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## Team English in Adolescent Large EFL Classes

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### Abstract

Teachers attempting to use communicative language teaching in large EFL classes often encounter challenges that are difficult to overcome. In this article, the authors describe a case study using Team English, an approach promoting communicative language learning in groups within a color-coded team organization. The project director and participating teachers addressed ways to implement and manage group work using cooperative learning concepts. The project showed that, while some difficulties persisted, overall Team English provided potential solutions for most of the problems related to large classes.

Most second language acquisition researchers would agree that using a communicative language teaching approach in a homogeneous class of twelve to fifteen students is the optimal situation for teaching communicative competence in a second or foreign language (for communicative language teaching see, for example, Nunan, 1989, and Savignon, 1997). However, many English foreign language (EFL) classrooms do not conform to this ideal model. Studies of large EFL classes, from the Lancaster-Leeds Project to current research, point out that teaching English to fifty, one hundred,

or even several hundred students is all too often a reality in many countries (see, among others, Coleman, 1989a & 1989b; Nolasco & Arthur, 1990; George, 1991; Valérien, 1991; Naidu, Neeraja, Ramani, Shivakumar & Viswanatha, 1992; Oladejo, 1992; Christensen, 1994; Simmons, Yonally, & Haig, 1996; Bay, 1997; Hayes, 1997; Din, 1998; McMurray, 1998; Mutoh, 1998; LoCastro, 2001; and Sarwar, 2001). How, then, can communicative language teaching be effectively implemented in large EFL classes?

## BACKGROUND

### Barriers to Communicative Teaching in Large EFL Classes

Teaching in large classes presents many challenges to the EFL teacher. LoCastro (2001, pp. 494-495) revisits some of these difficulties, researched in her earlier study (LoCastro 1989):

#### Pedagogical

- More difficulties in carrying out speaking, reading, and writing tasks
- Difficulties in monitoring work and giving feedback
- Problems with individualizing work
- Difficulties in setting up communicative tasks
- Tendency to avoid activities that are demanding to implement

#### Management Related

- Correction of large numbers of essays virtually impossible
- Pair and group work often cumbersome to execute
- Noise level high, affecting neighboring classes
- Difficulties in attending to all students during class time
- Discipline problems more acute

#### Affective

- Difficulties in learning students' names
- Impossibility of establishing good rapport with students
- Concerns for weaker students who may get lost
- Crowd phenomenon: students' not listening to teacher and other students
- Problems in assessing students' interests and moods

Trying to use communicative language teaching in EFL classes likewise presents problems, particularly in large classes. Gahin and Myhill (2001) divide these problems into extrinsic and intrinsic. "Intrinsic constraints represent those factors that come from within teachers themselves, such as poor subject knowledge. Extrinsic constraints refer to factors that come from without, namely, structural and organizational factors, which teachers have no control over, such as students' and parents' beliefs, lack of resources or administrative obstacles," (Gahin & Myhill 2001, Findings of the Interview Analysis section, para. 2). The authors identify the following constraints (Gahin & Myhill 2001, Findings of the Interview Analysis section, para. 3-13):

#### Extrinsic

- Economic constraints
  - low pay
  - lack of resources
  - large-sized, unequipped classrooms
  - lack of appropriate teacher-training provision
- Examination pressure
- Role of culture
- Influences of colleagues

#### Intrinsic

- Teachers' academic abilities
- Feelings of frustration and stress

In discussing economic constraints, Gahin and Myhill state that teachers interviewed in their study reported large class size acted against group work activities. One teacher was quoted as saying, "If I use group work, the group should not exceed more than [sic] four or five students. How can I do this within this atmosphere?"

Gahin and Myhill also point out that, "Large class size makes learner-centered teaching problematic since teachers find it difficult to involve students at different levels." Some researchers, such as Samani and Eun (2000), maintain that communicative language teaching is often impossible in the EFL classroom.

