw from this assignment and particularly from working in a group. These benefits can be grouped into four categories: technical skills related to the project, such as web design; teamwork skills, recognizing that professionals often work in similar settings; personal benefits, including self-awareness, critical skills, professional identity and personal behaviors; and English skills, both in terms of written

skills and advanced vocabulary related to the research materials. The vast majority of students reacted positively to their assignment and felt that either their work or the skills they took away from doing the work would benefit them in the long-term.

These assignments asked of the students things that they probably had not dealt with before. Many students claimed that they either learned how to make a website or they honed the web design skills they already had. Similar things were said about researching. In the case of the engineering assignment, many students reflected on the technical knowledge that they gained from researching specific goods on the market today. Across the board, these benefits seemed very real and very practical in the eyes of the students.

The sample mentioned improving their abilities to work in a group. Some statements vaguely talked about getting better at team work in general, such as in comments like: “I have learned how to work in a team environment and I can get along with my team members.” In other cases, students had specific lessons that they learned about team work, such as: “I learned team work from our group that we can help each other by knowing the ability of each and we do our best in our part.” Most improvements in team work dealt with communication and conflict management issues. The students understood that the ability to work in a group is an important skill to learn, independently of the content of the course or the focus of the assignment.

As the students worked through their different tasks and saw the benefits of their work, many of them noted that they felt they were improving personally. As they recognized that the work they were doing had real-world applications, they felt that the experiences they were gaining could help them professionally or in their personal lives. Many students were thankful for the

experiences they had, reaching beyond the education they were receiving in English. They felt better about themselves because they were accomplishing such a difficult assignment and working in a team.

PEER COMMENTS

It took some adjusting for one student to get used to the idea of **peer comments**. He rationalized it saying “Although in our working have many problems but we can pass easily because we are talk about that problem and fix them together. In my team we can offer every think that maybe different or conflict with friends without problem so our work successful easily. I think in working don’t mind if your friends comment your thinking because it’s maybe good for our team.” This statement was an example of a tendency among some of the sample to minimize their recognition of conflict, particularly when it involved their friends. However, successful groups recognized the conflict and students suggested ways to overcome it. This suggests that groups develop ways to address interpersonal conflict. The result was that individuals acquiesced to the group requirements.

On the other hand, another student revealed what happened when group members had low investment in the group. The student assumed a level of unity that they did not actually have and had severe problems in moving ahead in the group task. The group had to talk and develop true understanding and mutual accountability in the group.

When we work in a team. We found a little problems. We shy to give comments on work, but when we talked and tried to understand other comments. We were intimating and getting along well that made our work. ...When we work together we obtained a

smile and share opinion. The most important thing obtained from this work it is friendship because we were understand and reliable to each team. Accordingly, it causes a great work for this project and we found a new friend I very happy.

A second type of interpersonal conflict named in the data was **individual accountability**.

This conflict happened when students had a higher motivation for success than one of their team members. The team applied stringent pressure on that student to perform. “The most important thing obtained from this work it is friendship because we were understand and reliable to each team. Accordingly, it causes a great work for this project and we found a new friend I very happy.” The student seems to be saying that peer pressure can improve individual performance.

Students expressed concern over **fairness** in dividing roles. Some hoped to obtain a particular role from the group. Others showed concern for how those roles were divided among them. The greatest issue of fairness was to make sure each member pulled their own weight. The sampled students perceived that great harm could be done to groups with little investment on the part of one or a few. This sense of fairness operated out of a concept of distributive justice rather than normative justice. Interestingly, group size never became a point of conflict in groups.

Communication and sharing were the chief ways to address interpersonal conflicts. One student stated that:

Our team always share idea for project. Everyone in my team are exiting for new topic. Every comment from everyone is very important to improve this project. We have good teamwork. I have good relationship with our team and teacher.

From many problems that make us to know a lot of advantages from this project. We started with a plan to solve the problems that learn to use the computer programs with other groups, learn to cooperate with others and don't think them are contestants. Consult and seek guidance from the instructor and brainstorm with team work so the success of this project is going well.

