



The Teachers' Roles in Cooperative Learning in  
the Conversation Classroom:  
A Case Study of Two Conversation Classes at  
Assumption University of Thailand

Lina Song

A THESIS SUBMITTED  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING  
MA-ELT

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH (GSE)  
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY  
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## PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

I certify that all the material in this study which is not my own work has been identified and acknowledged, and that no materials are included for which a degree has already been conferred upon me.

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Signature

Lina Song

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Date





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## Abstract

This research is a case study in which two English teachers were observed as they taught undergraduate senior students in the Institute for English Language Education (IELE) at Assumption University in order to discover the roles teachers play when they use Cooperative Learning in the conversation classroom. In addition, the two observed teachers were interviewed after each class session in order to find out what problems they often encountered in teaching CL conversation classes, as well as what solutions could be found for these problems.

The findings indicated that, even though the two observed teachers had very different personalities and teaching styles, they mostly played seven basic roles in the classroom. They were activity designers; organizer/managers; motivator/creators of atmosphere; instructors; monitor/observers; facilitator/interveners and evaluators. These roles overlapped with each other and connected with each other to achieve their especial functions. There were four problems the teachers often encountered. These included how to help weaker students in the classroom; how to help silent students in the classroom; how to help students speak more and more precisely about their thoughts and feelings; and whether to teach/correct grammar and vocabulary in the conversation class. Suggestions for solutions were provided both by the teachers in their interviews and in the literature reviewed by the researcher.

Although the study was carried out as a case study, not to be generalized, the



researcher still hopes that it may help teachers who, like herself, are still learning how to use CL in the conversation class to gain insight into the roles of teachers in such a classroom and to think critically about what cooperative teachers have to do, what they perhaps should not do, or what they should do differently when they face the same or similar situations and problems. From this, they may finally identify the necessary roles a conversation teacher should play in order to maximize the functions of CL and, with it, the students' learning.



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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

The following thesis is a case study about what roles teachers play when they adopt a group Cooperative Learning approach in the conversation class.

### **1.1 Background**

Cooperative Learning is recognized as one of the best researched of all teaching approaches, and it is practiced widely in ESL classrooms, including in conversation classes to improve students' speaking skills. This is because conversation is by nature a cooperative communicative act; it is difficult for students to improve their speaking skills only by learning individually. By contrast, through cooperating with each other; group members create more opportunities to practice their conversational moves. For example, they take responsibility to initiate the task, brainstorm and discuss with each other by using the target language; they either support or contradict each other by giving details; they encourage each other to risk speaking and to speak fluently; and they learn from each other and correct each others' mistakes. In this low-anxiety atmosphere, they share their ideas, express their opinions, risk speaking, and enjoy speaking the target language. Moreover, they build good friendships with each other. As Guo (2003: 143) states, "Cooperative Learning [is effective in] creating a non-threatening learning environment, offering students many opportunities to practice various kinds of communicative acts", and thus in helping students develop skills in oral communication.



However, Cooperative Learning in the conversation classroom is neither easy to use nor simple to understand. On the one hand, some people believe that group activities are the easy, lazy way to teach: all teachers have to do is just to put students into their groups and let them do the rest. From superficial observation, the classroom is noisy and chaotic; it looks as if everyone is discussing, but the teacher may not know what students are really talking about, who is holding the floor, and who is just audience. Obviously, in such a situation, the teacher role may be totally ignored, which may contribute to random learning and low effectiveness.

On the other hand, Cooperative Learning calls for classroom learning to move from teacher-centered to student-centered, so the teacher's role and responsibilities should be adjusted. But some teachers have not yet realized this. They assume a dominating role; they state their opinions rigidly, which inhibits students from responding; and they answer questions that could be answered by other members of the class. In such an atmosphere, it is difficult for students to develop their thoughts, improve their speaking skills and explore their learning potential.

## **1.2 Rationale and significance**

As is clear from the above comments, it is vital for teachers to clarify the two misconceptions discussed above and identify the role the teacher should play in order to bring about cooperative learning in the conversation class.

In fact, some researchers do discuss the teacher's roles in Cooperative Learning, McDonell's article entitled "The role of the teacher in the cooperative learning classroom" (McDonell 1992), for instance. It concisely and accurately summarizes what roles an effective CL teacher should play in a second language class. However, it may not be easy for teachers, especially those who have not used the CL approach before, to comprehend these abstract descriptions completely.

This thesis describes and analyzes two teachers' roles in a cooperative conversation class at a practical level and in detail. There was no negotiation between the observed teachers and the researcher beforehand about what would happen in the class. The researcher simply sat in on both classes to watch the sequence of events, especially what the teachers did and how the students responded to the instruction. From the researcher's analysis of the roles and teaching styles of these two teachers, she hopes readers can gain insight into the teaching process in the cooperative conversation class. The objective was not to evaluate or compare the two teachers' performances, but rather to present two teachers' ways of managing such a class, so that readers can think critically about them. Readers, especially teachers planning to teach such a course, may learn what a cooperative teacher has to do, what he/she should perhaps not do, and what they should do if they face the same problems or situations. From this, they may finally identify what roles a conversation teacher should play in order to take advantage of CL to really maximize the students' learning.

Cooperative Learning is recognized as one of the best researched of all teaching

approaches, and it is practiced widely in writing and reading courses. However, limited research focuses on applying CL to speaking/conversation classes. So it is hoped that this research may help teachers to gain insight into how they can use CL in speaking and conversation class and thus develop their own way to deal with the problems that occur in the conversation classroom.

### **1.3 Three research questions**

- 1) What roles do teachers play in the cooperative conversation class?
- 2) What kinds of problems do teachers often encounter when conducting a cooperative conversation class?
- 3) How do teachers deal with such problems?

### **1.4 Definitions of terminology**

1) *Cooperative Learning*: There is a body of research on a teaching approach called Cooperative Learning (e.g., Johnson and Johnson 1999; Slavin 1995; Jacobs 2004). In this thesis, Cooperative Learning means that a small group of students cooperate with each other in the conversation classroom to accomplish the tasks (activities) the teacher gives by using the target language. By cooperating with each other, the group members create more opportunities to practice speech moves and communicative acts. From now on, CL is used as an abbreviation for Cooperative Learning throughout the thesis.

2) *Group work*: The term "groups" in this thesis means small groups, usually of four students or fewer, and seldom more than six. A pair is considered a group.

3) *Communicative act*: in this thesis all the acts that create more opportunities for students to use the target language are called communicative act. For example, students brainstorm and discuss with group members; they either support or contradict each other by giving details; they encourage each other to risk speaking; they learn from each other and correct each others' mistakes.

### **1.5 Organization of thesis**

The study is divided into five chapters. This chapter has provided the reader with an overview of the background, rationale and significance of the thesis, the research questions, and the definitions of several terms.

In the first and second parts of Chapter Two, the researcher reviews the definitions of Cooperative Learning and conversation, respectively, as found in the literature. The basic elements of Cooperative Learning, the functions of conversation, and ineffective classroom responses are introduced. The cooperative principles proposed by Grice are highlighted in part two, as relevant to cooperative classroom conversation. In the third part, the researcher includes most roles played by teachers according to the literature she read and classifies and lists them into nine categories.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology used in this study. Firstly, the three research



questions are restated, and then the subjects, the classroom procedures, and the observation scheme are explained. After that, the four research instruments used to gather the data are described, along with the purpose for which each is used. The final part of this chapter states how the collected data are analyzed.

Chapter Four discusses the data collected in relation to the research questions presented in chapter one. It is divided into two main parts; the first part answers the first research question. Part two answers the second and third questions by discussing the problems teacher often encounter and suggesting solutions that have been found.

Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the findings and presents the reader with the pedagogical implications, perceived limitations of this study and recommendations for further research. Appendices include samples of the interview transcript, the researcher's journal, teaching materials, a CD of the interviews, and a DVD of recorded classes.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first part (2.1), the definition of Cooperative Learning is introduced. Then three basic elements: “positive interdependence”, “individual accountability”, and “cooperative skills” are stated and defined. After that, it is explained how to structure the three basic elements so as to avoid ineffective CL in the form of the “free rider” effect and the “rich get richer” effect.

The second part (2.2) first provides a definition of conversation, and then analyzes the conversation from the discourse aspect. Finally, the cooperative principles proposed by Grice and their relevance for the thesis is explained.

In the third part (2.3), the researcher discusses the roles played by the teachers according to the literature she read. She classifies and lists them into nine categories.

In the last part (2.4), a concise summary is given.

#### **2.1 Cooperative Learning**

##### **2.1.1 History of CL research**

According to Brandt, “CL has an ancient pedigree”. The first study was done in 1897, so that there has been 110 years of research in this field (Brandt 1987:12, cited in

Jacobs 2004). In the effort to discover how best to harness peer power for the benefit of learning, starting from the 1970s large amounts of research and practical work have been done on CL across a wide range of subject areas and age groups. (For reviews, see Johnson and Johnson 1999; Slavin 1995; Jacobs 2004). Thus, CL has a strong foundation in research. However, the literature pertaining to CL often treats general principles and does not apply it to specified classroom situations. Where it is applied to the classroom, it is often in regard to reading or writing, and almost never to the speaking skill or to the conversation classroom, even though the group-work principles of CL, especially, would seem ideally suited to use in the conversation class. This is a lack which the present study seeks to fill. In the discussion below, to the general discussion of CL principles provided by the literature, the researcher has at certain points added her own comments to show how these are applicable to conversation classrooms such as she observed.

### **2.1.2 What is Cooperative Learning (CL)**

Johnson and Johnson, two experts who have studied the CL approach for more than 30 years, explain that CL involves students working together to accomplish shared learning goals and maximize their own and their group mates' achievements (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 235).

In a conversational context, this means that students assigned to groups cooperate with each other to accomplish the tasks (activities) given by the teacher. Through cooperating

with each other; group members create more opportunities to practice various communicative acts. They take responsibility for initiating the task, brainstorming and discussing with each other using the target language; they either support or contradict each other by giving details; they encourage each other to take risks when speaking and to speak fluently; they learn from each other and correct each other's mistakes (Guo 2003: 155). In such an atmosphere, they share their ideas, express their opinions, and enjoy speaking the target language. Moreover, they build good friendships with each other, which is beneficial for their psychological health as well. Furthermore, even though CL means learning together, it does not mean neglect of individual achievements. It does, nevertheless, ask individuals to maximize their learning. That is, after cooperative practice with group members and making progress together, finally students have to take the final exam individually (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 235-238).

### **2.1.3 Ineffective CL**

Jacobs develops the definition of CL in detail; he explains that simply having students in groups sit side-by-side, sharing material, discussing and doing the assignment together, or simply allowing interaction to take place, may not really mean CL (Jacobs 2004). Some negative phenomena may occur frequently in the CL classroom, which are caused by the low effectiveness of CL in a certain context. In other words, the expected functions of CL, which are regarded as beneficial to students themselves, are not performed well. The following are some of these typical phenomena:



### 2.1.3.1 Free rider effect

“Free rider” students in a classroom are also called “passengers” (Hadfield 1992: 7). That is, “group members with a lower level may leave others to finish the group tasks, or they contribute decreasing amounts of effort to the group tasks” (Kerr and Bruun 1983, cited in Muijs and Reynolds 2005: 52).

In the conversation class, some group members may refuse to discuss with their group members or they only silently listen to their group members talking. This is harmful, especially in pair work. For instance, when one person is talking about something, the other one is silent or doing something else (like reading a cartoon book or eating a snack). Obviously, the person who tries to practice speaking is likely to be discouraged, give up talking and do something else as well.

### 2.1.3.2 Rich get richer effect

Group members with high ability and motivation take over key roles in order to benefit themselves. Gradually, abler members learn a great deal, while less able members just keep silent as audience (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 74).

This happened in a conversation class. Hadfield (1992: 11) describes just such a situation: the same students always answered the questions; quieter members could not get a word in; some members of the group tended to dominate group activities at the expense of shyer members. So it is not difficult to explain why some students

gradually speak better, while others still cannot speak fluently at the end of the whole conversation course.

### 2.1.3.3 Lack of CL skills

Some group members who lack CL skills may build up a negative atmosphere in a group. Hadfield (1992: 11) lists some examples, students are reluctant to make an effort or take the initiative; they neither participate in group activities, nor listen to others' opinion; they behave as though they are not interested in each other or are even antagonistic towards each other. Guo's study raises a number of important issues, and she formulates some features of unsuccessful groups in terms of discourse features:

- 1: when one group member is expressing his/her ideas, the other group members talk about other things unrelated to the topic under discussion.
- 2: one group member's opinion is accepted without any discussion. In other words, the group members just listen to one person, or accept others' ideas without challenging or justifying, never giving any comments or suggestions.
- 3: the group members contradict others' ideas without showing any evidence or giving any reasons.

(Guo 2003: 155)

She proposes that CL skills are very important for successful collaboration and it is necessary for teachers to instruct students such skills directly and explicitly (Guo 2003: 157).

Generally, the three effects mentioned above may bring negative influences into the class. So it is necessary to analyze the elements of CL to find helpful means to avoid such situations.

## **2.1.4 Basic elements of CL**

### **2.1.4.1 Basic elements of CL in the conversation class**

According to Slavin (1995), three concepts are central to CL: Group rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success. Kagan (1994) believes that there are four key CL indicators: Positive interdependence, individual accountability, equal opportunities and simultaneous interaction. Five basic elements put forward by Johnson and Johnson (1999) are also noteworthy. They are positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, face-to-face interaction, interpersonal and social skills and group processing. Finally, Akcan, Lee, Ghaith and Jacobs (2004) state eight CL elements (principles), which are developed from the five basic elements.

Despite different definitions of the basic elements of CL, most cooperative researchers agree that positive interdependence and individual accountability are the two most important indicators that are included in most definition of CL; moreover, positive interdependence is the heart of CL. In the conversation class as well, positive interdependence and individual accountability are key elements. The cooperative skills are also highlighted in the conversation class.

#### 2.1.4.2 Definition of three basic elements of CL in the conversation class

##### 2.1.4.2.1 Positive interdependence

###### i) What is positive interdependence?

Interdependence means depending on each other. Positive interdependence means students realize that “they need each other for support, explanations, and guidance” (Jacobs 2004).

However, in the conversation class the groups are changed every class for different activities, so under these circumstances, it is not necessary, and is even impossible, for students to succeed or fail, together. But they can cooperate with each other to accomplish the task and create more opportunities to use the target language. For example, group members brainstorm and negotiate together; they listen carefully to each other’s opinion; they support or contradict other group members with evidence; they encourage silent or shy group members to express ideas; they facilitate each other’s learning by acting as the resource when the teacher is not present; they correct each other’s mistakes; and, finally, they give presentations or performances as a group. If such positive interdependence is built up, “free rider” effect should be less and the atmosphere in the classroom will be healthy.

###### ii) How should interdependence be structured?

Two suggestions are provided. First of all, Johnson and Johnson (1999: 70) have put forward nine ways to structure positive interdependence. Among these nine ways,



“positive role interdependence”, “positive environmental interdependence”, “positive resource interdependence”, “positive task interdependence”, “positive outside enemy interdependence”, and “positive reward interdependence” are frequently used in the classroom.

Positive role interdependence means that “each member is assigned complementary and interconnected roles that specify responsibilities that the group needs in order to complete a joint task” (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 75). For instance, in group work, students can be assigned the roles of runner, checker, researcher, summarizer, observer/troubleshooter and recorder. Jacobs (2004) suggests even more roles, such as a timekeeper who reminds the group of time limits and a ‘sound hound’ who tells the group if they are being too loud in their deliberations.

Positive task interdependence means “a division of labor is created so that the actions of one group member have to be completed if the next team members is to complete his or her responsibility” (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 75). In other words, everyone has to participate in the task; no one can be absent or do less. This way is also suggested by Hadfield (1992: 7), who has designed a number of activities to structure positive interdependence among the students.