Nevertheless, there are studies that advocate both communicative language teaching and group work in large EFL classes, often in conjunction with a cooperative learning approach. (See, for example, Johnson, Bolitho, Gower, Murison-Bowie, Rossner, & White, 1983; Honeyfield, 1991; Hyland, 1991; Ngoh, 1991; Safnil, 1991; Lie, 1992; McGuire, 1992; Jacobs, 1995; Ghaith, 1996; Shamim, 1996; McGuire, Thornton, & Kluge, 1997; Kluge, McGuire, & Johnson, 1999.) Of the studies that focus on communicative group work in large EFL classes, relatively few address in detail issues of implementation and management. Even fewer studies focus on adolescent EFL classes. This paper describes a case study incorporating these areas.

### **Research Question**

The inspiration for this study came from a former MA TESOL student from the project director's university who had taught at the Thai institution referred to in this study. The former student claimed that, "You can't use groups with 60 teenage boys with raging energy." To disprove this claim, the project director addressed the following research question: How can groups be used successfully for communicative language in classrooms of 50 or more adolescent students? More specifically, the project director asked herself the question, "What would I do in this situation?" The answer

was the creation of Team English, an approach promoting communicative language in groups within a color-coded team organization.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The Team English project was conducted at a private school in the lower- and upper-mathayom levels (similar to junior and senior high school, that is, grades 7-9 and 10-12). The lower mathayom had only male students while at the upper-mathayom level, female students represented roughly 10% to 15% of each class section. Teachers introduced aspects of cooperative learning into classes that had been, in most cases, traditional teacher-fronted environments. While students at the institution experienced a team approach in other aspects of their school life, few group efforts occurred successfully in the classroom. The teachers who participated in the Team English project faced the challenge of changing their own teaching orientation and the learning style of their students, as well as adapting to the shape and congestion of the classroom and effectively using the limited class time—often shortened further by competing school events. The greatest hurdle in implementing and managing Team English was the sheer number of students involved in the process.

### **Preliminary Observation**

During the first month of the Team English project, the project director observed both prathom (equivalent to primary grades 1-6) and mathayom classes, most of which had more than 50 students. Many of the teachers followed a traditional teacher-fronted approach. At the upper-mathayom level, students were at times not engaged in the class activities, especially in

grammar classes. Some students slept, talked, or read assignments for other classes. Students at the lower-mathayom and prathom levels were more engaged; nevertheless, as the grades advanced the students were less likely to pay attention to the teacher. This change was likely brought about by years of exclusion from active class participation. Many students, especially at the prathom level, attempted to participate and then appeared dejected when time after time they were not called on. Even when some teachers tried innovative, communicative activities, many students were not engaged. Given the large numbers of students, the activities either dragged out if all students participated or excluded most students if only a few could participate. Several of the mathayom and prathom teachers attempted group work, but either there were so many groups or the groups were so large that control was difficult if not impossible to maintain.

### **Teacher Preparation**

During the four months of the project, teachers interested in the project met, when possible, for a one-hour workshop once a week. Although additional teachers participated in some of the workshops, only eight teachers chose to complete the full course of workshops. The first step the project director took to change the culture of the classroom was to introduce cooperative learning concepts to the participating teachers. Cooperative learning is an approach to group work in which students collaborate as a team in a systematic way, each contributing to the task and supporting others in that effort. Every group task has a clear goal. The success in achieving the goals of group work is measured by both group and individual assessment. (See

Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Kagan, 1994; and Slavin, 1995; among others.) Through the weekly workshops, the project teachers gained knowledge about cooperative learning by reading about this approach to teaching then practicing it, as well as suggesting activities to use with groups in their classrooms. One participant began implementing cooperative learning concepts early in the project's development. During the months leading up to the implementation of Team English, the remaining participants used techniques and activities incorporating limited aspects of cooperative learning.