Another student developed lasting memories from the group experience where they developed trust and **mutual respect**.

I remember the time that my friends and I work together. We are working, talking, thinking and enjoy. I was impress in my friends. We share work to everyone. Many people has many opinion and many problem is come I am so proud in my project and I very very proud in my friends. We working with teamwork. I think teamwork is very important for complete the project. When we have problems we share and we talk to others. Working make me know each other more than before, We understand either. We help each other to do their work.

For some, a group whose relationships were strictly professional was exactly what they did NOT need in order to be effective. Rather, tighter **friendship** was needed. “Once my group mate wanted to make a product video. We went out to the field and shoot the video. It was so funny when we're trying to act as professional. We laugh so much and the friendship is happened.” Other groups overcame



Students assess group conflicts

interpersonal conflict through a more professional approach: “My friends and I planned and created the website together. We provided up the work so that we could work faster. We paid the attention to work and were very well organized so we were successful.”

MAJOR FINDING 5: STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND GROUP WORK SHOWED THE GREATEST INDIVIDUAL IMPROVEMENT WHERE THEY OVERCAME CONFLICT IN THE PROCESSES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO GROUP COHESION.

4.5 OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INTERACTION OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND GROUP PROCESSES

Bakhtin (1981) states that by using words, the users change the meanings of the words. This means that within groups of people engaging in dialogue, all the members of the group have influence over the meanings of the words. As groups used the word “leader” in the present study, the meaning of that word and its implications for the group changed. As student groups discussed the assignment as outlined by the teacher, some groups changed the meaning of the words of the assignment, thereby changing its parameters. While some clearly didn’t have the ability to understand those English instructions, some groups intentionally adapted them to meet their needs. Each group engaged in a separate dialogue, so each group’s understanding and use of these words created meaning which was then checked and influenced by the inter-group contexts in the class authority structures. Where the teacher was not engaged in the dialogues, communication became more difficult. This is particularly true in a foreign language classroom, in which the understanding of words is malleable and made relative.

The Listening and Speaking classes for the Liberal Arts and the Education majors were required to perform in team-based debates. In order to do this, they focused on methods to improve their English abilities. Many of them turned to resources based on content, such as

English language news, books, movies and music. Students also tried to improve their abilities by talking to people in English, be they teachers, classmates, and even people from outside of the class who spoke fluently. While a number of the students admitted that they were too intimidated to speak with their teacher, they were more comfortable speaking with their group or with friends from outside of the class.

These assignments often pushed students to do research or conduct surveys, both of which forced the students to improve their English abilities. One student wrote, “We have to speak English outside of the class to do our research...we have to write English fluently and our reading skill weredeveloped from reading other research papers.” Aside from the students being forced to improve their English in order to do their research, they also improved by working together, checking each other’s work, and seeing how others approached grammar and usage questions. Many students expressed the feeling that they learned English more effectively from their peers than they did from the teacher. The following passage was the clearest example of this.

I have assigned to do a group research this semester, and to my surprise, I started to see the development of myself as well as the group members. I think it is because doing research can help students learn academic English independently, or based on their unique abilities. Moreover, doing a group research can help me and my friends improve our language ability like I have never seen before. My English has been improving so much by helping my friends do research and share information. Students can learn better English from their peers this way.

Not only were the students helping the other members of the group, but most students recognized that doing so helped everyone learn English more effectively. A student’s mention of

“unique abilities” was especially telling. It suggested that learning English this way targeted the areas where students excelled and addressed their needs for the task. This is the kind of attention that students simply cannot receive in a traditional classroom setting. The resources reported by students for self-development of skills is reported in Table 5.