Secondly, the teacher can instruct and guide students to pay attention to positive interdependence directly by explaining the reasons and advantages for students, even

discussing with them the advantages, as well as the disadvantage of the converse situation. When students realize the importance of this element, they may pay more attention to it (Gilbert, Goldenstein, Jacobs and Olsen 1997: 18).

#### 2.1.4.2.2 Individual accountability

The purpose of CL is to make each member a stronger individual and maximize individual learning. However, if “individual accountability” is neglected, “free rider” effect and “rich get richer” effect may occur. Adopting individual accountability can be regarded as the way to avoid such instances.

##### i) What is individual accountability?

Individual accountability means that everyone in the group has to contribute to the group to cooperatively accomplish the group task and must help group members do likewise. Individual accountability is “the key to ensuring all group members are in fact strengthened by learning cooperatively”, and after participating in a cooperative class, they should be better prepared to take the exam by themselves (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 75).

In the conversation class, individual accountability means that every group member contributes her/his efforts to the group work. Whatever the English level of the students, they can contribute to the group discussion, and guide or support each other to improve speaking and conversation skills. And finally, they can participate in the exam individually and pass the exam by self-effort.

ii) How should individual accountability be structured?

Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1991: 80) propose eight ways to structure individual accountability. Among these eight ways, the following are the most useful in the conversation class: “Keeping the size of the group small”, “observing each group and recording the frequency with which each member contributes to the group’s work”, and “assigning one student in each group to the role of checker”.

In addition to the above suggestions, by monitoring or observing the whole class, teachers may find out who is likely to keep silent, and can encourage such students to participate in groups or to speak more. Moreover, after group work (for example, in whole group discussion), teachers can randomly nominate group member to summarize her/his group ideas.

#### 2.1.4.2.3 Cooperative skills in the conversation class

Cooperative skills are ways to work with others effectively. Jacobs (2004) suggested some skills that are important to successful collaboration, for example, “checking that others understand”, “asking for and giving reasons”, “disagreeing politely and responding politely to disagreement”, and “encouraging others to participate and responding to encouragement to participate”. In addition, Guo summarized some cooperative skills which are necessary for successful conversation:

- 1) One member of the group takes the initiative and helps the conversation begin.

- 2) Students invite one another to contribute and give mutual support to sustain their discussion.
- 3) When one member asks for information, other group members always give information on request.
- 4) When one group member has some difficulty in understanding information and asks for clarification, another member clarifies.
- 5) When one group member expresses his or her opinion, others explicitly support his or her assertion with evidence and extend the contribution or else contradict it by using evidence to challenge the assertion or qualify it.

(Guo 2003: 156)

Those are very basic and useful cooperative skills for the conversation class. In addition, collaborative skills often overlap with thinking skills; e.g., asking for and giving reasons pushes students to think more deeply, and disagreement, when handled properly, encourages students to explain what they have said (Jacobs 2004), which creates more communicative acts for student interaction.

## **2.2 Conversation class**

### **2.2.1 Definition of conversation**

Thornbury and Slade list seven features of conversation:

- 1) It is spoken, 2) It takes place spontaneously in real time, 3) It takes place in a shared context, 4) It is interactive, hence jointly constructed and reciprocal, 5) Its function is primarily interpersonal, 6) It is informal, and 7) It is expressive of our wishes, feelings, attitudes and judgments.

(Thornbury and Slade 2006: 8)

According to this definition, the conversation held in the classroom has some differences from a natural conversation happening outside the classroom. However, the two still have six features in common. That is, in the classroom students are



assigned to groups, listen to each other, practice speaking with each other, and discuss some topics with group members. During those processes, students do express their wishes, feeling, attitudes and judgments in the classroom. Another quality of conversation is defined by the cooperative principle. Cunningsworth (1987: 51) puts it this way: “Conversation is a collaborative activity involving two or more people competing for the floor and negotiating meaning.” In other words, group members cooperate with each other to accomplish the task the teacher has given; they negotiate with each other, support each other’s ideas, or disagree with others by giving evidence. Cooperation is highlighted in conversation class.

### **2.2.2 The functions of the conversation**

The purposes of conversation include the “exchange of information”; “the creation and maintenance of social relationships” such as friendship; and “the negotiation, as well as deciding on and carrying out joint actions” (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 5). For example, by taking the conversation class, students have a chance to discuss with each other in order to exchange ideas and even build up friendships with their classmates. Moreover, students are supposed to gain the ability to “maintain and develop conversation on everyday topics”, “exchange personal views and opinions”, “share experiences”, “tell a short story or anecdote”, and “collaborate in getting something done in English” (Gower 1987: ix).

### **2.2.3 Discourse features in conversation**

### 2.2.3.1 Adjacency

Adjacency means “utterances produced by two successive speakers in which the second utterance can be identified as being related to the first” (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 9). Adjacency pairs like “ask and answer” are often used in the class. For example, “Hot seat” is a kind of “ask and answer” activity in which one student sits in front of the whole class and has to promptly answer the open-ended questions put forward by the remaining students. When answering the questions, the students have to obey certain principles. First of all, they must follow “the maxim of relation” (Grice, 1975, cited in Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 7). That is, the answers have to relate to the questions. Avoiding answering or talking about irrelevant things may lead to communication breakdown (Guo 2003: 155). Secondly, they must follow “the maxim of quantity” (Grice, 1975, cited in Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 7), because a minimal answer does nothing to drive the conversation forward, and it reduces the number of communicative acts between group members. That is, when they describe something, they should try to provide as much information as is needed for a full answer; when they state their opinion, they should expand their ideas as clearly as they can. Thus, the teacher should encourage students to follow these two principles when doing the adjacency pairs.

### 2.2.3.2 Turn taking

It is necessary for students to know some techniques of how and when to take turns to make this conversation flow more smoothly. First, when a speaker is about to finish

his or her turn, the speaker may invite another group member to take a turn to keep the conversation going. For example, in a group discussion, the speaker may say, “What is your idea, Sophie?” With this, Sophie is nominated to continue the discussion.

Secondly, when a listener wants to come in with a contribution, her/his turn should fit the direction in which the conversation is moving. For example, “initiate and build on what others have said, such as, ‘that’s like what happened to me...’ and ‘did I tell you about when...’” (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 9). Another possibility is to paraphrase what the speaker just said, for instance, “Do you mean that...” this will help the listener to make appropriate contributions. Thirdly, the listener may be alert to when the speaker is about to finish. Falling intonation is often a signal for this (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 10).

## **2.2.4 Some conversational techniques**

### **2.2.4.1 Stress and intonation**

Good conversationalists can use stress and intonation to keep the conversation going. For example, a fall on words like ‘ok’ or ‘so’, often serves to show that we are about to change the subject. A rise on ‘really’ is a way of showing interest. A wide voice range is also more likely to keep a listener interested than a monotone (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 10). However, wrong intonation can lead to misunderstanding. This is one of the techniques of conversation.

#### 2.2.4.2 Gesture and body language

The positioning of the body also has an effect on the listener. Body language is a complicated area, but the teacher may pay attention to the students' body language, and give them feedback on how they appear to others. Moreover, body language can be used to disguise students' nervousness to some extent (Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 10).

#### **2.2.5 The co-operative principle in conversation**

Here is an example of unsuccessful group discussion,

S1: Do we need a refrigerator? Do you agree?

S2: yes

S3: Matches

S2: yeah

S1: more, we need more

S2: candles

S3: a fishing pole

S1: anything more?

S2: toothbrush

S1: a lamp

S1: anything else

(Guo 2003: 155)

In this instance, S1 initiated the discussion and dominated the group by asking other group members (S2 and S3) to contribute to the list of things a political prisoner was supposed to carry to a lonely island. The students just gave the names of the articles without giving or asking for any reason, and agreed with each other without question.

Grice has described four maxims expressing principles of co-operative behavior that



should be followed in order for students to have a smooth and successful conversation.

The maxims follow:

- 1) The maxim of quality [says to] make your contribution one that is true.
- 2) The maxim of quantity [says to] make your contribution just as informative as required and no more.
- 3) The maxim of relation [says to] make your contribution relevant and timely.
- 4) The maxim of manner [says to] avoid obscurity and ambiguity.

(Grice 1975, cited in Nolasco and Arthur 1987: 7)

These four behaviors should be highlighted in the conversation classroom. Moreover, Scarcella and Oxford emphasize that the cooperative skills are very important in conversation. They suggest that students should keep the following checklist of principles in mind:

- 1) I checked to make sure that everyone [in my group] understood what I said.
- 2) I gave explanations whenever I could.
- 3) I asked specific questions about what I didn't understand.
- 4) I paraphrased what others said to make sure that I understood.
- 5) I encouraged others to speak by making such remarks as, "I would like to know, what do you think?"

(Scarcella and Oxford 1992: 158)

The skills above are really useful and necessary in the conversation class. If students can follow the principles, they should help them to create more communicative acts and improve their conversation skills.

### 2.3 Teacher's roles

A number of relevant research articles or journals have talked about the different roles teachers play in the group activities in a speaking class. Those roles are integrated to make the whole learning process happen in the classroom. However, “teachers had different labels to describe the same or similar roles” (Hedge 2000: 27). In other words, different research studies may define one and the same teacher role under different names or labels. For example, some researchers state that the teacher plays the role of a ‘resource’ to answer lexical, grammatical and other relevant questions for students, but in this study the researcher has adopted ‘facilitator’, a term used in other studies. There are three reasons. First of all, the term ‘resource’ sounds negative, as though the teacher were playing a ‘dead’ role, like a dictionary. Secondly, the teacher helps students to solve lexical and grammatical problems in order to make their learning easier, so ‘facilitator’ is a more appropriate term. Lastly, ‘resource’ is a relatively small role teachers play; it is impossible to define all the teachers’ roles in terms of such narrow labels. The teacher role as ‘facilitator’, on the other hand, is a comprehensive designation which includes teachers assisting students’ speaking in many ways: by giving students hints to help them think over the topic from different points of view; guiding the students to brainstorm; reminding them of relevant words, phrases, and sentence patterns (Zhang 2005: 37); and, furthermore, giving suggestions of their own to broaden the discussion.

In the following, the researcher includes most roles played by teachers according to

her literature review and classifies and lists them into nine categories.

### **2.3.1 Role as an activity designer**

The conversation classroom is a student-oriented classroom; students spend most of the class time doing activities. Only by doing activities, can the students achieve the course objectives. As one Chinese saying goes, teachers should “Foster their strengths and circumvent their weaknesses”. So the first role the teacher plays is as a designer who prepares the task or activities students should do later in the class. In other words, the teacher designs the blueprint, and then the students have to realize it.

There are many ways to prepare the activities. Teachers can adopt and adapt activities from resource books and the Internet. Teachers can also design the activities themselves according to their personality, teaching style, and the nature of the students in class.

In the summary of her study, Guo (2003: 157) writes that it is vital for teachers to “increase their awareness of the importance of proper task setting.” She suggests, “More research is needed on the effect of teacher’s preparation for group work”. In other words, the teacher’s role as an activity designer is very significant. The following are some typical categories of activities:

#### **i) Fluency-based**

Conversation class aims primarily to help students to use English to express their own ideas, attitudes and emotions, as well as to develop their ability to use English outside the classroom. So the emphasis of activities is on successful communication rather than on correctness of language. In other words, the activities carried out in the conversation class should be fluency-based. Fluency “does not necessarily mean speaking quickly and without mistakes but keeping the attention of the listener and getting across what the speaker wants to say” (Gower 1987: viii). So the teacher can design fluency-based activities for students to clearly express their ideas, attitudes and emotions, as well as to draw others’ attention.

## ii) Weaknesses-based

The weaknesses of most of students will be one of the main factors in determining which activities teachers design. For example, many students complain that their English capabilities are restricted by limited vocabulary; when they want to express something, they cannot find the right words. So they speak less, and they do not want to talk about complex situations for which they are afraid they do not know the exact expressions. In such a situation, the teacher can design some activities to cultivate students’ capability to describe and paraphrase. In other words, instead of using the exact words, students can describe the color, nature, and features, or even using body language to provide as much information and as many details as they can. Some activities, like “Guessing”, or “Describe and Draw” are useful. “Guessing” is a game in which the teacher or a student thinks of a word or phrase, describes it and provides



abundant information, but avoids referring to the key words needed in the answer. The remaining students have to guess. In “Describe and Draw”, students work in pairs. Student A has a picture which Student B cannot see. Student A describes the picture, and Student B draws it (Hadfield and Hadfield 1999:1-5).

### iii) Structured CL activities

Structured CL activities can provide students with more opportunities to negotiate with group members and increase the number of communicative acts. Moreover they must pay attention to individual accountability to avoid "free ride" and help silent students speak more. A detailed example is the “exchanged information” activities carried out by Zhang (2005: 36). He assigns two tasks to groups. One task is describing pictures; each member of the group is asked to describe one of four pictures that the other student cannot see; the four pictures together make a well-organized story. This is a kind of jigsaw activity. This task can be done only if the students share information; in other words, it is a "required information exchange task". Another task is a simple topic discussion. There is no obligation to exchange information in this task. It is an “optional information-exchange task”. Zhang analyzes the total amount of individual output. He finds that the required information-exchange task results in more individual output than the optional task (2005, 37). Moreover, in a required information-exchange task the individuals in each group share the interaction fairly, and it is more difficult for students to remain silent. Pica and Doughty (1986: 305-325) recommend this kind of structured CL game, like

jigsaw games, as well.

#### iv) Affective and cognitive activities

Affective and cognitive activities are defined by Hadfield. According to her, affective activities aim to “create a positive and supportive group atmosphere in a non-explicit way”, for example, by breaking the ice, introducing group members to each other, or creating a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. On the other hand, cognitive activities seek to “make certain demands of the group learning process more explicit to the learner”, for instance, raising students’ awareness of what learning in the group involves; teaching students to listen to group members and ensuring participation and individual contributions (Hadfield 1992: 15).

Generally speaking, it is important for teachers to play a role as an activity designer. That is, through participating in a well-designed activity, students experience a high degree of success; feel interested in these activities and would like to risk speaking. Teachers also experience greater success when tasks are planned around the students’ interests and balance the students’ participation.

### **2.3.2 Role as an organizer/manager**

#### 2.3.2.1 Organizes the physical arrangement

Gower has listed a lot of advantages for organizing flexible physical arrangements in a classroom. For example

- 1) They simulate the learner's experience of various types of interaction and therefore encourage the sometimes-different conversation skills required for each;
- 2) They help generate a more relaxed and cooperative classroom atmosphere;
- 3) More students have an opportunity to speak;
- 4) Students are more likely to feel free of the pressure of being listened to by the teacher and so more ready to speak;
- 5) Students are more encouraged to take responsibility for improvement of their performance.

(Gower 1987: viii)

Thus, the physical arrangements bring a lot of benefits to group work. Hadfield (1987: v) suggests that the traditional arrangement of front-facing desks can be easily adapted. For example, pairs can share the same desk and work together, while small groups can be formed by two people turning their chairs around to face the two people behind them. For whole class activities, it is necessary to have a space big enough for students to move around at the front of the class, so desks can be pushed back to clear a space.

#### 2.3.2.2 Manages the time

The management of time is also very important. It is necessary for teachers to limit the time. On the one hand, the time of each task should not be delayed, and on the other hand, too "rapid completion of one task after another is usually a sign that something is wrong" (Gower 1987: ix). The teacher can adjust and decide the time to end an activity, taking into consideration that each group works at a slightly different rate and some tasks may be more engaging than others.



### 2.3.2.3 Groups students

Group members can be fixed or changed according to the needs of activities. It is helpful to change the grouping frequently. For example, talking circles can be used. That is, the teacher arranges the students in two large circles (or rectangles). Each student should face his or her partner and talk about the first topic for one or two minutes. Then the students switch partners and talk about the same topic. Students repeat this with three or four partners and then switch topics (Rost 1998: 7).