### **Teacher Participants**

As noted previously, the Team English teachers (see Table 1) were self-selected by their willingness to participate in the complete project. Of the eight mathayom teachers, four were from the upper level and four from the lower level. Two of the upper-mathayom teachers, B and G, were foreign but fluent in Thai. One, G, was a British-American and thus native in English. The other, B, was from the Philippines and near native in English speaking and listening; she would be categorized as superior in oral-aural skills by the ACTFL Language Proficiency Guidelines (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, n.d.). The remaining two upper-mathayom teachers were Thai. One, H, had intermediate fluency in oral-aural communicative English while the other, E, had more limited novice-level fluency. Neither appeared comfortable using spoken English. Of the four lower-mathayom teachers, all were Thai. One teacher, D, had lived in the United States and was very fluent in listening and speaking, an advanced level by the ACTFL guidelines. Another, C,

communicated at an intermediate level, seeking out opportunities to use and improve her proficiency in English. The remaining two were less fluent, but one, A, was more willing and successful in attempting to use spoken English, raising his communicative proficiency to a low-intermediate level. The other, F, was novice level.

Three of the teachers, C, E, and F, held a bachelor's degree in English, while one, D, was completing this degree. Of the three with English degrees, two, E and F, had only novice ability in oral-aural communicative English, while the third, C, was at an intermediate fluency level. With the exception of the native English speaker, the

remaining teachers had bachelor's degrees in other subjects and, in H's case, a master's degree and work towards a second degree in subjects other than English. Most of the teachers had, in the past, attended short-term workshops on teaching English. The lower-mathayom teachers generally taught more integrated-language classes whereas most of the upper-mathayom teachers taught reading and grammar to prepare students for the university entrance exams. Only one teacher in the upper mathayom, G, regularly used communicative language activities, integrating listening and speaking skills into her reading and writing courses.

*Table 1. Teachers Participating in the Team English Project*

| <u>Participating Teacher</u> | <u>Years Teaching</u> | <u>Years at Institution</u> | <u>Level Taught</u> | <u>Communicative English Ability</u> | <u>Bachelor's Degree</u>                    |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| A                            | 4                     | 2                           | Lower Mathayom      | Intermediate                         | Accounting                                  |
| B                            | 15                    | 15                          | Upper Mathayom      | Superior                             | Marketing                                   |
| C                            | 15                    | 14                          | Lower Mathayom      | Intermediate                         | English                                     |
| D                            | 18                    | 8                           | Lower Mathayom      | Advanced                             | English (in progress)                       |
| E                            | 6                     | 6                           | Upper Mathayom      | Novice                               | English                                     |
| F                            | 15                    | 6                           | Lower Mathayom      | Novice                               | English                                     |
| G                            | 15                    | 4                           | Upper Mathayom      | Native                               | None  |
| H                            | 8                     | 6                           | Upper Mathayom      | Intermediate                         | Guidance/Ed. Admin.<br>(M.S. in Psychology) |

The number of different sections each teacher taught varied. One Team English teacher, H, had three different sections for two courses each, or approximately 165 students each week, while the rest of the project teachers taught at least four different sections of students, encountering some 220 different students each week. One teacher, D, with the assistance of a colleague, taught

23 sections, each for one hour a week, totaling more than 1200 students each week. Due to the number of students involved, many of the teachers referred to the students by a number assigned to each student at the school, rather than by name. Experience in teaching ranged from 4 to 18 years, with an average of 12 years. Five of the eight teachers had taught at least 15 years.

### Student Participants

All students at the mathayom level received English instruction. Of the eight lower-mathayom sections for each grade level, seven received seven hours of English a week: four in grammar, two in integrated skills, and one in skill activities. In place of these classes, one of the eight sections for each of the three lower-mathayom levels attended a special institute, for which the parents paid additional tuition. These students were taught communicatively by native English speakers in classes of approximately 15 students.

The five sections of upper-mathayom students at each grade level were placed in one of four tracks: two sections of the science and mathematics track, one Japanese/Chinese track, one French track, and one arts track with more intensive English. All tracks took four hours of grammar and two of reading per week. The

arts section took an additional three hours of reading and writing and three hours of listening and speaking per week. Some lower- and upper-mathayom students also paid additional tuition to attend after-school tutoring in English at the institution.

Most English classes exceeded 50 students. The year previous to the study, class size had been reduced from 60 to 55 students. Some classes had fewer students while others surpassed the 55 limit. Although some teachers used Team English activities in more than one class section, for this study, each teacher designated one section to participate in the project (see Table 2). Because the project was implemented in the classroom near the end of the second semester, students in mathayom level 6 were preparing for college entrance exams and therefore could not participate.