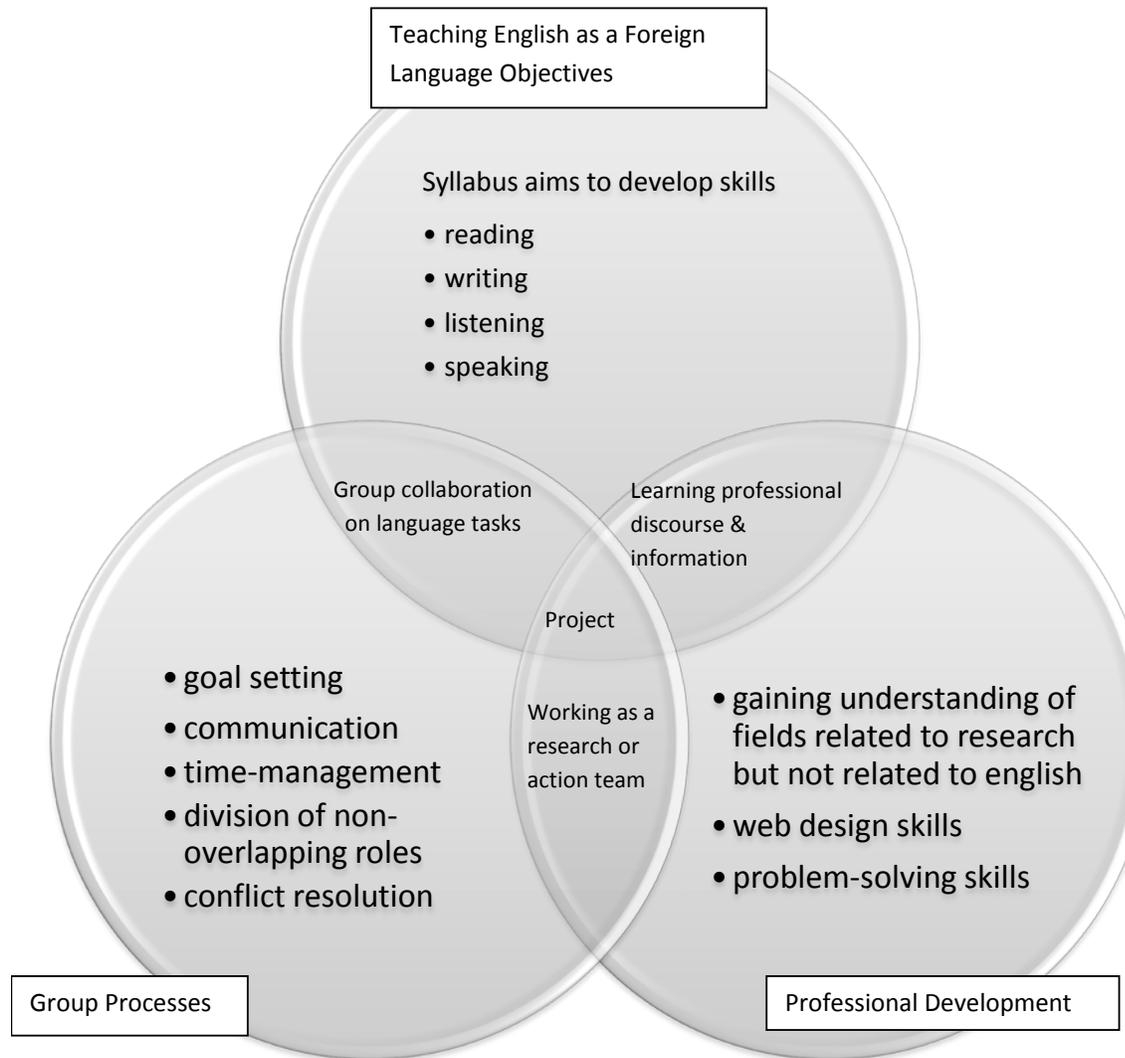
Table 5 Summary of student-reported resources for skills development