### **2.3.3 Role as a motivator/creator of the learning environment**

The teacher is instrumental in creating a positive and supportive learning environment within the class. Students who feel safe and secure are much more willing to practice the target language. A healthy classroom climate stimulates the students to risk speaking up. More important, Hedge (2000: 31) emphasizes the teacher's role as a motivator who encourages students to work actively. For some students who lack confidence, the teacher may encourage them to speak by convincing them that they can use English. A first step is to get them to reflect on and discuss what they use the mother tongue for (Gower 1987: viii).

In addition, a relaxing environment should be created. Johnson and Johnson suggest that a "supportive" and "cooperative" atmosphere in the classroom is very important as well. In other words, teachers may encourage students to help each other, to compliment each other and even correct each other. For example, they can encourage



their group members to give presentations in front of the class, applaud after each person's presentation, and never laugh at group members' mistakes.

### **2.3.4 Role as an instructor**

#### **2.3.4.1 Gives clear instructions**

It is necessary for a teacher to make sure students fully understand the task and have the information they need. Zhang (2005: 38) clarifies that merely asking students to work in groups to do the activities has low effectiveness; rather, it is important for the teacher to give more specific instructions to encourage students to interact productively. He believes that effective instructions make students speak more and create a more balanced performance.

#### **2.3.4.2 Gives a demonstration**

“Activities can be set up by demonstration rather than by lengthy explanation” (Hadfield 1987: v). Sometimes teachers need to demonstrate what the students have to do later in their pair or group. Demonstration can be done either by the teacher in front of the class, or with a student in front of the class, or even with the whole class. Furthermore, Hadfield and Hadfield (1999: 2) suggest that after the demonstration, it is necessary to double check to make sure that everyone knows what to do.

#### **2.3.4.3 Instructs in some skills**

In addition to giving clear introductions or a demonstration about how to accomplish

the task, Guo (2003: 157) emphasizes that it is necessary for teachers to explicitly teach group-work skills to students. Group work skills include, for example, how to take responsibility to initiate discussion, how to help and support each other, and how to encourage each other.

Generally, teachers play an important role as instructors to give clear instructions about how to accomplish the tasks and why. Demonstrations and double-checking are used when it is necessary. In addition, the teacher can remind students to pay attention to the cooperative and conversation skills as well.

### **2.3.5 Role as a monitor**

#### **2.3.5.1 Monitoring should be subtle**

Cauldwell (1983: 27, cited in Hedge 2000: 31) proposes that: “monitoring any group activity has to be done very subtly and there are a number of points to look for.” In other words, teachers are moving from group to group, listening, noting error; they observe carefully and decide whether the students need help, when to intervene, and how appropriate it is to intervene. In addition, it is a good idea to carry paper and pen to note any persistent errors or areas of difficulty. This can then be dealt with in a feedback session after the activities are finished (Hadfield 1987: v).

#### **2.3.5.2 Some “don’ts” for teachers**

i) At the beginning of group work, “Do not sit at the desk, do not leave the room and

take a break” (Brown 1991, cited in Zhang 2005: 38); moreover, Zhang (2005: 38) suggests: “Do not go around the classroom and do not stay with the students at the beginning of the group work”. In other words, once the group work is underway, the teacher should keep some distance for a while to let the students brainstorm by themselves.

ii) Circulate to see how things are going with each group, but “do not spend an undue amount of time with one group at the expense of others” (Brown 1991, cited in Zhang 2005: 38).

iii) “Monitor how the tasks are going but do not correct learners as they are working so that they can concentrate on what they want to say” (Gower 1987: viii). This also means, “do not correct students’ errors unless asked to do so” (Brown 1991, cited in Zhang 2005: 38).

iv) “Do not assume a dominating or disruptive role” (Brown 1991, cited in Zhang, 2005: 38). This is also recommended by Gower, who says, “You should avoid taking part except as a genuine participant and use any time available to quietly monitor and assess with a view to organizing feedback and planning future input” (Gower 1987: viii).

To summarize, it is important for teachers to play the role of monitor. When teachers

monitor the whole class, they should pay attention to the techniques of monitoring and monitor the class subtly and carefully.

### **2.3.6 Role as a facilitator/resource**

The teacher can facilitate students speaking by giving hints to help them think over the topic from different points of view; teachers can guide the students to brainstorm, and remind them of relevant words, phrases, and sentence patterns (Zhang 2005: 37); furthermore, the teacher gives suggestions of her/his own to broaden the discussion.

### **2.3.7 Role as an intervener**

#### **2.3.7.1 Some “don’ts” for intervening**

Cauldwell (1983: 27, cited in Hedge 2000: 31) protests that teachers should not intervene when there is no need: “When the group work starts initially, one has to allow each group to gather its own momentum. One cannot go to a group and push them at a rate which is faster than they are capable of going at the beginning.” And he suggests that teachers can stand back and let the group do the activities by themselves.

When teachers observe that the group is stuck, they can try asking some stimulating questions to guide them instead of intervening too much. Jacques and Warrenpiper have similar opinions, and they suggest the following prohibitions:

- 1) Don’t correct or reject the first contributions even if they are wildly wrong
- 2) Don’t state an opinion rigidly as this may inhibit students.
- 3) Don’t answer questions that could be answered by other



members of the class.

(Jacques and Warrenpiper 1975, cited in Zhang 2005: 38)

#### 2.3.7.2 The time for teachers to intervene

Zhang gave some suggestions for the time to intervene; it was better “after approximately half of the discussion time had elapsed”, so the teacher could “go around the classroom, listening to discussions, giving suggestions, and encouraging the less able or shy students to speak” (Zhang 2005: 38).

Even though many researchers suggest not intervening too much, if a large number of learners have the same problems, it is probably better for teachers to stop the activity, explain to everyone, and then start again.

#### **2.3.8 Role as a controller**

If the activity gets too noisy, teachers may have to quiet students down. The teacher should give a clear signal to show students they have to calm down, for example, clap their hands or ring a bell (Hadfield and Hadfield 1999: 7).

#### **2.3.9 Role as a corrector/evaluator**

As suggested above, when teachers monitor group work, they do not need to intervene too quickly or too much. This may affect fluency and undermine students' confidence. Instead, teachers can take some notes and deal with them in the feedback stage. Secondly, after the group work, a few groups may report to the rest of the class on things they have talked about in their pairs or groups; here, teachers can encourage the

reporters to self-correct and the remaining students to give feedback.

#### 2.3.9.1 Grammatical error correction

When students are giving a report or presentation, correction by the teacher of grammatical errors will be an unwelcome intrusion to the students (Gower 1987: viii).

If teachers intervene to correct grammar mistakes, the students will not be able to concentrate on what they are talking about. If there are grammar and vocabulary errors, after all the students have reported, teachers can “write them on the board and ask the students if they notice what is wrong”. If a large number of students make the same mistake, teachers may need to spend some time explaining or clarifying it. Teachers can also make this language problem the topic of another lesson at a later date (Hadfield and Hadfield 1999: 7).

#### 2.3.9.2 Feedback on performance

Feedback should center on things that may interfere with communication, such as severe pronunciation problems or violations of the communicative competence rules.

Secondly, feedback can include comments on the appropriateness of language used by the students. In addition, it is a good idea to try to get the performers to correct their own errors if possible, with questions such as, “Do you think a professor would really say...” Moreover, after teachers give feedback, a feedback discussion can be held among students (Tillitt and Bruder 1985: ix).

## 2.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, the researcher has reviewed the definitions of Cooperative Learning and conversation respectively. According to the reviewed literature, cooperation is highlighted in conversation. Secondly, cooperative principles proposed by Grice were introduced. In the third part, the researcher classified the teacher's roles into nine categories and discussed them according to the sequence in which they occur in the teaching process.



## Chapter Three

### Research Methodology

In this chapter, first the three research questions are restated (3.1), then the subjects, the classroom procedures, and the observation scheme are explained (3.2). After that, the four research instruments used to gather the data are described (3.3), along with the purpose for which each is used. The final part of the chapter (3.4) states how the collected data are analyzed.

#### 3.1 Restatement of the research questions:

- 1) What roles does the teacher play in the cooperative conversation class?
- 2) What kinds of problems do teachers often encounter when conducting a cooperative conversation class?
- 3) How do they deal with such problems?

#### 3.2 Introduction to the conversation classes and subjects

##### 3.2.1 Background information: Context of the conversation classes

At Assumption University, the students who fail the FEOT (Final English Oral Test) must take the Conversation Course within two semesters. The conversation class (two hours per day, five days per week, 60 hours total) has two parts, “Read Aloud” and “Conversation” (one hour each per day). For the “Read Aloud” part, students read an assigned novel before the class, and talk about the contents or discuss the details in the class. The teachers organize the “Conversation” part as they see fit (the researcher



only focused on and observed this part). To pass the course, they have to pass the “Classroom Teacher’s Evaluation”, “Reading Aloud Test” (answer questions posed by the examiner from the reading novel) and “COT” (a conversation or interview with the examiner) with a result of “S” (Satisfactory), which demonstrates that they have passed the FEOT.

### 3.2.2 Subjects

The researcher observed two teachers in the conversation program to gather data on their roles in the classroom, how they designed their classes and what activities they used. The two teachers and the students in the classes are described below.

Teacher A: Teacher A is not a native speaker. She studied at an international school in Thailand when she was young. Later she earned a Master’s degree in Real Estate. She has been teaching English for 11 years part time. She does group activities in almost every class.

Teacher B: Teacher B is not a native speaker either. She has a Bachelor’s degree in English, and is presently studying for her Master’s degree in English Language Education at Assumption University. She prefers using pair discussion in class.

Students: All the courses these students have taken at Assumption University are taught in English; thus, their learning environment is basically in English. All are

senior undergraduate Thai students; in other words, they have studied at Assumption for four or more years. However, since they were not able to pass the exit examination, they are required to take the conversation class to improve their speaking skills.

### 3.2.3 Class plan and observation scheme

Teacher A alternated days for the “Read Aloud” part and the activities (“Conversation” part). That is, on the day for the group conversation, she spent both hours on group activities. Because the researcher wanted to observe the whole group activities sequence done in one class, she actually observed Teacher A’s class two hours per time, even though the video recorded only one hour.

Teacher B divided each class period into two parts: “Read Aloud” and group discussion (“Conversation” part), one hour for each. Because the “Read Aloud” part was not in the scope of the research, the researcher observed Teacher B’s class one hour per day.

The researcher observed the two teachers five times each; the whole observation period lasted three weeks. Teacher A was observed ten hours total, while Teacher B was observed five hours. It should be noted that the researcher missed the chance of observing from the beginning of the semester and could only observe from mid-semester (the semester was from 28<sup>th</sup> March to 9<sup>th</sup> May).

Times	Teacher A	Teacher B
1	19-Apr 2007	19-Apr 2007
2	23-Apr 2007	23-Apr 2007
3	26-Apr 2007	26-Apr 2007
4	30-Apr 2007	30-Apr 2007
5	3-May 2007	3-May 2007

### 3.3 Research instruments

Four research instruments were used: Video recording, classroom observation, journal and interview.

#### 1) Classroom observation

The researcher sat in the classroom to observe the conversation class. Classroom observation was conducted in order to obtain information about the procedure used in the conversation class, the activities, and the various roles the teacher played in the group process. The researcher made some notes to record what she observed, including the activities carried out, detailed description of the teacher's performance, and the atmosphere in the classroom.

#### 2) Video recording

Each teacher was recorded five times by the University's Audio-Visual Department,

one hour each, for a total of ten hours. The video recorder recorded what happened in the classroom, what the teacher did and what the sequence of activities was in the conversation class. The video recording provided an objective record of the two classes for the time period recorded. It was also very convenient for researcher to go back and observe again what happened for analysis purposes. The video recording is found on a CD in Appendix E of this thesis.

### 3) Interview

Interviews were conducted only with the teachers, because the interview aimed to find out what problems the teachers faced when they were in class. Before the first interview, the researcher informed the teachers their real names would not be used and that they would be called Teachers A and B in this thesis. After each class, the researcher interviewed the teachers by asking questions like, “What problems did you encounter in today’s class?” and “Do you have any ideas or suggestions to solve the problems?” Teachers were interviewed immediately after class, which assured the validity of those answers. Unfortunately, teachers could not be reminded of events in the class by being shown the video recording during the interview, because the video recording was only made available by A-V some time after the interview had been conducted. The researcher used audio recorder to record the interviews, so that they could be analyzed later. Each interview took around 5-10 minutes. A sample interview is given in Appendix A.



#### 4) Journal

The researcher wrote in a journal after each observation to record what happened in that day's class. The journal helped the researcher think critically about what roles the teacher played in the class and how they played these roles. The journal includes a lot of details of what happened in the conversation activities and provides a complement to the video recordings. A sample journal entry is given in Appendix B.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis is treated qualitatively. In chapter two, the researcher defined each role the teachers played based on the teacher functions that were reported in the literature, and classified them into nine categories. For the first research question, she followed the framework built up in chapter two and identified the roles the teachers played in the cooperative conversation classes observed. In addition, the recorded DVD of the classes was watched repeatedly in order to analyze the details of the lessons and the specific occurrences in the classroom. The journal written by the researcher was used as a further source of information and as a complement to the observations. The researcher described the roles according to the sequence in which they occurred in the teaching-learning process.

The interviews carried out after each class observation are transcribed and used to answer the second and third research questions. The literature review provides further information toward answering the third research question (See Chapter Four, Section

4.2).

### 3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has provided information on the research methodology and explained the context of the course observed, the subjects and the instruments used for data collection and analysis. The next chapter analyzes and interprets the collected data in order to answer the three research questions.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Analysis**

This chapter has four parts. Part one (4.1) is an introduction. Part two (4.2) and part three (4.3) aim to answer the three research questions put forward in chapter one. The last part (4.4) is a short summary.

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In chapter two, the researcher defined the roles teachers play in the cooperative classroom as discussed by the existing literature. They were classified into nine categories by the researcher.

In the second part of this chapter (4.2), the framework built in chapter two was followed, and seven of the nine roles of teachers which were observed in the cooperative conversation classes were discussed in detail. In Appendix C the reader can find sample transcripts of classroom talk by the teacher which gives evidence for the accuracy of the observations of the researcher. The manner in which the video recording was produced made it difficult to separate out appropriate passages of talk for inclusion within this chapter.

The third part of this chapter (4.3) answered the second and third research questions. In this part, the researcher interviewed the teachers after each class and asked for problems they encountered in the class. After that suggested solutions were provided.

**4.2 The roles that the teachers played in the cooperative conversation class**  
(answering the first research question).

The researcher found that there were seven main roles the teachers played during the cooperative conversation class. They were as follows:

**4.2.1 The teacher was an activities designer**

4.2.1.1 The teacher designed the activities

When talking about designing the activities, Teacher A said,

Two things I do. Usually I am looking for their weaknesses. As soon as I see most of them make the same mistake, past tense, I try to go and find activities to match their weakness. The best resource is the Internet, as it has a lot of activities, many times you have to adapt. Some of them are great activities, but they are boring. You try to change them; I use dice, cards, nothing bad, just entertaining.

(Interview, from Teacher A)

From the above, Teacher A, targeted students' weaknesses in designing the activities.

Furthermore, she also adapted activities from the Internet to fit her classroom.

Most of the activities carried out in Teacher B's classroom were group discussions.

Teacher B said, "In every class, each student writes the topics they are interested in discussing. If they are interested in these topics, [they] can have fun from these topics." Moreover, she said that the same topic could be designed in different ways to develop activities. In addition, she emphasized that imagination was an important ability that students should have; she believed activities like 'make up a story' could



cultivate students’ imagination as well. Generally, Teacher B aimed to meet the students’ interests, and she emphasized abundant speaking practice by means of various topic discussions.