*Table 2. Students Participating in the Team English Project*

| <u>Participating<br/>Teacher</u> | <u>Mathayom<br/>Level</u> | <u>Number of<br/>Students</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| A                                | 1 (Lower Mathayom)        | 51                            |
| B                                | 4 (Upper Mathayom)        | 55                            |
| C                                | 3 (Lower Mathayom)        | 52                            |
| D                                | 2 (Lower Mathayom)        | 49                            |
| E                                | 4 (Upper Mathayom)        | 58                            |
| F                                | 2 (Lower Mathayom)        | 50                            |
| G                                | 5 (Upper Mathayom)        | 55                            |
| H                                | 4 (Upper Mathayom)        | 56                            |

### Classroom Environment

Classrooms varied in space and convenience. All had access to overhead

projectors, but it was difficult to find space to set up machines in the regular classrooms. Students in the back of the room had

difficulty seeing the overhead transparencies clearly. Because of the noise from ceiling fans, it was also difficult to hear in the back of the room if the teacher was standing at the front. There were some larger, more convenient special classrooms, and three lower-mathayom teachers moved their classes to these better-equipped rooms for Team English. The fourth lower-mathayom class was regularly taught in the best equipped of these rooms. The upper-mathayom classes all participated in Team English in their regular classrooms.

### **Implementation of Team English in the Classroom**

Near the end of the academic year, the participants implemented Team English in at least one of their class sections. Incorporating the existing school culture of group behavior in sports, after-school activities, and annual contests, the teachers transferred the same color-coded team format into the classroom.

Each class was divided into six teams with nine members—or occasionally eight or ten, members, depending on class size. Teachers were asked to identify the six students with the strongest leadership qualities and English ability. These students were designated the team captains. Then the remaining students were listed from high to low ability. The lowest six students were distributed evenly to the six teams, as were the next top six, then the next bottom six, and so forth until all students were assigned to a team. Thus six heterogeneous teams were formed. If there were any personality conflicts or students who needed to be separated from each other, students could be switched with similar-ability students from other teams before the teams were finalized.

In each team, the top three in English ability were designated numbers 1-3, with the captain as number 1. The middle three were given numbers 4-6, and the lowest three, numbers 7-9. (Number designation can be more random, as long as it is consistent across all groups. For example the most advanced top three could be 1, 5, and 9; the next three, 3, 4, and 7; the lowest three, 2, 6, and 8.) In class sections with fewer than 54 students, number of students on a team varied, some with eight, others with nine. The original plan for classes of 55 students was to have the class captain—an official designation in all class sections—serve as a floater, moving from group to group or substituting in a group when a student was absent. However, in the implementation, the class sections of 55 or more students had some teams with ten students. (Number 10 on a team should be of average ability so as to keep teams equal.)

Within each team, there was an organizational infrastructure. Each team captain was responsible for explaining and coordinating the team's activities, as well as providing other leadership responsibilities. The teacher could give instructions to the captains and obtain information about the team from these leaders. Teams wore numbered, color-coded sports jerseys, providing easy organization and accountability, while at the same time creating an atmosphere of excitement in place of boredom. Numbers appeared on both the front and back of the jersey. The colors included red, blue, pink, yellow, orange, and green.

To create manageable groups, teams were further broken down into smaller groups, configured according to the activity. The most common arrangement was three groups of three. While many different triads



were possible, as shown in Table 3, most classes used the first heterogeneous triad in Table 3. With teams of eight or ten students, some groups had two or four students. The group leaders were the captain, number 1,

and the other two higher-level students, numbers 2 and 3. As students gained experience in group cooperation and leadership, other students could become group leaders.