Classes	Listening Skills Development	Advanced English Speaking	Academic Writing IV	Communicative English for Chemical Process Engineers
Types of Language Skills	Vocabulary development, phonetics, listening comprehension, note-taking skills and debating skills	Critical and argumentation skills, rhetorical patterns, live and digital presentations	Surveyed literature, research, sentence structure, paragraph composition, report writing and power-point presentations (including summarizing, paraphrasing, citation)	Summarizing, process description, evaluation, web design, paragraph writing, pronunciation and presentation (using website)
Non-person Resources for Skills Development	English language online videos, news, books, movies and music	Websites and recording equipment	Academic articles, news channels and internet	Company literature, internet resources, library database, textbooks in chemical engineering and class textbooks
People Resources for Skills Development	Fellow students, other Thai students, Thai teachers, native-speaking teachers and proficient Thai speakers of English	Native-speaking teacher, classmates and ad-hoc peer gatherings	Groups, classroom intergroup reports, independent intergroup meetings, survey and interview participants (hospital staff, business people, beauticians, etc.)	Team-members, independent intergroup meetings, company executives, native-speaking teacher, Thai teacher and engineering professors/experts

When analyzing the benefits from group-based tasks reported by the sample, three main benefits emerged, which were group processes, professional development, and teaching English as a foreign language objectives. Group processes included all the tasks related to group cohesion and productivity, such as communication, time management, and conflict resolution. Professional development describes those benefits from specific tasks or exercise of skills that may be useful in the students' professional lives, such as web-design or problem-solving skills. It is recognized that this skill set points to but does not fully incorporate a more desirable

emphasis on social change (Bahktin, 1981). TEFL objectives include the aims of the language classroom to improve language ability as outlined in the course syllabi as four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The three categories interact with each other, creating mutually beneficial objectives, as shown in Figure 11 below.

Figure 11 Relationship between language, group processes and professional development in dialogic learning



The excerpts of student comments cited in this chapter show the interaction of group processes with TEFL objectives in that the group members were helping each other to complete the tasks at hand which also required them to meet the objectives of a language course as

outlined in the course syllabus. Similar benefits took place where professional development and TEFL objectives overlapped, as seen most clearly in the work of the engineering and to some extent the education students. It was seen less so with the Arts students. The exposure to professional discourse and information not only prepared these students for engaging in their professional lives, but worked to increase their understanding and use of the English language.

The study finds that these separate objectives work harmoniously together to produce an environment in which language acquisition is reinforced from different aspects. The students are motivated to learn English as part of their membership in and responsibility to their group. They are also learning English in service of their own professional development. Introducing group processes and professional development objectives into the TEFL classroom not only diversifies the students' experiences, but also supports the original TEFL objectives of the courses.

In conclusion, this chapter described group processes among Silpakorn University students in foreign language classrooms. It found that group project work contributes to student English language proficiency, teamwork skills and professional development. This could be enhanced by teachers through attention to group formation and clarifying the relationship between the task and expected group roles. Although conflict with self, peers and the assignment itself could impede group cohesion and task accomplishment, students needed to work through the conflict together. The teacher needed only to confirm that conflict was a normal part of working on a team and ask the students questions that helped them think about how they resolved the problems. Since students identified benefits in areas where they overcame conflict, it can be inferred that cohesive groups had the greatest overall value. Assessment of group task

accomplishment might divide the score between individual contributions and the group score for the final product. It must also factor into the assessment of the three skill areas of this study (language, social and professional skills development) perhaps in part through student self-assessment. Therefore assessment of a group task involved individual performance, group performance and student self-assessment. Task-based groups had a positive relationship to EFL learning environments at Silpakorn University as they motivated students, used critical skills and provided peer-feedback that improved L2 language products in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

This study used field notes and student descriptions in essays:

1. To describe how group processes were designed and implemented in foreign language classrooms
2. To identify pedagogical processes which enhance groups in foreign language classrooms.
3. To identify factors impeding groups in foreign language classrooms.
4. To identify criteria for assessing the product of learning groups
5. To demonstrate the relationship between groups and EFL learning environments at Silpakorn University.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings, consider how to apply the findings to promote cooperation in educational research, suggest how to design group assignments and consider areas for follow-up research.