4.2.1.2 Activities designed by the teachers in the observed classes

During the study, the researcher observed the classes ten times, five times for each teacher. Teacher A adapted four activities in the five observed classes. They were: “Board game”, “Liar”, “Hot seat” and “Talk show”. Teacher B mainly adopted group discussion in class, and occasionally she assigned students to make up a story; for every class she chose different topics for students to discuss. The details were as follows:

Table 1: The four activities used in Teacher A’s classroom:

Activity	Type	Material
Board game	Group work	Board made from paper Dice
Liar	Group work	None
Hot seat	Whole class activity	None
Talk show	Group work	None

Table 2: Group discussion in Teacher B’s classroom:

Activity	Type	Material
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Group discussion	Group work	None
Make up story	Group work	None

Table 3: The group discussion topics held in Teacher B’s classroom:

First class	The most scary thing for you
	An experience when you made your friend angry, and How do you solve that problem?
	Your criteria for good friends and best friends
	Friendship
	The most unacceptable situation you have
	Where do you come from?
Second class	What kinds of book do you like to read?
	(How do you) choose a job, in terms of your interest or just for money?
Third class	A famous person in Thailand
	A free-time activity
Fourth class	Make up a story
	Discuss: The most expensive thing you have ever bought
	Discuss: Selfishness and jealous
Fifth class	Make up a story: What happens in this classroom at night after the conversation class is over?
	Discuss the final COT exam

#### 4.2.1.2.1 Activities carried out by Teacher A

i) In the activity “Liar” done in Teacher A’s classroom, three persons were assigned to a group. First, the three had to brainstorm together and share the most unbelievable experience they had ever had. When one student described her true story, the other group members kept asking questions to help her make a complete story. After all three had finished their true story, they chose the two most amazing stories; next they had to cooperate with each other to make up a fictional one. For this step they had to discuss and negotiate with each other. Finally, they got two true amazing stories and a fictional one. However, the cooperation was not finished yet. For the last step, they had to decide who would tell the true stories and who might tell the fictional story and how to rehearse it so that others would not recognize the true from the false story from their performance. To summarize, they cooperatively made up stories, perfected them, and rehearsed the performance so that the fictional one might not be distinguished easily by outside groups. Each group had to perform, and no one could keep silent. After each group performance, the rest of the classmates had to ask a lot of relevant details in order to find out whether the stories were true or false. And finally, the losing groups would be penalized.

From the performance of group members, “Liar” was a well-structured CL activity. First of all, it ensured the participation of every group member and avoided the “free rider” effect. Three group members took turns and spent a similar length of time (3~5 minutes) to tell their individual stories. In other words, their talking was balanced; no

one either held the floor or was “the passenger”. Secondly, it required positive interdependence, that is, group members brainstormed together and rehearsed together. After their performance, they defended their group from the “outside enemy”; group members failed or succeeded together. Thirdly, the atmosphere in the classroom was lively and harmonious. For example, before every group member’s performance, all three pretended to be the “true story” tellers and seriously said, “believe me, my story is true”. Such jokes made the teacher and the rest of the students laugh.

ii) “Talk show” simulated a television or radio program where one person or group of people come together to discuss various topics put forward by a talk show host. Teacher A brought “Talk show” into the classroom as an activity for students. For example, the guests could play the role of superstars and were interviewed by the host. Or the guests acted as politicians, divided into two opposing parties and debated each other. It could be an interview or debate or issue discussion. Five people were assigned to a group. First of all, group members spent time brainstorming a situation or issue, they decided what would happen, and then they negotiated who became the host to preside over the talk show, and who became the guests. Finally, they rehearsed it and performed it in front of the class.

From the performance of group members, like “Liar”, “Talk show” required positive interdependence and individual accountability. However, it seemed that it was not as successful as “Liar”. For example, in the first group, one student acted as host, while



the other four acted as two couples. These two couples planned to tell their love stories to the audience; in the end it became a gay story in which two couples fight for a gay. The performance seemed more entertaining than communicative; the rest of the students laughed a lot. Another group talked about the Assumption teachers. There were only two talkative persons; the other two only introduced themselves and spoke little. The reason might be, firstly, making up “Talk show” was more difficult than “Liar” for students, even though they had watched talk shows on TV. Secondly, the time was not enough, only 30 minutes, for them to brainstorm and rehearse. The teacher might think about setting a situation or building up a framework (scaffolding) for students that would fit their English ability, and allow them to create their own communicative acts in a limited time. Additionally, more tips and information should be given to weaker students.

iii) “Board Game” used is a game board made by Teacher A on a piece of paper that students played as a group to practice speaking. Students could move along the squares by throwing the dice. When they arrived at a certain square, there was a topic waiting for them. There were 28 topics in total. Examples were, ‘the most exciting experience you have ever had’, ‘the most dangerous thing you have ever done’, and ‘the most adventurous experience you have ever had’. These topics were both interesting and useful for students to express their own ideas, attitudes and emotions. However, when the researcher observed one group, she found that the group members threw the dice and played one by one just to pass through the board. When one got a

topic, he/she simply expressed his/her ideas, and other group members seldom asked questions or gave comments, but just took their turn immediately. The reason might be that there were only around 100 minutes for each group to finish this game and there were three people in a group taking turns to throw dice from the beginning to the end to practice the 28 topics on the board. So it seemed that they did each topic quickly, and there was not much communication among them. Also, there were no feedback reports or presentations for this activity; thus, there was not such a sense of accountability.

iv) “Hot seat” was a kind of ‘ask and answer’ activity, in which one student sat in front of the whole class to promptly answer the open-ended questions put forward by the remaining students. It could be used either as a whole-class or a small group activity. When the researcher observed the class, Teacher A did it as a whole class activity. In this activity, one student was selected to come to the front of the class and take the hot seat. The hot seat was located a few feet in front of the chalkboard. The student sat in a chair facing his or her classmates, back to the board. The classmates who sat in the classroom could ask any questions they liked, and the student had to answer them immediately. Because a student who sat in front of the whole class might feel nervous or frightened, what was required was for the student to calm down, listen to the questions, and answer without too many hesitations. Generally speaking, this game was to help students to use English to answer some general questions, and express their own feelings, attitudes and judgments. Sometimes the teacher tried to

bring some arguments from her personal perspective into the whole class discussion. For example, she asked the student who sat in the hot seat questions such as, “What do you think about the Virginia Tech massacre?” “How would you protect yourself if you were there?” “How do you politely refuse to answer impolite questions?” then she turned the discussion of the issues over to the whole class. For such topics, all the students brainstormed together to find solutions. However, because the time was limited, not everyone participated in this activity. Also, some students were inclined to ask overly personal questions.

#### 4.2.1.2.3 Activities carried out by Teacher B

Teacher B preferred using group discussion. Firstly, abundant topics were submitted by students, and then the teacher chose some interesting ones for students to practice in pairs in the classroom. Some topics such as “the most scary thing for you”, “the most unacceptable situation you have had”, and “the most expensive thing you have ever bought” were suitable for students to express their wishes, feelings, attitudes and judgments. Topics such as “friendship” and “an experience where you made your friend angry and how you solved that problem” helped students to think about how to create and maintain social relationships, such as friendship. After each pair discussion, Teacher B asked some volunteers to give a report, and then she arranged students in new pairs and moved on to a new topic until the time was up. Before leaving the class, students had to submit new topics for discussion the following day.



The researcher found that most students could carry on a discussion immediately and automatically when Teacher B assigned a topic to them. It seemed that they were quite familiar with this process; they could predict what was going to happen next. And when switching pairs, they could find their new pair immediately and start talking without too much persuasion from Teacher B. However, there were still shy students or “free riders”. Moreover, from superficial observation, the discussions between some students consisted only in expressing their own opinion, without negotiation or discussion. Furthermore, for the report part, it was always the same 3-5 persons who did the report while 13-15 were just audience. In addition, even though they laughed at some interesting reports, the rest of the “audience” seldom gave comments or feedback.

Besides group discussion, Teacher B occasionally assigned group members to make up a story. When the researcher interviewed Teacher B, she said she believed that imagination was very important for students, and through making up stories, they could develop their imagination. For example, there was a topic entitled “What happens in this classroom after we have finished our class?” and students could make up any stories they wanted by using their imagination. From observation, most students liked to make up ghost stories.

Teacher B mainly carried out group/pair discussion in the class. However Zhao (2006: 49) suggested that “sticking to one or two group activities may make the students feel



bored, so the teachers should try to adopt different kinds of group activities at different stages to meet the students' demand and need." Hadfield (1987: iv), too, proposed that "variety is important in language teaching" and "a succession of activities based on the same principles" might be more effective.

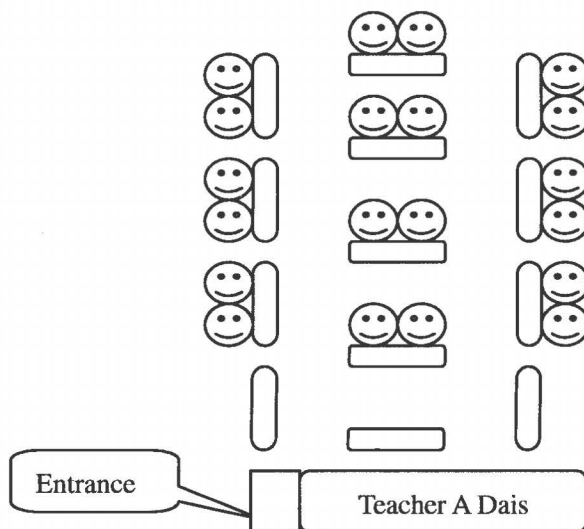
#### **4.2.2 The teacher was an organizer/manager**

When the teachers played the role of organizer/manager, they arranged the physical conditions and decided how to group students according to the activities.

##### 4.2.2.1 Physical arrangement

By observation, the researcher found that sometimes the physical arrangement might hinder the organization of an activity. For example, when working in pairs, students could only share one desk and could not sit face to face. For groups of three to five, it might be difficult for group members to sit close to each other; the physical arrangement separated them. It was also inconvenient for the teachers to monitor and intervene. On the other hand, a face to face and close physical arrangement in a class helps "generate a more relaxed and cooperative classroom atmosphere" (Gower 1987: viii) Moreover, when the teachers want to intervene, it is easy for the teacher to approach the students.

The classroom Teacher A taught in was very small, and the physical arrangement was fixed.

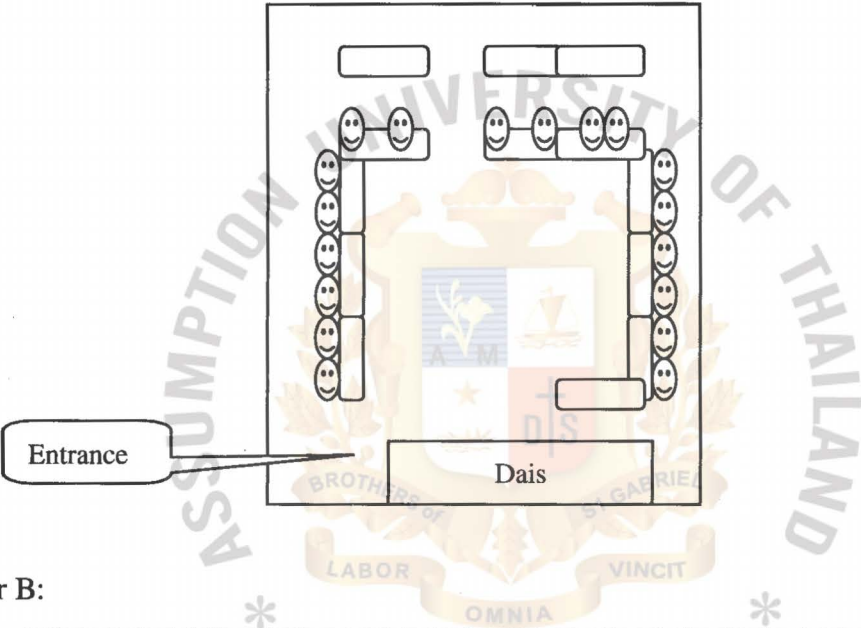


To some extent, this affected the activity to be carried out. For example, when three to five people wanted to work together, only students sitting in the center of the class could easily turn around to make up a group of four; it was difficult for the students sitting at the two sides to become a group. Furthermore there were spaces between the center and the two sides; if students worked in such a group, they might feel separated. In addition, when students occupied the small classroom, it was an obstacle for Teacher A to approach the students when she wanted to intervene.

Teacher A:

Activity	Group person	Physical arrangement
Board game	3-4 persons	Fixed, cannot change, crowded
Liar	3 persons	Same classroom
Hot seat	1 person	Same classroom
Talk show	5 persons	Same classroom

The classroom that Teacher B taught in was more spacious, so it was more convenient for the teacher to approach students, and the physical arrangement in the classroom could be changed. But Teacher B mainly carried out group discussion, so she seldom moved anything. She just let the students sit in an open-rectangle, which made them feel closer to each other. In such an arrangement, discussion was facilitated and learners could move quickly and efficiently into and out of groups. The details follow:



Teacher B:

Activity	Group person	Physical arrangement
Group discussion	Pair work or 3-person group	An open-rectangle, spacious

4.2.2.2 Grouped students

Neither Teacher A nor B used special techniques to group students. Teacher A grouped students randomly. The number of group members depended on the activity

requirement. Teacher B just asked students who sat close to each other to be pairs. But after each topic discussion, she changed pairs frequently. That is, Teacher B left one of the pair at her/his seat, while her/his partner moved to the next table. Rost (1998: 7) recommended this “change seat”, and he believed that this could keep students practicing in case they felt bored or sleepy; moreover, this might provide students with more opportunities to practice speaking.

#### **4.2.3 The teacher was a creator of atmosphere and a motivator**

##### **4.2.3.1 The teacher was a creator of atmosphere**

When talking about creating atmosphere, Teacher A said,

It is more like getting to talk at the same level; [I] sit with them. [It's] using informal language, sometimes the reaction, gestures I use. I joke with them a lot, I found, years ago I joke with students, it seems that if you are able to joke with them, make them relax, they speak more, they tell you more, and you can keep the conversation going. So I try to make everything light. Not serious. Grammar is boring; you try to make it very easy. So the point is just making them practice, speak to them like speaking to friends.

(Interview, from Teacher A)

The researcher observed that Teacher A's personality was open. She was active in the class; she had an attractive and high voice, which created a lively and vigorous atmosphere. When the researcher mentioned it in the interview, Teacher A said, “I think the teacher's voice makes the teaching more appealing. It makes them less bored. You can only draw students' attention for 30 minutes. After that nothing comes in. If you make it more interesting, I feel, it makes the students want to participate more.”



During the five class observations, the researcher found that Teacher A did like laughing and making fun with the students. When she was talking in the classroom, students could be affected by her enthusiasm. So the atmosphere in this classroom was very harmonious. For example, during the “Board game”, because of the physical arrangement, it was hard for her to monitor students. But she sat on her heels in order to get close to the students, and she was somehow lower than the students, but she did not care. So students might not have felt too nervous when the teacher was in such a “non-threatening position”. As she said, students might just like to talk with friends. When she taught students how to distinguish “embarrassed” and “embarrassing”, she tried to explain by joking with them. Moreover, she always encouraged students to ask questions, for example, when the students did not know the word “frustrated”, she had the patience to explain and give a lot of examples. In the researcher’s observation, when she conducted the activities, a lot of students were willing to be volunteers and practice speaking.

Teacher B’s personality was peaceful and quiet. Her voice was not loud, but everyone could hear it. The researcher found that Teacher B also tried to build a non-threatening environment. In her class, the researcher felt a relaxed atmosphere without pressure. In the researcher’s observation, students seemed to be relaxed, as was apparent from their sitting position; they leaned against the chair or wall, talking with partners. The atmosphere in the classroom was comfortable and not too noisy; sometimes they laughed when they talked about funny things. When giving a report, they did not

stand up or come to the front of the class; they just sat at their own seats and did the report from there. They built up a good friendship with each other; Teacher B encouraged them to write down others' telephone numbers and email addresses; one student whose family sold chocolate brought some to share with her classmates.