*Table 3. Triad Combinations within the Team*

| <u>Heterogeneous</u>             |   |   |   | <u>Homogeneous</u>                       |   |   |   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| Group A                          | 1 | 4 | 7 | Group A                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Group B                          | 2 | 5 | 8 | Group B                                  | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Group C                          | 3 | 6 | 9 | Group C                                  | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Group A                          | 1 | 5 | 9 | <u>Random</u>                            |   |   |   |
| Group B                          | 2 | 6 | 7 | 24 combinations with no triad duplicated |   |   |   |
| Group C                          | 3 | 4 | 8 |  |   |   |   |
| Group A                          | 1 | 6 | 8 |  |   |   |   |
| Group B                          | 2 | 4 | 9 |  |   |   |   |
| Group C                          | 3 | 5 | 7 |  |   |   |   |
| High Level Students: 1, 2, and 3 |   |   |   |  |   |   |   |
| Mid Level Students: 4, 5, and 6  |   |   |   |  |   |   |   |
| Low Level Students: 7, 8, and 9  |   |   |   |  |   |   |   |

Table 3 shows a total of 28 possible triads of mixed or similar ability level. Adding pairs and larger group combinations, the nine team members could interact in many different ways. Once students were comfortable in group work and the concepts of team cooperation, the teacher could implement these groups of different sizes or combinations simply by posting the team grouping for the day. With pair work in teams of nine students, the team captain could circulate within the team or work in a group of three to help the students most in

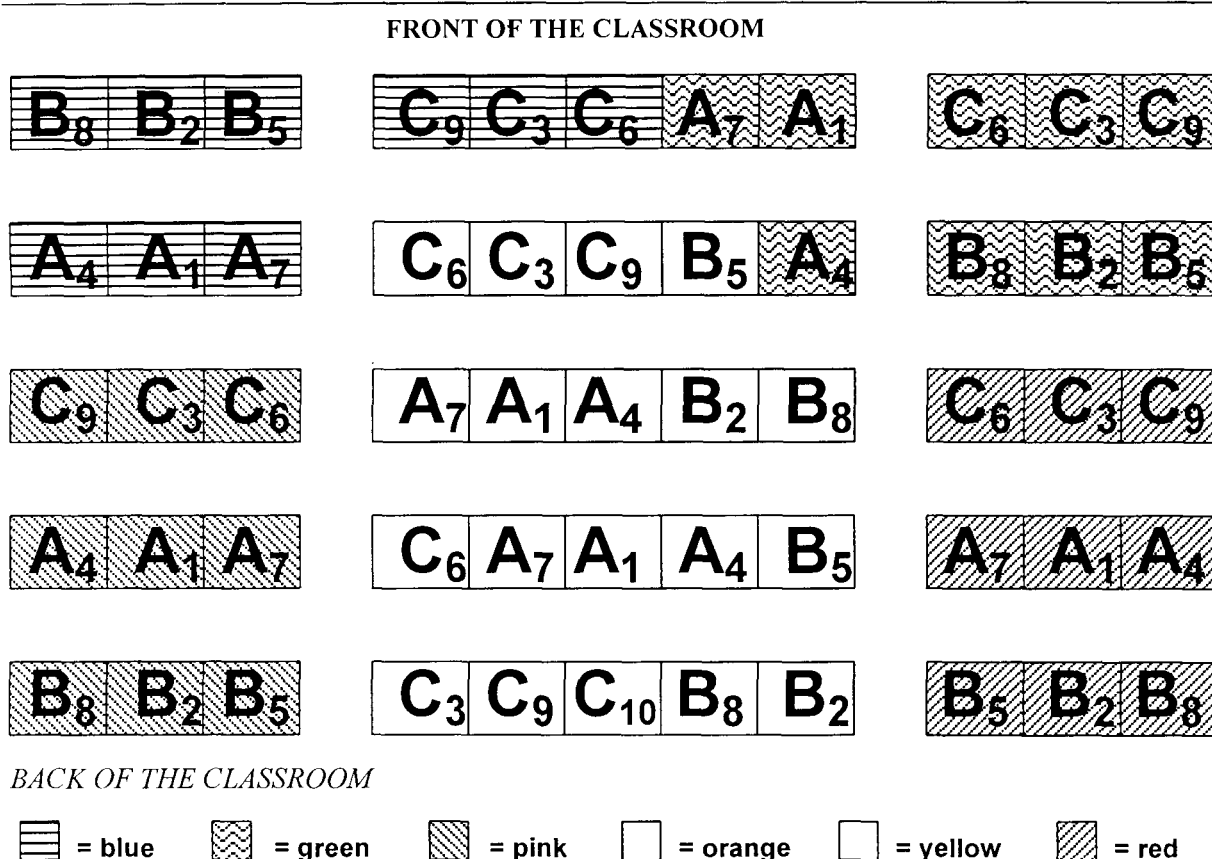
need. Groups larger than three could include one group of four students and one of five. However, McGuire (1992) points out that in large, severely crowded rooms, groups of three work most successfully. The middle student can hold a copy of the activity material, with students on either side easily able to view this material. An added benefit of this configuration is that the teacher only needs to provide one-third the number of activity materials as in the traditional classroom. Also, with only one copy of the