5.1 DISCUSSION

Students sampled in this study found cohesive, structured groups in the foreign language classroom to be very meaningful, particularly in areas of language acquisition, interpersonal skills and professional integration. Through analysis of the descriptions by Silpakorn University students of their group experiences in English classes, several key findings can be made.

Major finding 1: Group processes are distinguished from *task* processes and consist mainly of the agreements (norms) and behaviors that enable a group to function. The current study confirms the theory of Tuckman regarding 5 basic procedures in groups. What was quite descriptive in the current sample was Tuckman's first (forming) stage of the students' groups.

Major finding 2: It can be concluded that pre-existing relationships and rules of group formation in L1 university culture were applied and predominated the formation of the new groups for the English language classroom assignment. Impression setting behaviors of Thai university students during group selection that were observed confirm or indicate a need for confirmation of self-worth, mutuality and a precarious but false sense of a power void. There were clear agenda setters and others in these emerging groups who had a previous loyalty. Although there was considerable student autonomy in group formation, *loyalty structures, class heads and teachers still represent final authority structures*. Independent-minded students tended to have low group identification and indicated some resistance to group work.

Major Finding 3: leaders of groups did not seem to actually exert any authority over their groups. This may be related to how they are chosen by the other members of the group, often against their wishes but feeling obligated to do so. They are not chosen for their leadership

qualities or abilities to lead the group members, but for their skill at completing the task at hand. The role of leader was fluid, changing hands when the tasks facing the group changed. Groups enlisted members to help complete tasks based on their diverse skills and thus led to role diversification in the group. Groups did not always possess the skills necessary for the task at hand and entrusted someone with it. They divided the labor evenly and indiscriminately. Students were familiar with the idea that group members do things to help the group, things that are not necessarily related to the task of the group.

Major Finding 4: Few students had previously developed group working skills. This is why none of the students talked about coming in to the group with teamwork skills.

Major Finding 5: Student self-assessment of skills development and group work showed the greatest individual improvement where they overcame conflict in the processes that enhance group cohesion. This study identified different factors that enhance or block group cohesion, as discussed in more detail below with regards to follow-up research possibilities.

Enhancement of student group processes included five elements: teacher scaffolding, purposing, role differentiation, norming through an emerging peer review and problem-solving process. Teacher scaffolding included content, feedback, assessment, and cohesion enhancement, as well as advising on educational technology, as indicated in Figure 11.

Group processes in the classroom are a way to model emerging national values. The present study confirms the literature that indicates university students are responding to the opportunity to develop new patterns of working together at an extremely affirmative level. What might be happening is that changing social attitudes are encouraging students to look at social structures

more laterally, which in turn is encouraging them to question society's views towards leadership. And while these changes can be considered on the small scale of the classroom, this may only be a piece of the greater cultural change.

Hindrances to student groups were categorized into three psychosocial dimensions of groupness: Personal conflict with oneself, interpersonal conflict between different members of a group and structural conflict, such as lack of clarity about the task, the perceived changed role of the teacher, the field of study and institutional requirements and assessment. This study found that peers are actually reinforcing confidence in group work without teacher intervention. Students' negative attitude towards the English subject was significantly improved through group work. Meanwhile, teachers facing structural conflict must be aware that conflict with the task itself or with the teacher can be used as a diversion by university students struggling with other issues threatening group cohesion. Nonetheless, the design of group tasks needs to be simple and clear to reduce this area of conflict. Finally, conflict avoidance indicates low investment in group tasks. Group cohesion and effectiveness remain low until groups argue and develop norms for their group. This convergence in group work takes weeks, however, all the students whose groups passed through their conflict reflected on it with great excitement at how group work made the task easy and meaningful.

