

# Eliciting Students' Voices in the Thai Context: A Routine or a Quest?

By  
Dr. Stephen Conlon\*

## **Abstract**

*The elicitation of a response from students by a teacher is a very traditional part of the teaching process but in recent years it has tended to be ignored in favor of a more learner-centered approach. This paper suggests that the neglect of this method may be the result of a too narrow view of the nature and function of elicitation. Rather than merely a means for testing the student's understanding elicitation can be, as it is in the Socratic method, a means of allowing the student to explore and expand knowledge.*

In practice, are the acts of teaching and elicitation basically synonymous? The Western practices of English Language Teaching (ELT) come out of the Greek ideas of Socratic dialogue: teachers and students ask and answer questions in order to search for the truth. Even when we only teach the test or teach by testing,

we are still practising a form of elicitation. While different teachers in different cultures may define the verbs "to teach" and "to elicit" in different ways, they all seem to agree that the two actions are related.

However, over the last decade, at least, there seems to have been a tacit de-emphasis in the literature on the role of elicitation in the teaching process. This may be a by-product of the increased interest in learner-centredness and in the later stages of learner language production. And to be sure, we have learned much from looking at such areas of teaching. My concern is that we are forgetting or ignoring what we already knew – we may be throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

This point may be illustrated by the presentation of elicitation in two texts that between them would form the backbone of most English Teaching Methodology courses. Jeremy Harmer (1991) mentions elicitation several times without actually spelling out how

---

\* Dr. Stephen Conlon holds a PhD in English from the University of Sydney. He has been working in Thailand for fourteen years. Currently, he is the Associate-Dean of the Institute for English Language Education at Assumption University