Generally speaking, both Teacher A and Teacher B played the role of creators of a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere.

#### 4.2.3.2 The teacher was a motivator

According to one Chinese saying, the teacher might possess the best teaching techniques, and might have mastered English very well, however, if he/she cannot encourage students to learn, they will not improve. Obviously, the teacher's role as a motivator is especially vital in conversation class.

During the five observations, the researcher found that students liked chatting with Teacher A. Teacher A gave positive reinforcement in every class. She used words like "excellent", "good" and "you did a good job" to encourage the students. She did not like forcing the students to practice, rather, she persuaded them to volunteer, and she invited them to stand in the front of the class to practice which was useful for building up their confidence to speak in public. She used expressions like "You are very brave!" and "Good guys!" to build the students up. And she always smiled and even laughed together with the students in the classroom. She also believed that sometimes

directly reminding students that they would be evaluated by the teachers, so they had to work hard, was another way of motivating them.

Teacher B was kind; she always smiled and spoke gently. She preferred to give the students a lot of freedom to discuss topics. During the researcher's observation, she used questions like "Have you experienced the same situation?" to encourage more volunteers to practice speaking. She said, "It doesn't matter. Don't think about it, wrong or right, you can use your imagination" to persuade students to speak more. When there were shy students who seemed to want to try but did not have enough courage, she used eye-contact to encourage them to do a report.

#### **4.2.4 The teacher was an instructor**

##### **4.2.4.1 Gave instruction on how to accomplish the activities**

The researcher found that Teacher A could explain the task clearly. She introduced the function of activities and the procedures of how to accomplish them. Sometimes she gave demonstrations. She also provided clues for students to facilitate their work. For example, when she carried out the activity "Liar", firstly, she introduced the activity, and then she introduced the procedure, emphasizing that group members should brainstorm first to find out what amazing experiences they had had. After that they had to make up a fictional one. She gave tips about how to make others believe their stories, so group members had to discuss and negotiate. She also showed how group members could rehearse, so that the others could not judge the truth or falsehood of



their speeches from their faces or speaking speed; how they could prepare enough information so that when the others asked questions, the liar could answer with details. But it was not easy to give clear enough instructions every time, especially sometimes for activities the students were not familiar with. For example, when the teacher carried out the fourth activity “Talk show”, the researcher felt it was rather disorderly. After class, during the interview, Teacher A also stated, “It wasn’t to my expectation, because I think I did not explain to them clearly enough, because I think it is like acting and not really a talk show, it’s more like drama.”

The researcher found that most of time Teacher B played her role of instructor well. She explained the discussion topics clearly, and she also provided clues for students to facilitate their work. However sometimes she still encountered some problems. For example, she wanted the students to discuss their criteria for distinguishing ‘friends’, ‘good friends’ and ‘best friends’. It seemed that the students did not catch her meaning very well. It looked as if those students were a little bit confused. So she explained again, “First, in your mind, you have some levels you set up, someone is as your best friend, how do you say someone is your good friend or best friend, how do you say she or he is your best friend or good friend. In your mind you have some criteria, for example, we share the same interests, so we become best friends, or we have the same ideas to solve the problems, so we become best friends. [How is] your level and criteria of good friends and best friends?” After assigning students to groups, she repeated again, “criteria of best friends and good friends”. After monitoring



awhile, she used gestures to explain: “there are different levels, basic one is friend, second is the good friend, third level is close friend, how to think of some one as your good friend.” Finally, the students seemed to understand her explanation, but they seemed have no ideas about this topics. Hadfield (1987: v) stated that sometimes demonstration was more useful than a lengthy explanation. Thus, the teacher might have demonstrated or modeled her idea to bring out more ideas from the students.

#### 4.2.4.2 Reminded students to use the conversation skills in group work

According to the “the maxim of quantity” (Grice 1975), a minimal answer does nothing to drive the conversation forward, and it reduces the number of communicative acts between group members. When describing something, students should try to provide as much relevant information as they can; when they state their ideas, they should expand on their opinion as clearly as necessary to be understood. In the researcher’s observation, both Teacher A and Teacher B reminded students to follow the “maxim of quantity”. They did this by repeatedly reminding students that they had to tell “where, when, what, why and how” in detail. In addition, Teacher A modeled to students how to keep the conversation going by asking relevant questions; how to ask questions instead of keeping silent after others spoke; and how to refuse to answer sensitive questions in a polite way. She indirectly modeled to students how to joke with each other and how to use intonation to attract each other’s attention.

#### 4.2.4.3 Reviewed the grammar and vocabulary

In the researcher's observation, Teacher A reviewed some grammar and vocabulary relevant to the activity's needs. For example, she distinguished "boring" versus "bored", and "interesting" versus "interested"; she also helped students to recognize the difference between "scared", "frightened", and "nervous". She used many examples to explain the meaning of "frustrated" and "embarrassed". Secondly, she emphasized that when students talked about their experience, they had to use the past tense because it happened in the past. In addition, she corrected some basic grammar like using "my brother and I" instead of "I and my brother". However, she did not spend much time on reviewing and she never taught difficult new vocabulary and grammar as far as the researcher could see.

Teacher B never taught or reviewed grammar or vocabulary during observations.

#### **4.2.5 The teacher was a monitor/observer**

In these student-centered classes, the students took most of the class time to do the activities, so half of the time was taken up for the teacher to play the role of monitor.

Both Teacher A and Teacher B monitored very carefully during the group work. For example, after the group work started, as proposed by Brown (1991), they did not sit at their desk or leave the room and take a break; they did not spend an undue amount of time with one group at the expense of others; and they seldom corrected students while they were working, so that students could concentrate on what they wanted to

say. In short, the teachers did not assume a dominating or disruptive role.

On the other hand, Teacher A and Teacher B did have different styles of monitoring. For example, Zhang (2005: 38) advised, “Do not go around the classroom and do not stay with the students at the beginning of the group work”, but Teacher A did go around the classroom and stay with students at the beginning of the group work. However, from superficial observation, the students got used to this style of monitoring and seemed not to feel pressured or uncomfortable. Moreover, Teacher A tried to monitor every group several times; she said, “It is very hard for you to spend time with every group, I mean only a few minutes. I try to spend as long as I can, as much time as I can on a group, come back to them if possible, and sometimes it’s not that equal, it’s hard.” As she had claimed in the interview, the researcher found that she always did go around to observe each group. When the group work was beginning, she stood by and listened carefully to the group’s idea. If she felt it was ok, she went on to the next group. Sometimes, she found that the group had problems; then she might join that group to guide them, later leaving that group to go on. Sometimes, she discovered that the whole class had the same problem; then she might clarify in front of the whole class. Littlewood (1999: 19) said, “While learners are performing, the teacher can monitor their weaknesses and strengths; even though he may not intervene at the time, he can use weakness as signs of learning needs which he must cater for later”. Teacher A mentioned this point as well. She said that after monitoring the whole class, she could diagnose the weaknesses of students, and then she tried to find

activities which matched their weaknesses.

Teacher B did not, in the researcher's observation, go to every group. At beginning of group work, she kept some distance from students. And later she either went to sit down in one group or stood beside some groups. She monitored the whole class, and if she found almost all the students in the class had finished the topic, she might let three to five volunteers share their experience before changing the topic.

#### **4.2.6 The teacher was a facilitator/intervener**

When observing the class, the teacher should "intervene to clarify instructions, review important procedures and strategies for completing the assignment, answer questions, and teach ... task skills as necessary" (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 44). This was exactly what Teacher A and Teacher B did in the classroom.

##### **4.2.6.1 Explained the task again**

When the activities started, both Teacher A and Teacher B went around to observe the group work. When they found that some students did not understand the task or procedure very well, they explained it individually. When they found that most students were unfamiliar with it and had the same problems, they might stop and explain for the whole class.

##### **4.2.6.2 Explained vocabulary**



Teacher A explained the vocabulary to students when she found that they did not know it or some asked her questions about it. For example, when students were doing the “Board game”, one student did not know what “frustrated” meant. Instead of answering it directly, firstly she asked the whole class whether someone could help with the answer. When she found most students did not know it, she tried to explain it. In the researcher’s observation, Teacher B did not explain vocabulary in front of the whole class. But she might have explained it to individuals.

#### 4.2.6.3 Brainstormed with the students

In the researcher’s observation, when Teacher A and Teacher B went to monitor groups, sometimes they might sit down with students to brainstorm with them. For example, in the activities such as “Talk show”, when Teacher A found that two groups were discussing the same topic, she sat down with one group and suggested that if they liked, they could change. Then she brainstormed with them.

#### 4.2.6.4 Asked questions to encourage students to think more

When students described something, both Teacher A and Teacher B liked using “where, why, when, how” to guide student think more and speak more. Teacher A explained what she did in the class,

I try to explain to them how to speak more, I try to tell them, give them guidelines on what they should say, I think they have a lot of things in their heads, going on in their heads, when they are listening to their friends or they are in front of the class, but they just don’t know when

to say it, what to say, or should they say it. I try to guide them by giving tips on what could be things you can say, and it could be opening a conversation, it could be something that you complete for another topic and everything.

(Interview, from Teacher A)

From the researcher's observations, Teacher B prompted students to think about the content of the topic deeply and critically. For example, when they were talking about "The most expensive thing you have ever bought", she asked questions like "Do you think it's worth it or not"; "Do you think the most expensive things has the highest quality", to motivate them to speak more and think critically.

#### **4.2.7 The teacher was a corrector and an evaluator**

##### **4.2.7.1 Grammatical correction**

Littlewood (1999: 19) said that the "teacher has to decide that a particular error is so important he or she must correct it at once to prevent it from becoming fixed in the students' speech." In the researcher's observation, Teacher A sometimes corrected students' mistakes both in front of the whole class and individually in group work. But she corrected both grammar and vocabulary mistakes only occasionally; she did not intervene too frequently during the talk of the students. Teacher B did not correct mistakes in front of the whole class.

##### **4.2.7.2 Feedback on students' performance and reports**

Every student took turns performing in front of the whole class. Both in "Liar" and in "Talk show", which were carried out in Teacher A's classroom, the teacher always

gave encouraging comments, such as “good job”, and she occasionally gave suggestions about communication skills or pronunciation problems. She usually modeled for the rest of the students how to ask questions, how to keep the conversation going, as well as promoting interaction between the students on the stage and the rest of the students sitting at their desks. However, from the researcher’s observation, there was no feedback during “Board game”. One reason might be the limited time. Before changing to a new topic, Teacher B also encouraged volunteers to report about their conversation on the topic. However, Teacher B seldom gave any feedback either on pronunciation or on contents or on communication skills.

At the end of the semester, Teacher A and Teacher B were both required to evaluate their students on both their performance and their effort (Classroom Teachers’ Evaluation). So they also played the role of evaluator.

#### **4.3 Problems teachers faced and suggestions for solutions** (answering the second and third research questions)

In this part, problems the teachers often confronted are stated, and suggestions for solutions are made. However, this does not mean the suggestions were necessarily able to completely solve the problems. While they provide a stimulation to problem-solving, more suggestions need to be made.

##### **4.3.1 Helping weaker students in the classroom**

#### 4.3.1.1 Problems

When it came to weaker students, the interviews with Teacher A brought out three kinds of issues:

##### 1) Some students' English was really poor

In the interview after the second class, Teacher A said, “You see we had a very weak student today when telling stories; it is pretty hard. I helped her before too, the student was very weak. It is very hard, because 60 hours will not be enough for a student that weak, but it doesn't mean she should give up ...”

##### 2) Some students were too weak to comprehend the teacher's instructions.

“Some students, it seems, even cannot understand what I am saying. Some students understand me right way”, Teacher A said in the interview.

##### 3) Teachers may focus too much on weak students.

Teacher A said: “ There are many different proficiency levels in the class. Some students are very weak, and some students are strong, I can't focus too much on weak students, even if I want to”.

During the ten observations, the researcher found this was a big problem in both Teacher A and Teacher B's classroom, even though Teacher B did not mention it.

#### 4.3.1.2 Suggested solution



### 1) The teacher helped weak students individually during the monitoring

When talking about how to help a weak student in her class, Teacher A said, “What I try to do is just explain to her what is wrong... When she is talking in a group, I try to explain to her, correct what she’s saying.” In addition to Teacher A’s method, a suggestion is that a teacher may try to help weak students individually during the monitoring stage. The teacher can approach the weak students, checking their understanding of the procedure of the activity, observing their speaking, brainstorming with them if necessary, correcting their obvious mistakes occasionally, and encouraging them as well (Researcher’s suggestion according to observation).

### 2) Strong students help weak students

Another solution Teacher A had was to let “strong students help weak students”. This idea was also suggested by Slavin (1995: 16); if four persons are assigned to a group, “have a high performer, a low performer, and two average performers”, and let them help each other. Actually, there were some strong students in the classroom; when they were working in groups, they could play the role of teacher or leader, initiating the topic, encouraging weaker students to brainstorm, reminding weaker students about serious mistakes, and persuading weaker students to give a report/performance in front of the class after rehearsing in the group (Guo 2003: 157).

### 3) Design some activities suitable for dealing with the different level of students

As Teacher A mentioned, designing suitable activities was very important. One

suggestion was that teachers might consider designing different level activities for different level students. For example, when role-play was done, students could be classified into three levels. Weaker students could be assigned a simple situation and given role-play cards with vocabulary/grammar hints provided; intermediate-level students could practice role play with simple hints provided and perform a complex situation; and advanced-level learners could present role plays without hints provided and perform still more complex situations (adapted from Dipietro 1987; Hadley 1993).

#### 4) Self-learning outside the classroom

Teacher A said, “60 hours conversation is not enough for weakest students to improve a lot.” In other words, some students were too weak to improve their English enough in a short time; they had to learn by themselves outside the classroom.

### **4.3.2 Helping the really quiet students in the class**

#### 4.3.2.1 Problems

Some students kept silent when the task was assigned in groups; they didn't want to participate, and they let the rest of the group members do the talking. They neither expressed their own ideas nor helped their group members to keep the conversation going.

Teacher A mentioned this problems three times. According to her, silent students had

these features.

- 1)“They can speak, but they don’t know how to start”
- 2)“ They are not shy, they just don’t have confidence”
- 3)“ They have learnt English for many years, but they just didn’t get used to using it”
- 4) “They are just audience, they never interrupt to ask questions”
- 5) “Some of them might not know how to interrupt during the conversation”

#### 4.3.2.2 Suggested solutions

##### 1) Find reasons for their silence by chatting with silent students

Teacher A suggested that, “I might have to talk to them personally, ask [them] ‘is everything ok?’ ‘How can I help.’ What’s the reason, I guess I should find the reason first, I am sure each of them might have different reasons why they aren’t talking.”

##### 2) Guide and encourage silent students in a non-threatening way

According to Teacher A, the second feature of silent students is that they lack confidence. When monitoring in the classroom, it was necessary for the teacher to use a non-threatening way of guiding and encouraging silent students individually.

Furthermore, when the teacher is monitoring the whole class, she/he may spend some time rehearsing with students who lack confidence, and later encourage them to give a report for the whole class to gradually help them to build up confidence by having a successful experience (Researcher’s suggestion).