Student self-assessment of skills development and group work showed benefits that they saw from this assignment and particularly from working in a group. These benefits fall into four categories: technical skills related to the project, such as web design; teamwork skills, recognizing that professionals often work in similar settings; personal benefits, including self-

awareness, critical skills, professional identity and personal behaviors; and English skills, both in terms of written skills and advanced vocabulary related to the research materials. The vast majority of students reacted positively to their assignment and felt that either their work or the skills they took away from doing the work would benefit them in the long-term. The study discussed how groups were guided by values of individual accountability, fairness, communication and sharing, mutual respect and friendship as well as finding efficient processes for thinking and discussion. Student self-assessment of skills development and group work showed the greatest individual improvement and growing confidence and group status where group cohesion was high.

This study has observed the interaction of Language Acquisition and Group Processes. Group assignments observed in this study often pushed students to do research or conduct surveys, both of which forced the students to improve their English abilities. The sample proved very creative at finding resources for skills development. Hence it can be concluded that language learning, group process learning and professional development occurred at the same time. In conclusion, this study attempted to understand group processes among Silpakorn University students in foreign language classrooms. It found that students believe that group project work contributes greatly to student English language proficiency, teamwork skills and professional development.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COOPERATION

This study has been conducted by a team of two researchers from the Faculty of Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the School of Education at Silpakorn University. Through the

process of working collaboratively, parallels between the group processes of the sample of the study and the group processes of the research team emerged. It is clear that research teams need to adhere to similar processes as the sample.

Group norms must be set with members agreeing on meeting times, task deadlines and responsibility, decision making processes, and acceptance of different opinions and views. A research team can only benefit from the skills and experiences of the members when the team is able to express ideas and integrate those ideas into the shared project. Division of labor is important and must be coupled with ample meeting time to collectively assess the group's work and decide how to proceed.

Group goals and tasks must be clearly defined, often through use of lists and schedules. This might seem unnecessary, but it is immensely helpful for tracking progress and keeping members on task. Meeting notes are similarly important. Goals and tasks must be reassessed often as the work changes and progresses. New decisions and goals should be checked against previous ones to see that the group is progressing in a desirable fashion.

The research team experienced little conflict. This may be due to the working relationships already established outside of the research. These personal relationships supplemented the professional ones formed for the purposes of this project and reduced time spent in the "storming" phase of group development.

The research team sees the possibility for incorporating new members/associates in to future projects. This can include collaboration with student research groups, other faculty members, or researchers from other organizations. It is important in these situations to model the team's

research techniques and group norms to smooth the addition of new collaborators. A strong, cohesive, well-performing core group should be able to interact with or incorporate new members effectively in this way.

5.3 TEACHERS DESIGNING GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

The study has identified five elements which enhance group processes: teacher scaffolding, purposing, role differentiation, norming and problem-solving. From these elements, the researchers can make recommendations for teachers that are designing group assignments as follows.

Content – Use the Pedagogical enhancement matrix, from p. 40 of this report. The teacher needs to consider the origin for content for the assignment and also consider what content the groups and/or individual students is bringing in to the experience. The teacher should be prepared to advise students on possible resources and methods, such as researching techniques, integration with teacher-provided content or assessment options.

Purposing – The parameters of the assignment influence not only the product of the groups but also their cohesion and structure. Clarity with regards to the tasks the groups will face is vital, as it governs the groups' structure. The parameters of the assignment must be clear enough that the groups can set their own goals and tasks. The teacher should also make it clear how he/she will be providing feedback to the groups. Once the assignment begins, the role of teacher should move to that of a coach or advisor and away from an instructor.

Role differentiation – The sample of this study often struggled with dividing group roles and responsibilities, which posed a challenge for group cohesion. The teacher should consider what skills or roles the group will need of its members in order to complete their tasks and inform the students **before** they form groups, possibly by identifying which students in the class might be helpful to fill each role, so that the groups form with members who are suited to the assignment. Once the groups are assembled, the teacher should reinforce the group roles so that students identify with their skills and abilities and take ownership of their role.

Norming – Through the use of reporting mechanisms, teachers can monitor groups' progress through the norming process. Groups should be designating various norms, including methods and frequency of communication, times for group meetings, deadlines for the completion of tasks, designation of group roles, etc. If the teacher notices that these norms are not being set in a timely manner, the teacher should advise the group on how to do so. The teacher should also consider the possibility that the group members might not have realized that such norms were important.

Problem-solving – While group cohesion and performance is dependent upon the group's ability to solve problems and resolve conflict independently, the teacher must be prepared to intervene when necessary. This means that the teacher must have mechanisms in place to monitor the health and progress of the groups, either through reporting or observation during in-class group working sessions. When a group has trouble solving problems, the teacher should act as a guide, but not an instructor. When a group has problems related to conflict resolution, the teacher should be prepared to act as a mediator. There should be an implied threat that the

teacher will step in and exert authority over or dissolve a group, but such actions should only be used in extreme circumstances.

It is important to note that many of the participants in this study admitted that they had never been asked to work in a long-term, structured group before. Teachers intending to use these activities should be prepared to address inexperience-related issues in the groups. This may not be readily apparent, as short-term, unstructured bundling of students is common. The students may look organized and structured, but could have no concept of how to form a functional and cohesive team. The teacher must be vigilant and prepared to guide the groups through all the phases of the group experience.

5.4 FURTHER RESEARCH IN GROUP COHESION

The results of the study guide the recommendation that a further study be directed to the topic of group cohesion. The study found 9 variables that may be related to group cohesion. It also found variables that diminish group cohesion in an inverse relationship. These inverse relationships suggest a possible statistical 'range' that could be measured through a survey instrument using Likert scales and Pearson coefficient to measure the level of that relationship. Finally, two variables have been identified that are not likely to be related to or reliable and valid measures of group cohesion.

Measures of cohesion

1. Stability (Students splitting from group indicates low stability and a non-cohesive group. This variable can be problematic because some stable groups have low performance.)
2. Size
3. Goal setting (clearly marking group tasks, convergence on class assignment; how well the group identifies new objectives related to the task)
4. Group norms enforced (make the threat of enforcement viable while providing praise and advancement/status in the group for adherence to norms)
5. Communication (developing mechanisms for coordination, setting time to voice opinions in the group),
 - a. How frequently students check for messages/send message through the mechanism.
 - b. Self-reported numbers of meetings concerning group tasks and how often they meet without discussing the specific project
6. Time-management (choosing people with similar schedules in formation of the group, investing in the goals of the group by taking time for group needs, completing tasks),
7. Division of non-overlapping roles (dividing responsibilities for various tasks, establishing expected behaviors for each member in the group)
8. Conflict resolution
9. Task performance (assessment of product completion and quality)

Diminishing factors

1. Bundling of roles (avoidance of group goal setting = low cohesiveness; low product coherence)
2. Open conflict
3. Group norms require low level of expected performance
4. Vague or unclear or direct conflict with an assignment (high cohesion, low performance groups)

Group design issues that may have no measurable correlation to group cohesion

1. Attraction (This is not a factor in the language classroom because they are already involved in larger, longer-term relationships with fellow classmates.)
2. Structure (fluid, because of factors such as the relative brevity of the assignment, students not wishing to overshadow others. Scaffolding in this area helps groups to function better.)

5.5 FURTHER RESEARCH INTO GROUP PROCESSES AMONG THAI
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

The research team recommends three areas for further research related to the findings of this study. Quantitative research should be done to study the relationship between group processes and specific language skills, such as integrated writing, reading comprehension and grammatical accuracy. Also, to understand in further detail specific aspects of group processes, qualitative research should be done regarding decision making processes, leadership, group formation, and structure. The findings in these areas are inconclusive, but initial findings imply that these

processes may diverge greatly from Thai cultural norms and groups norms from other cultures. Finally, the researchers recommend an ethnographic and comparative study of the larger institutional contexts of university students. The researchers suspect that larger social groups influenced the findings of this study and feel it is necessary.

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APPENDIX A ENGINEERING GUIDED GROUP FORMATION

TASKS AND PROCESSES

SUMMARY

Students are to develop an interactive offline English website in three parts. The site should introduce an actual company in Thailand. Students must describe the company, explain how they make one of their products, propose an innovation to the industrial process. Those creating a new product at that company must develop a model for communication with clients.