### 3) Guide them to apply conversation and cooperative skills

According to Teacher A, some students did not know how to start, they never interrupted to ask questions during group discussion, and some of them might not know how to interrupt during the conversation with their peers. These reactions meant that students lacked basic conversation skills. The teacher could teach students how to initiate a conversation or discussion, and how and when to take a turn during the conversation. More important, students had to apply the conversation skills when doing the activities. Guo suggested that it was necessary for teachers to teach the cooperative skills explicitly, which were important for successful conversation. She summarized as follows;

- 1) One member of the group takes the initiative and helps the conversation begin.
- 2) Students invite one another to contribute and give mutual support to sustain their discussion.
- 3) When one member asks for information, other group members always give information on request.
- 4) When one group member has some difficulty in understanding information and asks for clarification, another member clarifies.
- 5) When one group member expresses his or her opinion, others explicitly support his or her assertion with evidence and extend the contribution or else contradict it by using evidence to challenge the assertion or qualify it.

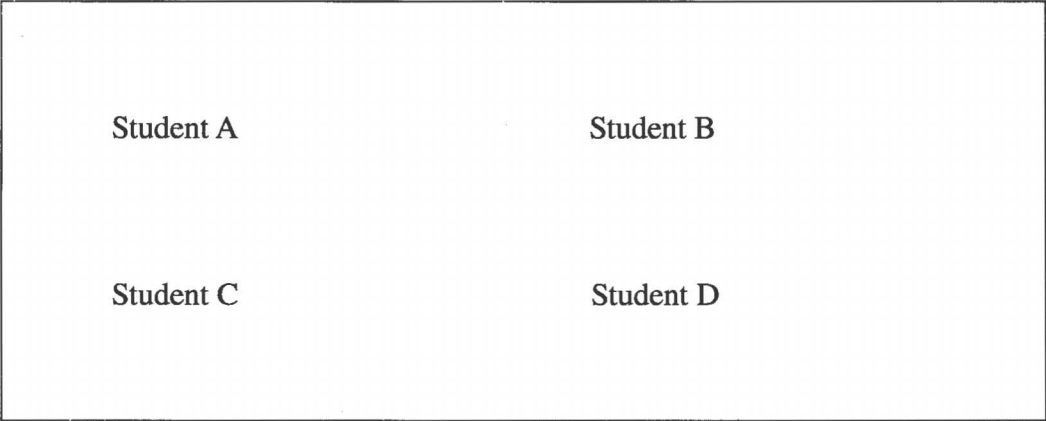
(Guo 2003: 156)

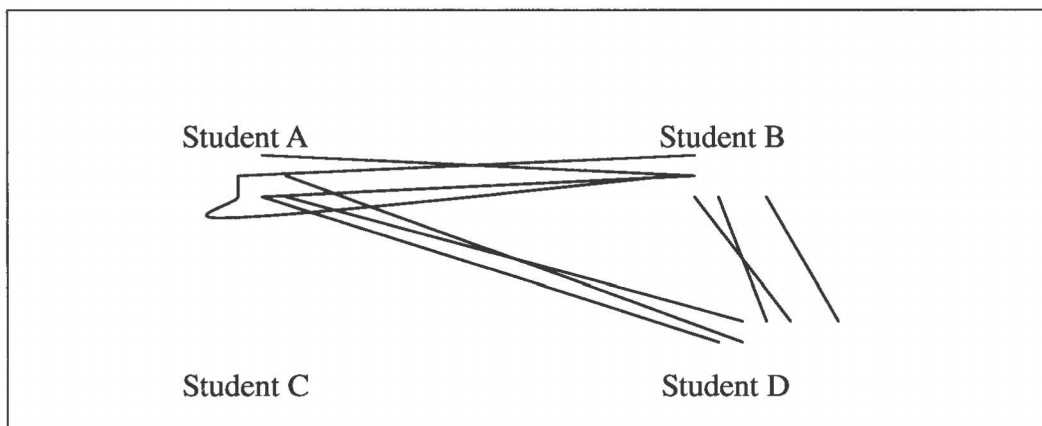
### 4) Design activities to ensure participation

Some especially designed activities could be used to ensure participation or individual accountability. Hadfield (1992) described how cognitive activities could be used for



this purpose. She stated that cognitive activities “seek to make certain demands of the group learning process more explicit to the learner” (1992: 15), and ensure that participation and individual contributions are part of these activities. For example, “Interaction mapping” (1992: 122) was a cognitive activity. First of all, for each discussion group, the teacher appointed one ‘observer’ to act as a secretary, who sat a little apart from the group and did not play an active part in the discussion, but would take notes on the points raised. Then the teacher had each observer draw a diagram (see sample diagram below) of the people in the group. When the discussion was over, the observer was asked to show their diagram to the group and initiate a discussion: Did everyone participate in the discussion? Was there equal participation? How could they get the balance better in their group? A similar activity was to give each group a ball of string. The person who opened the discussion should hold one end of the string, and pass the ball on to the next person to speak and participate in the discussion. The students might become aware of what was happening; they could influence it, either by participating more fully or by bringing other members in (1992: 124).





### 4.3.3 Helping students speak more, and speak more precisely

#### 4.3.3.1 Problems

When the researcher interviewed Teacher B, it seemed that this was her biggest problem; she mentioned it twice. In the first interview, Teacher B complained that the students' talk was superficial: "Like today, they answered the question surface, not deep, for example, they thought about their friend (the topic of talking about criteria for friends) they were not open-minded, [they did not] use their imaginations". In the fifth interview, Teacher B said she felt this was a serious problem: "They only answered questions on the surface with short or simple sentences. The answer was basic and, they didn't want to search for more meanings related to this question."

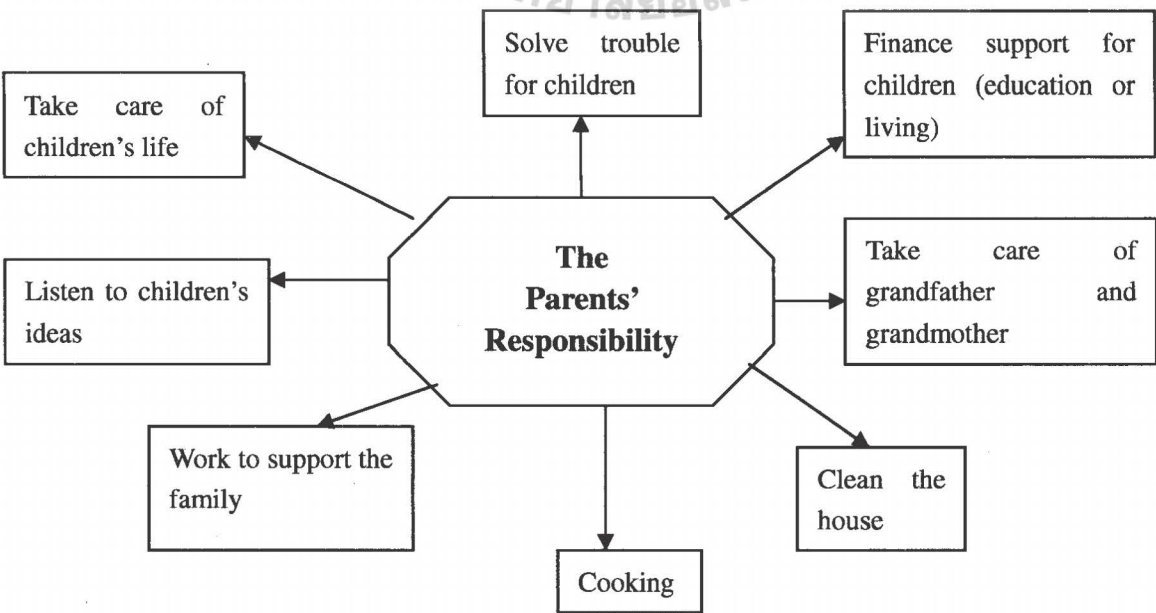
The researcher found, as well, that during the discussion process, students expressed some ideas by using a word or short phrase instead of giving a complete sentence; moreover, they did not clarify their points by giving details or examples. It seemed that students lacked enough ideas to talk about; the discussions were short and not lively, so that the communication easily broke up. It might be that the students felt

their thoughts were limited by their English capability, so they were afraid to think about more ideas in English, and they did not believe that they could express their complex ideas in English.

4.3.3.2 Suggested solutions

1) Encourage/ teach students to brainstorm

“Two heads are better than one” is the principle of CL. So one suggestion is that the teacher encourages the students to brainstorm. First of all, the teacher asks the students to write down as many ideas as they can (later the teacher can encourage them to brainstorm without writing ideas down), no matter how normal or strange they are. Then the teacher guides the students in a discussion about these ideas. Every student has to explain their opinion about these ideas; they can agree or disagree, giving reasons or examples, and they can add more ideas if they wish. This is a useful way to increase the number of communicative acts between students (Researcher’s suggestion).



## 2) Encourage more speaking and more precise expression of ideas by asking relevant questions.

The researcher observed that once a pair discussed the topic “the most expensive thing you have ever bought” in Teacher B's class. They talked only very briefly about it. Teacher B tried to guide them by asking questions like, “Do you think it is worth it or not?”; “Do you think the most expensive things have the highest quality?”, to motivate them to speak more and think critically.

Instead of intervening directly with follow-up questions, the teacher can also guide students in such a way as to help their partner to speak more and more precisely by asking relevant questions. When one partner answers, “The most expensive thing I ever bought is a digital camera. I bought it at a mall, I like it very much”, instead of giving no feedback, the students can be trained to brainstorm many questions to guide pairs to speak more and express their thoughts more accurately. They can ask, for example, “Where did you buy it?”, “Who gave you the money?”, “What color is it?”, “How much digital memory does it have?”, and so on (Researcher’s suggestion).

## 3) Use a group leader

In the fourth interview, Teacher A said,

Today's activity is a whole class activity (“Hot seat”)... and I think, thank goodness we have them [leaders]. Because the class was able to go on, they were actually showing or acting as an example for some of the students. Once there was a student to lead them to begin to ask more questions, the other students followed; pretty soon some of them become leaders themselves, because they were on the road. Leaders were very important in



the classroom because students not only copy from the teacher, they also observe what the other students are doing and they may know what they should do...because these [leaders] are their peers, their friends... They feel more confident that 'if that person can do that, I can do that'. I think some of them copy [leaders' behavior].

(Interview, from Teacher A)

When talking about leaders, Teacher B said,

You know that we sit together, three persons a group. If all of them keep silent, we cannot develop our activities. If some one can get ideas, we don't care that it was only one word or two sentences, but it was enough. Because at the beginning, giving two words, others can get ideas, know the beginning, they can continue.

(Interview, from Teacher B)

A lot of researchers in the CL field have suggested using a group leader to lead group members to the initial topic and to discuss with each other. In other words, group/team leaders can play an important role in a group/class. One instance is that the teacher can nominate advanced learners to be leaders. In a group discussion, first of all, they can play the role of teacher, taking responsibility to initiate group discussion by either paraphrasing the topic or restating the procedure or by organizing the group members to brainstorm. Secondly, the group leader can act as a model, either showing how to approach the topic by actually talking about it, or by putting forward his/her ideas as examples to guide/remind the other group members to explore more ideas. Thirdly, the group leader can act as a resource to help weaker students to solve grammar and vocabulary problems. Lastly, the group leader can act as a cheerleader, encouraging silent group members to practice, just as the teacher may do (Hadfield 1987,1992,

1999).

However, besides nominating a fixed group leader, some students become the group/class leader themselves. They are active in the class. They put forward many ideas when doing group work and discuss with group members energetically. They actively become volunteers when doing the report or performance in front of the class. Their behaviors influence the whole class; the atmosphere in the class is positive, and the rest of the students have more confidence to put forward their own ideas and be volunteers speaking in front of the class. The teacher can give encouragements or positive comments to those leaders or volunteers (Interview from Teacher A).

#### **4.3.4 Deciding whether to teach/correct grammar and vocabulary in conversation class**

##### **4.3.4.2 Problems**

When Teacher B was interviewed, she said that her students complained that their vocabulary was insufficient for them to speak English well. She said, “Vocabulary is not enough and [they] don’t know how to paraphrase it.” On the other hand, Teacher A believed, “Everything they use to speak is ready there. They already have it, but it just does not come out at all”.

##### **4.3.4.2 Suggested solutions**

###### **1) The minimum adequate speech vocabulary**

West (1960, cited in Thornbury, 2006: 43) developed a minimum adequate speech vocabulary for learners of English of just 1200 words. Adolphs and Schmitt (2003, cited in Thornbury 2006: 43) suggested, “2000 word families may be a useful starting point, but 3000 is a better goal”. Whether 1200 words or 2000 word families are considered adequate for speaking, Nation (1990, cited in Thornbury, 2006: 43) advised that, “To speak English it is not necessary to have a large vocabulary. It is best to give learners practice in being able to say a lot using a small number of words.” Students in the conversation class were senior students who had mastered enough vocabulary. So as Teacher A said, it was necessary for the teacher to encourage students to build the confidence that they could speak and express their ideas with whatever number of words they had. Moreover, the teacher might show students how to use simple words to express complex situations by designing some relevant activities.

## 2) Practice paraphrasing

It is an important skill for students to be able to paraphrase something when they do not know the exact word. For example, they can use one or more patterns to define words. The patterns can be like some of the following: n. is a type of...; n. is used for...; something means...; n. is a place that...; n. is part of...; n. is a ...color and large/small, the shape is... (Gardner and Gardner 2000: 22)

Channell (1994, cited in Thornbury 2006: 43) suggested that: “One way of

economizing on vocabulary size is the use of vague language, such as thing, stuff, ... and things like that, ...or so, ... or something, ... or whatever.” So the teacher can guide or demonstrate to students how to describe something by using basic vocabulary and vague language.

### 3) Techniques of correcting grammar mistakes

When students are doing a report, presentation or performance, “correction by the teacher of grammatical error will be an unwelcome intrusion to the students” (Gower 1987: viii). This is because if the teacher intervenes to correct the grammar mistakes, the students cannot concentrate on what they are talking about. However, the teacher can make notes when students are doing their report or performance. After the report the teacher can either “write them [errors] on the board and ask the students if they notice what is wrong” (Hadfield and Hadfield 1999: 7), or ask the rest of the students to point out the speaker’s mistake, or let the speaker self-correct. After this first step, the teacher can summarize later. If a large number of students make the same mistakes, teachers may need to spend some time explaining or clarifying them. The teacher can also “make this language problem the topic of another lesson at a later date” (Hadfield and Hadfield 1999: 7).

## **4.4 Conclusions**

In Chapter Two, the researcher listed nine basic roles found by other researchers of CL. In this chapter, the researcher found seven main roles that both Teacher A and B



played, which were similar to the roles found in Chapter Two. Evidence for the accuracy of the researcher's classroom observations in this chapter is provided by sample transcripts of teacher talk in the classroom, for which, please see Appendix C. These are summarized and their implications discussed in Chapter Five of the thesis.

In the following, the researcher provides several clarifying comments about the data analysis as presented in the present chapter:

In regard to the discrepancy in the number of roles, two points need clarification. First, from observation, the two classes were not very noisy when students were doing activities, especially Teacher B's classroom. Moreover, as Teacher A said, instead of quieting students down, the teacher should cheer them up and encourage them to risk speaking, especially in a conversation class. So the teacher's role as controller was not included in the finding. Secondly, the researcher combined the teacher's roles as "facilitator" and "intervener" into one item. This was because the one main purpose of intervening was to facilitate the students' work, so it was difficult to distinguish or disjoin the two.

In part three (4.3), the teacher interviews carried out after each class were transcribed and used to discuss the four problems the teachers often encountered, and some suggested solutions were provided. The observations of the researcher and the review literature were used to expand on the solutions suggested by the teachers. The points

at which the expansions occur are made clear in the discussion.

In Chapter Five, the findings are discussed, along with pedagogical implications, some perceived limitations of this study and recommendations for further research.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis has been to find out which of the teacher roles ascribed by the literature to the Cooperative Learning classroom teachers actually played in a conversation class. The researcher especially wanted to find out to what extent the two teachers whose classrooms at Assumption University of Thailand were studied used CL roles in their teaching of conversation. In addition, the two observed teachers were interviewed after each class session in order to find out what problems they often encountered in teaching CL conversation classes, as well as what solutions could be found for these problems.

Although the study was carried out as a case study, not to be generalized, the researcher still hopes that it may help teachers who, like herself, are still learning how to use CL in the conversation class to gain insight into the roles of teachers in such a classroom and to think critically about what are the necessary roles the teacher should play in order to maximize the functions of CL and, with it, the students' learning. That is, in the cooperative conversation class every student does participate in group activities; "free rider" or "passenger" effects are mostly avoided; group members, including the weaker students, create many opportunities to use the target language by brainstorming, sharing ideas, discussing and negotiating,. In addition, they build good friendships with each other by expressing their feelings and wishes, sharing ideas, and supporting each other, which is beneficial for their psychological health as well as

language learning. Finally, everyone speaks as much as possible while preparing to take the exam individually.

## **5.1 Conclusions for this thesis**

### **5.1.1 Seven roles teachers played in the cooperative conversation class**

Generally, even though the two observed teachers had very different personalities and teaching styles, the researcher found that they mostly played similar roles in the classroom: they were activity designers; organizer/managers; motivator/creators of atmosphere; instructors; monitor/observers; facilitator/interveners and evaluators. More interesting still was that their differing performance interpreted the same roles with varying meaning. However, comparing the two teachers or evaluating their performance in the class was not one of the purposes of this thesis.

#### 1) The teacher role as an activity designer

The first role the teacher played was as a designer who prepared the task or activities students should do in the class. In other words, the teacher designed the blueprint, and then the students had to realize it.

In the five classes of Teacher A observed by the researcher, four activities were adapted for use by the students. They were: “Board game”, “Liar”, “Hot seat” and “Talk show”. These were carried out as group activities or in the whole class, but they always emphasized as many of the students using the language as possible. Teacher B



mainly adopted group discussion in class, and occasionally she assigned students to make up a story; for every class she let students propose different topics, from which she chose some for discussion. Thus the students basically used the whole class time for speaking.

Firstly, the activities designed by teachers in conversation class were fluency-based. They aimed primarily at helping students to use English to express their own ideas, attitudes and emotions, and as well as to develop their ability to use English outside the classroom. Some discussion topics picked by both Teachers A and B have this purpose, for example, expressing feelings like 'happy', 'scared', and 'embarrassed'. 'Friendship' and the 'criteria for good friends and best friends' taught them to deliver their wishes or values within a social context.

Secondly, structured CL activities could create more opportunities for students to negotiate with group members and increase their communicative acts; moreover they paid attention to individual accountability to avoid "free ride" and help silent students speak more. An activity such as "Liar", as designed by teacher A, was a structured CL activity.

In addition, some topics were related to the learners' daily life. For example, a role-play such as "Talk Show" was useful for helping students "recreate their own identity in the target language" (Zhao 2006: 49). Furthermore, the activities designed

by teachers were interesting to students. One example was that there were 28 discussion topics that teacher A designed into a “Board game” and prepared for students to play, which were far more interesting to the players than if they had been given the 28 topics directly.

However, not all the activities could achieve the original purpose of the design. When talking about “Talk show”, Teacher A said it did not achieve her original expectation. In the researcher's observation, even though the students had watched talk shows on TV and so had background knowledge, it was still very difficult for students at their level to choose topics and structure a well-organized “issue” in 30 minutes preparation time. The teacher might think about setting a situation or building up a framework (scaffolding) for students that would fit their English ability, and allow them to create their own communicative acts in a limited time. Additionally, more tips and information should be given to weaker students.

Teacher B mainly carried out group/pair discussion in the class. However Zhao (2006: 49) suggested that “sticking to one or two group activities may make the students feel bored, so the teachers should try to adopt different kinds of group activities at different stages to meet the students’ demand and need.” As well, Hadfield (1987: iv) proposed that “variety is important in language teaching...[and] a succession of activities based on the same principles” might be effective.

## 2) The teacher role as an organizer/manager

After designing the activities, teachers had to think about how to arrange the physical conditions and how to group students according to the activities. That is, the teachers played the role of organizer/manager.

The classroom Teacher A taught in was very small, and the physical arrangement was fixed. To some extent, this affected the activity to be carried out; moreover, it was an obstacle for Teacher A to approach the students when she wanted to intervene. The classroom that Teacher B taught in was more spacious, so it was more convenient for the teacher to approach students, and the physical arrangement in the classroom could be changed. But Teacher B mainly carried out-group discussion, so she seldom moved it. She just let students sit in an open-rectangle, which made the students feel closer to each other. In such an arrangement, discussion was facilitated and learners could move quickly and efficiently into and out of groups.

Teacher A grouped students randomly. The number of group members depended on the activity requirement. Teacher B assigned students who sat close to each other to be pairs. After each topic discussion, pairs would be changed. That is, one pair stayed at her/his seat, while her/his partner moved to the next table. Rost (1998: 7) recommended this “change seat”, and he believed that it could keep students practicing so they would not feel bored or sleepy.

### 3) The teacher role as a creator of atmosphere and motivator

Both teacher A and B played the role of creators of atmosphere and motivators, even though their class atmosphere was different. Teacher A created a lively and vigorously active atmosphere which expressed her personality. She had an attractive and high intonation and she liked laughing and making jokes with students. Teacher A gave positive encouragement in every class. She used expressions like “You are very brave!” and “Good guys!” to persuade students/groups to be volunteers to perform in front of the class. After each performance, she used words like “excellent”, “good” and “you did a good job” to encourage the students. Teacher B had a soft voice and she smiled politely. Even though teacher B was not active in the class, her students felt relaxed and they followed her guidance to accomplish group discussion. The researcher found that most students could carry on the discussion immediately and automatically when Teacher B assigned a topic to them. It seemed that they were quite familiar with this process; they could predict what was going to happen next. And when switching pairs, they could find their new pair immediately and start talking without too much persuasion from Teacher B.

#### 4) The teacher's role as an instructor

##### a) Gave clear instructions

Both Teacher A and B gave clear and detail instructions to their students on how to accomplish the activities. Teacher A introduced the function of the activities and the procedures of how to accomplish them. Teacher B explained the discussion topics clearly, and then she let students discuss them.



#### b) Gave a demonstration

Both teachers gave demonstrations or examples sometimes. Hadfield (1987: v) pointed out that sometimes demonstration was more useful than lengthy explanation.

#### c) Emphasized conversation skills

They both emphasized that students should use conversation skills in their group work. Especially For example, they reminded students that when describing something, they should try to provide as much relevant information as they could; when they stated their ideas, they should expand their opinions as clearly as necessary to be understood. Teacher A seemed to be particularly conscious of the need to stress these skills.

#### d) Reviewed necessary grammar to facilitate activities

Teacher A reviewed the grammar and vocabulary occasionally, according to the task to be carried out. Teacher B never taught or reviewed grammar or vocabulary during the observations.

### 5) The teacher's role as a monitor and observer

In a student-centered class, students take most of the class time to do the activities, so the teacher has only half of the time to play the role of monitor.

#### a) Monitored subtly

Both Teacher A and Teacher B monitored very carefully during the group work. For

example, after the group work started, they did not sit at the desk or leave the room and take a break; they did not spend an undue amount of time with one group at the expense of others; they seldom corrected students as they were working so that the students could concentrate on what they wanted to say; they did not assume a dominating or disruptive role (See rules proposed by Brown 1991, cited in Chapter Two).

#### b) Different styles of monitoring

Teacher A preferred to go around the classroom and stand close to groups or sit beside students at the beginning of the group work. Teacher A took turns monitoring every group several times. In her interview, she said that after monitoring the whole class, she could diagnose the weaknesses of students, and then she might design some activities for future classes that matched their weaknesses. At the beginning of group work, Teacher B kept some distance from the students. Later she either went to sit down in one group or stood beside some groups. She monitored the whole class, and if she found almost all the students in the class had finished the topic, she might let three to five volunteers share their experience. Then she changed the topic immediately.

Even though they had a different monitoring style, both sets of students seemed be used to their teachers' monitoring style. By monitoring the whole class, both teachers noticed obstacles that students met. Based on these, they decided whether it was

necessary for them to clarify the task or procedure, or brainstorm with students, or just stand beside them and let the students do the task.

#### 6) The teacher's role as a facilitator/intervener

When the students started working, both Teacher A and B went around the class to observe, and when they felt it necessary, might intervene to help them get through the task or improve; they clarified the task or procedure, explained difficult vocabulary, brainstormed with them, asked them questions, even modeled the task for them in order to facilitate the students' speaking. When students described something, both Teacher A and Teacher B liked using "where, why, when, how" to guide the students to think more and speak more.

#### 7) The teacher's role as a corrector and an evaluator

Teacher A corrected students' mistakes occasionally both in front of the whole class and individually in-group work. But she did not intervene too frequently during the talk of the students. Teacher B did not correct mistakes in front of the whole class.

Teachers played the role of evaluator to give feedback on students' performance and reports. For example, every student took a turn performing in front of the whole class, both in "Liar" and "Talk show", which were carried out in Teacher A's classroom. Teacher A always gave some encouraging comments, such as "good job", and she occasionally gave suggestion about communication skills or pronunciation problems.

She usually modeled for the rest of the students how to pose questions and how to keep the conversation going, as well as promoting interaction between the students on the stage and the students in the “audience”. Teacher B occasionally gave some feedback on the content volunteers talked about, but she seldom gave any feedback on pronunciation, grammar or communication skills.

After the whole semester of conversation class, both Teacher A and Teacher B were required to evaluate their students from the aspect of both performance and effort. So they also played a role as evaluators.

In fact, taking a broad view of these classrooms, the teaching process that went on in them was a coherent and integrated whole; many roles overlapped with each other and connected with each other to achieve their especial functions, the roles of ‘monitor’ and ‘intervener’ for example. There is no doubt that the quality of teaching would be greatly enhanced if teachers could always integrate all the necessary roles together and perform them effectively. In other words, it is important for teachers to think critically about their teaching and decide what roles are necessary in terms of different teaching approaches and styles, and of different classes and students. When teachers have realized these fully and really paid attention to their roles, they can then really enjoy the roles they play and change role, as needed, naturally and freely. More importantly, they can really experience the happiness of teaching and feel that they are rewarded for their efforts.



### **5.1.2 Problems the teachers encountered and suggestions for solutions**

There were four problems the teachers often encountered. These included how to help weaker students in the classroom; how to help silent students in the classroom; how to help students speak more and more extensively; and whether to teach/correct grammar and vocabulary in the conversation class. Suggestions for solutions were provided both by the teachers in their interviews and in the literature reviewed by the researcher. For example, there were four suggestions for solving the first problem: 1) the teacher could help weak students individually during the monitoring (suggestion from teacher's interview); 2) the teacher could encourage strong students to help weak students (suggestion from both the interview and the literature); 3) teachers could design some activities suitable to different levels of students (suggestion from the literature); and finally 4) teachers could encourage students to practice self-learning outside the classroom (suggestion from teacher's interview).

The teachers similarly proposed solutions to other problems they encountered in teaching, which were often, though not always, backed up by the literature. The researcher also found solutions in the literature for problems the teachers seemed at a loss to solve, and sometimes proposed solutions of her own.

### **5.2 Pedagogical implications**

Firstly, through reviewing relevant literature and observing two teacher's classes, the researcher has gained a much deeper comprehension of the applications of CL

principles to the conversation class. Secondly, it has become clear what a teacher has to do in a conversation class in detail. After the whole observation, the researcher is aware of what good techniques she has learned from them, which must be born in mind and applied in her own classes. More important, she has thought critically about what aspects the two observed teachers did not perform very well. She has learned and set out in the thesis how they can be performed better when she, or any other teacher is in the classroom, and how some problems can be figured out when the same situation is encountered, whether or not exactly the same problems are discussed in this thesis.

Now that the researcher, a newcomer teacher, has had the chance to teach a conversation class, she has really applied what she has learned in her class. She has met the same problems the observed teachers told her about before and new problems as well. She is trying to use methods discussed in this thesis to solve these problems. She also sometimes invents her own personal ways to solve these problems.

Generally, the two teachers, especially teacher A, have affected the researcher deeply. She keeps them in her mind, comparing and contrasting with her own teaching. In her future teaching career, she may adopt different teaching approaches and meet different levels of students, but she will always remind herself to think about what necessary roles the teacher has to play in a class.

### 5.3 Limitation of the study

The researcher was relatively inexperienced in research when she started this study project. Furthermore, she did not have teaching experience before, so some important details might have been ignored by her when she observed the class. To begin with, the journal was an important tool in the research, but the researcher did not realize its importance fully until the end of the study. A number of other limitations are discussed below.

One problem concerns the way the classroom data was recorded and preserved. The description of what happen in the classroom comes mainly from the researcher's observations. Specific evidence, such as the actual dialogues that took place in interactions between teacher and students are limited. There are two reasons for this; one is that when the researcher observed the class, she focused on the teacher's performance and roles. In doing so, she stayed some distance from teacher and students to avoid disturbing them, and thus did not record any dialogues between them. Furthermore, the researcher did not have control over the videotaping process, which was done by A-V personnel. As he followed a customary A-V practice of recording the whole class in a broad way, it was difficult to pick up the special detail between teacher and students. In order to alleviate this weakness in the thesis, the transcript of passages from Teacher A and Teacher B's classroom talk have be extracted from the videotape and placed in Appendix C of the thesis.

Another limitation of this thesis is that the researcher only observed five times per

teacher; it was therefore impossible to give completely generalized conclusions about the conversation class and about the teacher roles. If the researcher had observed from the beginning of the class until the end (which amounted to one month and a half) the result might be more generalized.

Furthermore, the classes observed were conversation classes, a category of class which at Assumption University is reserved for students who have failed to pass the regular four-semester sequence of courses, specifically because of the weakness in their speaking-listening skills. Thus they are not typical students. On the other hand, these classes are the only ones in the program focusing exclusively on oral skills; in that sense, they are the best choice for this study.

In addition, the two teachers of these classes were only part-time teachers; they were not specifically trained in CL principles, even though these principles are supposed to be the foundation for the course; for example, they did not pay much attention to cooperative skills among the students, which are key elements of CL. If more experienced teachers could have been interviewed or observed, the results might be different. However, it is a fact that the conversation courses, being in great demand, are often taught by part-time teachers. Again, it was the typical situation at AU that was the context for this study.

Another facet of the situation at AU which may be atypical of other universities, at



least in Thailand, is the intercultural nature of the university and the program. The two observed teachers were of European and Asian cultural backgrounds respectively. The first had a mixed background, the second was Chinese. Neither was a native speaker, nor were they Thai; however, they had been assigned to teach Thai students. Had they been native speakers of English, the observations might have brought out different qualities. Nonetheless, there were three reasons to observe these two teachers. Firstly, they made it a practice to use group work, and they believed they were using a CL approach in the conversation classroom. Secondly, they did not mind being videotaped, which was not true of other teachers; no matter how faultily used, the videotape was a necessary tool in this research. Thirdly, again this was the typical context for AU: teachers who are non-native speakers teaching English as a Second Language to mainly Thai students.

As a last limitation, the roles the researcher found in this thesis were similar to the roles discussed in the academic literature, in particular McDonell (1992). However, McDonell proposed one more role, that of “the teacher as Change Agent” (McDonell 1992: 170). That is, the teacher has a key role in reforming the classroom; the teacher has a redefined role as teacher-researcher. Actually, the teacher role as change agent is very important, because “changes that affect the way teachers and students perceive one another and themselves ultimately affect the social climate for learning” (1992: 170). As Christa McAuliffe, the teacher-astronaut, once said, “I touch the future, I teach” (cited in McDonell 1992: 71). Because the researcher was not the teacher, but

only observed the teachers in this study, this role could not be pursued. This is, however, an impetus for further research, for which recommendations are given below.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for further research**

Johnson and Johnson (1990: 23-37) pointed out that “a deliberate attempt must be made not only to structure the learning, but also to teach the interpersonal and small group skills that are necessary for successful collaboration”. Actually, recently, much research has gained insight into teaching cooperative skills to children when they are doing group work. This research compares children trained in cooperative skills with those who are not trained; they have found that the achievements are significantly different. However, there is little research on teaching cooperative skills to college students. Until now the researcher has not found enough relevant literature that shows whether it is necessary for teachers to instruct students in the cooperative and conversation skills directly and explicitly. If the answer is yes, how to teach those skills to college students needs to be researched. This is an important area for further research.