Schedule

Groups must submit parts of their project according to the following deadlines.

Homepage (Week 9) Part 1 (Week 10) Part 2 (Week 11) Part 3 (Week 12) Parts 4&5 (Week 13)

Presentations and Q/A: Week 14 and 15

Group Formation

Team development: your team will need people of different skills, similar schedules and leadership that can help the team members succeed. Top priority functions for the team are to be as follows: coordinating, editing, researching, graphic designing, web designing. Only editors/language checkers are permitted to consult the teacher on behalf of the team for advice about the language used in the writing of the website, to prevent the entire group from forming a mob effect at the teacher's desk.

Week 9: A Website Project brainstorming process

Home Page

The home page acts like a **link** to all the content in the website. The website should have three main parts: Company description, Process Description and Proposed Innovation

Part I Company description

1. What content will our group need to include in this section?
2. How long or how many link pages will we use to talk about this company?
3. What important information is NOT on the company's real website at this time that we think is important?
4. In our team, who will write about each aspect of the company?

Example:

One team will select the project to make an improvement to the dvd coating. They will focus only on production. So the company information this team will need must include information about the "process of making dvds in that company."

Another team wants to make a window coating that will produce electricity. They want to sell this product. So this team will need information about the sales organization of that company.

Another team wants to make a new unbreakable ceramic. They want to include both production and some sales to "distributors." So the team members will develop different aspects of the website for this product.

Improve the process of production of furniture sealant coatings

Questions

Make a list of questions your team wants to answer about the company.

What company vocabulary do you expect to find?

1. Production (is a type of "department" or function of a company) what other kinds of functions does the company have?
2. Sales (is a type of department)
3. Distribution (is a function)
4. Manager (is a kind of employee) what kinds of people do we find at this company?
5. Plant (is a group of buildings or facility for production) what kinds of places or spaces are there at this plant?
6. Machines (is a kind of equipment in production) what kinds of equipment are there in the company?

Part II Description of the Production Process

Generally we will have only general information about their production process. We must find examples of how this product is made in other places and show that. Talk about problems in production because of materials or process.

Part III Proposed Innovation

This section will show how to improve the process of the company through chemical processes.

Presentation Practice in Class

Students were given the following instructions on Week 13: For the rest of this class time, divide the presentation into parts and decide who will present each part of the website. One person will need to control the computer / click on the website. That person might want to speak first. The English editor can bring the website to Aj. Don and Aj. Nujcherry to check the grammar. After class, post your grammar questions on the Facebook page. Practice speaking each part in your group now. If you did not write something yet, your speaking may help give you an idea what to write.

Result: It turns out that 3 of the groups posted grammar questions on the instructors' FB page. One outstanding presentation was chosen to move to another room to record their presentation as a sample for next years' class.

Grading of the Web Project (20% of total course grade)

Written Part (20 Points)

1. Submit a website
2. Students graded on individual contributions
3. Frequency of contributions (0-10)
4. Substance
 - a. The student addresses the assigned subject matter
 - b. Demonstrate overall comprehension of the matter
 - c. Applies a significant amount of class content to each of the 3 tasks

Presentation (30 points)

1. Accurately describes the purpose, method and results of the group process
2. Analyzes how the group identified problems and found solutions to problems in the process of working together to create the website
3. Elicits feedback from others about the website
4. States personal assessment of the website that has been created

Website Presentation Evaluation Form

Communicative English for Chemical Process Engineers Website Presentations

Section ____ Team # _____

Names of Team members

Area

Strengths

Recommendations

Organization

Logical
Support
Examples
Bridging

Language

Grammar
Rhetorical connection words
Uses techniques from our course

Presentation and Fluidity

Voice
Volume
Pace
Pitch
Pauses

Teamwork
Enthusiasm
Humour

Visual Aids
Staging

Outstanding student (s) efforts? (based on the student who did their job well)

Great Improvement by a student? (Compared to previous in-class conversations)