Moreover, the students in the observed class were Thai students. They had their special culture background. Because this thesis focused on teacher’s roles, it did not discuss too much about the features of the students. Actually, teacher performance might be different according to differing levels and backgrounds of the students. It

would be interesting to study differences which would come out with different mixes of culture (the teacher's and the students'), student levels, and specific courses, as long as they have significant conversational elements.

Furthermore, the teacher's personality influences teaching style and rapport with students. In this thesis, the two teachers had very different personalities, so they performed the same role in very different ways. This is a very interesting observation which could be followed up on in a further, more psychologically directed study.

Finally, the idea of the teacher as an agent of change mentioned above could be studied in a situation where the teacher is also an action-researcher in his/her own classroom, trying out an approach to focus specifically on developing students' critical thinking about their learning and even their societal context and how they can change them for the better. Thai education, like many other educational systems, has great need of this kind of impetus.

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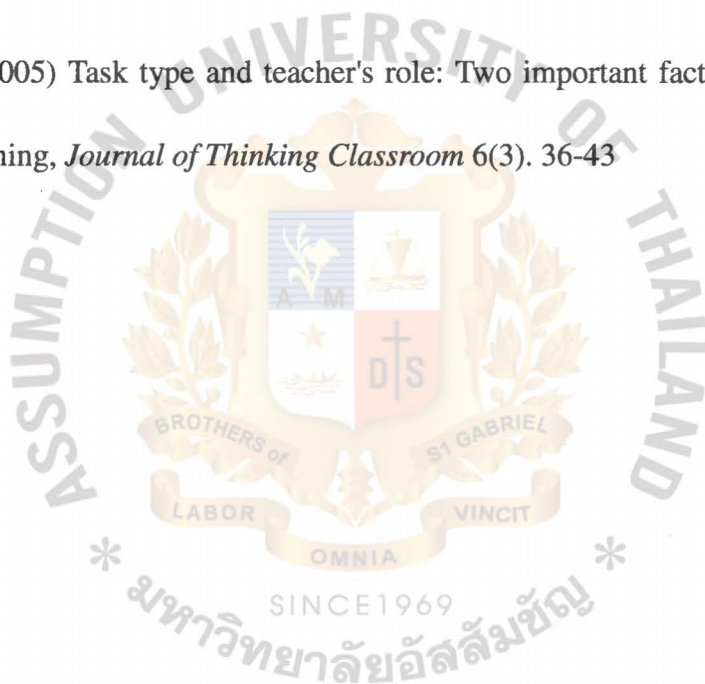
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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Sample Interview with Teacher

1)

Researcher: Good afternoon, today is 19<sup>th</sup> April 2007. This is the first interview for Teacher A. May I ask you some questions?

Teacher: first of all you are welcome, and of course you can.

2)

Researcher: where do you come from?

Teacher: I'm from Thailand.

3)

Researcher: how long have you been an English teacher?

Teacher: I've been teaching English 11 years, it's only part time.

4)

Researcher: do you like teaching English?

Teacher: I love it.

5)

Researcher: do you often use group activities?

Teacher: I would say every one or two days, I usually do that, because there's some activities, like class presentation, I want them to speak in front of public, so it is mixture; everyday we do some group work.

6)

Researcher: do you think learning environment in the classroom is important?

Teacher: Definitely, how the students react to my instruction, how do they react to each other, that's the important thing, because when they do the activity, it keeps going on, whether they can keep it going on or not depends on how they react to one other, and how comfortable they feel, relaxed they feel.

7)

Researcher: how do you create a relaxed environment?

Teacher: It is more like getting into the same level; getting talk to them the same level; It is more like getting to talk at the same level, [I] sit with them. [It's] using informal language, sometimes the reaction, gestures I use. I joke with them a lot, I found, years ago I joke with students, it seems that if you are able to joke with them, make them relax, they speak more, they tell you more, and you can keep the conversation going. So I try to make everything light. Not serious. Grammar is boring; you try to make it very easy. So the point is just making them practice, speak to them like speaking to friends.

8)

Researcher: so how do you choose topics for group activities?

Teacher: Well, there are two things I do. Usually I am looking for their weakness, as soon as I see most of them make the same mistake, past tense, I try to go and find activities to match their weakness. The best resource is the Internet, it has a lot of activities, many times you have to adapt, some of them are great activities, but they are boring. You try to change them; I use dice, cards, nothing bad, just entertaining. So try to observe first, what is their weakness, what is the mistake they made, questions and answers mostly like that.

9)

Researcher: after choosing topics how do you instruct and monitor them?

Teacher: That's hard, because I tried sets of guidelines, I should tell them first before we are starting the activity, so they are clear on what is expected, what they should do. So I tried to list of guidelines, and I still feel I am not in control of them, because there is only one teacher, like today 20 students in the class, the groups are small, but it is still many groups, it is very hard for you to spend time, I mean you can spend time with every group, it would be just a few minutes, you have to move on. Sometimes, I try to spend as long as I can, as much time as I can on a group, and before I move on, and come back to them if possible. I think I am still doing that not very well, sometime is not that equal, it's hard. One thing I told the students that don't



expect me to be able to monitor you always, you guys have to know each other too. Because the point is you are here to practice speaking every day for two hours, it doesn't matter who you speak with, you can speak to your friends and both of you are Thai, and you are speaking English, you are doing fine, if you both understand each other, I think it is practicing.

10)

Researcher: what problems do you often meet in the conversation class?

Teacher: One problem is that there are many different levels of students in class, and there are some students who are very weak and some students who are stronger. The problem is I can't focus too much on the weaker students, even though I'd love to. Some students seems even don't to understand what I am saying, some students get me right way, so it is hard to design the activity, to choose an activity that will be best for the students' need, because there are different levels. I think that one of my problems, finding a perfect activity to fit everyone. But one thing I try to do was I tried to put the stronger students with weaker students, so they can at least help each other. And another problems is amount of the students, 20 students is too many for a conversation. 15 should be the maximum. You will be surprised that how much difference five students make. Really, because last semester, we had 20 students in a class, it was horrible. But I had a class with 16 before it's excellent. Because I think I could spend more time in each of individual students. That one rule I observed, I told them and I do not allow them to speak Thai. I am not forcing them, they would receive a penalty, their COT, they try to speak English, if they try to express themselves or communicate to their friends, or with me no problem, and with their friends, students which blunder they don't know how to express, they turn immediately into Thai, it is the easy way out. So I try to force them to explain, so they can do it. This is one of the things I try to force them not to speak Thai, it is not a strong force, because some of them still speak Thai, but lesser, it is much better than you don't tell them, they pretty easily understand, you try to explain to them. They speak English two hours, they speak English every day, they pay the money to be here,

they get it and they can do it.

11)

Researcher: how to make students speak better?

Teacher: All of them can speak, they have studied English the past 10 years, since they were in kindergarten, started from their first ABC. It's more than enough. We think about they are 10 years old, I mean the vocabulary and ability to communicate, the students should at least be able to communicate with the level they are, if they can practice. They should have a conversation class like this the first year the students are coming. They just take English course like English I, II, III, and IV. They are just the same thing like they studied in high school. It is grammar and writing, it is the same thing. It is something, that didn't work in the past ten years. It has to change something like more conversation, because these students have never taken a conversation class. They only take English course, so they can read, they can write, speak, they can speak, but they just don't know how to start, right now they are half way in the middle of the course, they have spoken more than when they were first here, only when they feel comfortable, only when they think they can do it everyday, speak English, I won't say they are shy, they are not shy, they just lack confidence. They are afraid if they speak English that might be wrong, so it is just better to be silent. If people ask something, they will answer. It's confidence, they speak more than, every thing they speak, they do not use to. These students, they are ready to speak more, they have spoken more than what I saw them the first day, everything they used to speak is ready there, they already have it, you did not prove anything, is wired. But it just didn't come out at all, because they are not comfortable, they are not confident, because they are not used to this. I make it, it's nothing, it is not a big deal, I mean I think now they know they practice everyday, they get used to it more. Sometimes I used the example, My dad, he is, his Thai is very bad, everything is words, he is so proud, they can speak so much English, they are native speakers, perfect, as long as you can communicate. The accent, I overheard another instructor, we should think about, try to make our English perfect, we don't have, we open the

mouse...

12) Researcher: this is the end of the interview, thanks very much

Teacher: you are welcome





## Appendix B: Sample Journal written by researcher

### Journal about Teacher A on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2007

Teacher A is of mixed background. Her father is a Dane. And she studied in international school when she was young. Although she is not a native speaker, her English is quite good.

Before my formal observation, I have observed her class informally. She is kind of teacher who is good at encouraging enthusiasm in her students. Besides observing the process of group activities, I also want to focus on how she creates the environment in detail when using group activities.

Before today's group activities, teacher A emphasized common grammar mistakes that the students often made in the last group activities, for example, the difference between "I am boring" and "I am bored". Instead of asking them to remember directly, she taught how to use some special way to distinguish. For example, she gave a lot of visual examples to demonstrate that "ed" is someone's feeling. Her illustrations were interesting which made the students laugh. This could be a good start.

Because the desks and chairs in the classroom were fixed, she didn't arrange the classroom. When assigning the students to groups, she first assigned a certain number of students to each group. The size of the group depended mainly on the total number of students that day and particular activities. Almost all had three persons to a group, the last one had 4 persons. Then according to her experience, she adjusted some group members, putting some lower level students with some high level students. And she didn't assign roles to group members. No leader, no recorder, no reporter.

After confirming the group members, she assigned the task to students. It is a kind of



board game which uses a map with 34 stations with different topics and group members and dice to skip from entrance to end of the map, the number of skips depends on the dice number they threw. Group members played one by one, after throwing the dice, one group member said something about the topic, and the other group members listened and asked questions or gave relevant help. This game, which makes topic changeable and flexible, helped students feel interested and also provided chance to practice various topics. As she told me later in the interview that she found the games on the Internet, but the most important thing was adapt this game to their needs.

After checking the students' understanding, she looked around to observe students activities. As she said in the interview, she tried to observe each group, listening to their speaking, observing their activities. When she found one group member looks a little hesitant about the topic, she would explain the topic or ask some questions to guide him/her; after listening to student's conversation, she would give comments. Either she corrected the students' mistake instantly, asked some questions to elicit students to speak more, or gave compliments to encourage them. Sometimes she even joined in the group to give her personal ideas as model. She was kind of humorous and always described vividly which created the environment that makes students feel relaxed and they often laughed together. And later she left one group to another group. But she never occupied one group, she tried to move, try to facilitate each group's conversation. When observing group activities, she also guided student to pay attention to interdependence that when one group member expressed her/his idea, instead of keeping silent, others should ask questions or encourage their group members to speak more.

Through observing, she diagnosed that one reason some group members hesitate to speak was that they even didn't know the meaning of some vocabulary in the topic. When she found that, she immediately explained in front of the whole class, which help students a lot. Actually, it is not big deal; students should have the responsibility

to look up to the dictionary themselves. But the important thing was that through observing, teacher found some common problems, she should clarify in front of class instantly.

However, after activities, she didn't give any comments about today's group activities. She frequently used exclamations like "Marvelous" to encourage students. She intervened to correct their speaking, but she always waited until they paused and her correcting tones were gentle. And never make people feel pressure. But she didn't pay too much to individual accountability and weak students. Today's activity was so flexible, so she didn't pay attention to time. And she didn't change groups and check their outcome in front of the class.

Generally, teacher A impressed me a lot. She is good at creating positive atmosphere by making jokes with students, by joining group activities as a non-threatening informant. Even though she often corrects students' mistakes, she always uses some gentle and flexible way that does not pressure students. She frequently encourages students. As she said in the interview, students in ABAC, they have learned English for more than 10 years and they have mastered enough vocabulary and conversation skills, they only lack confidence.

But on the other hand, I also found some problems. For example, as a teacher you can guide students speaking through observation, but for each group teacher can just observe a short time. So if only depended on teacher's guidance, the quality of the conversation is not that high, and some student's content of conversation is boring and limited. And group members don't know how to guide each other. So the outcome is not that high achievement. Last but not least, after group activity, the teacher didn't make any comments about the group activity or content. My suggestion is that if the teacher can assign some group role to group members, let them help each other, monitor each other, the outcome may be more satisfactory. Besides, teacher should give comments after group activity, emphasize both group activities skills and conversation skills.

Generally speaking, today's class was student-centered, but you could feel the teacher's guidance and encouragements throughout the whole class. It was good combination of teacher guidance and student-centered classwork.



## **Appendix C: A sample of transcription of teacher's talk in the class**

### **Teacher A:**

**Teacher A:** Today's activity is "Liar", do you guys know how to lie? Do you know how it is useful for you when you talk something interesting, especially for text, if you don't have certain experience, you have to make up one. I will divide you into four, no, we have eighteen; it is easier six or three, right, how about group of three. Each one in the group come up to talk about one experience you have had and take turn to tell the whole class your story. Everyone has to guess which one in each group is a fiction one. The key is if you are caught there is a penalty. I will tell you the penalty later. Tell detail and one of you to be the liar. Can you find your partners now? The key is not be caught.

**[Each one sat down in their group]**

**Teacher A:** So all of you have 30 minutes for preparation. Remember, two of you must tell true story, one of you must tell a fictitious story. Do you know, what is a fictitious story? [Write the vocabulary 'fictitious' on the chalkboard] we usually read books; we call it fiction books and non-fiction books. Non-fiction books may be about science, person life. What is fiction?

**Student 1:** Create.

**Teacher A:** Yes, it is created. Ok. So you have to create story. If I were you, I will brainstorm what story you have, especially the unrelieved story you have, think about the strategy. Remember, you have to help each other to come up each stories, because you will be penalized in a group.



**Teacher A** went to monitor every group one by one.

**Teacher B:**

**[Discuss about feeling of sacred]**

**Teacher B:** when you talking about your feeling, you should give detail and explanation, give some explanation. These four items you have to talk. First, explain what time, then how do you feel, after that, describe these matters and how to solve problems. Ok. Any volunteers?

**Student 1...**(the answer is not clear, because the effect of video record is poor)

**Teacher B:** another one else?

**Student 2:** when I was youth I met a lot of car accident. When I was 7 years old...the doctor cannot help finally.

**Teacher B:** Oh, yes, so when we are driving the car, we should be careful. Ok, everyone in our class has good friend. And there is also something happened between you and your friend. So the next topic is what unpleasant thing you make your friend angry and how to solve the friend. How to make your relationship longer and longer. How to cut down the misunderstanding. And I'll change the partner and also [you have to] how to solve these problems.

**Students changed their seats.**[change topic]

**Teacher B** [explain again]: you can use some examples about misunderstanding...

**Teacher B** sat down in one group (spent 4 minutes according to videotape)

**Teacher B** moved to another group (spent 3:35 minutes according to videotape)

**Teacher B** looked around and asked for individual report.

**Students 3...**(Not clear)

**Teacher B:** someone else?

**Students 4...** (Not clear)

**Teacher B:** how to solve these problems?

**Student 4**(answered)...

**Teacher B:** Oh, really?

**Whole class** are laughing

**Teacher B:** anyone else?



**Appendix D: Recorded interviews (CD-ROM)**



**Appendix E: Recorded observation of class (DVD)**