material, all three students must work together.

Thus large, crowded classrooms were organized into smaller "classes," each team having a self-contained area within the larger classroom. These areas could be rotated after the students became accustomed to working in designated areas,

so as to allow each team opportunity to be closer to the chalk board or overhead projection. Within their area, all teammates had easy access to each other, by looking to either side or turning their chairs. Figure 1 shows the configuration of a participating classroom.

*Figure 1. Heterogeneous Configuration in a Class of 55 Students*



Using the first heterogeneous triad grouping in Table 3, Figure 1 shows the desks of each team's area and that of each group—A, B, and C—within the team. (Desks were not moved for the project because other teachers used the same classroom and moving furniture back and forth would have been both difficult and time consuming.) In Figure 1 every team has the same triad groups: A is composed of team members 1, 4, and 7; B, of 2, 5, and 8;

and C, of 3, 6, and 9. In each group configuration, the group leader—1, 2, or 3—is placed between the other two triad students—and the one group of four students—so as to provide mentoring to the lower-ability students.

Most cooperative learning researchers caution that students will need to spend considerable time learning how to work in cooperative groups. (See, for example Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993; Kagan,

1994; and Slavin, 1995.) Because students in the Team English project worked together in so many similarly color-coded, school-related teams outside of the classroom, most students quickly learned how to begin participating in the English-class teams. Students became accustomed to responding as a team member through warm-up drills calling on teams, numbers, and finally a specific team number to stand up, sit down, and so forth.

When the students were involved in group work, the teacher could circulate around the classroom, making personal contact with individual students. This was not always easy, however, with desks often crammed into the room. Nevertheless, with a little agility, circulating could be done in all the classrooms used in the project.

Team English teachers combined group work with traditional teaching, having students learn general concepts and practice as a class before breaking into groups for follow-up activities. Most of the teachers used reading activities for the Team English project. After the students completed a contextualized reading assignment, they would find information or perform other tasks related to the reading. The teacher then called on a member of the team to supply the answer to a question about the task.

Only one teacher, G, who had used cooperative learning techniques throughout most of the project, identified different tasks for students within each team. She gave more difficult tasks to those with more advanced ability, also using these students as mentors for the less advanced students. This teacher then allowed only the less advanced students to provide answers in the activity competition. Thus, the more advanced students had to be sure that everyone in the group understood the material and was able

to provide the correct answers. This same teacher also used group work for students to write collaboratively and do other types of activities often difficult to assign to large classes. In addition, she experimented with groups larger than the triad.

While some cooperative learning researchers (see, for example, Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993 and Kagan, 1994) do not recommend competition among groups, others (see, for example, Slavin, 1995) think competition promotes student involvement. Because competition at the project school was good-natured, promoting team spirit among the intramural teams in sports, festivals, academic contests, and other activities, the project teams also competed. Once the students were comfortable with group work, teams were given points for a correct answer. In some cases, if the team member answered incorrectly, another team member could answer for partial credit. The winning team was given a token prize or other recognition.

In some classes, the teacher awarded "echo" points, calling on a member of a different team to repeat the answer given by the original team. The teacher usually called on a student who was not paying attention. This tended to keep the team members on task, listening carefully to other class members. If team members were disruptive, the teacher issued a warning to that team. If students still were not on task, the team was penalized points. Teams quickly caught on that all students on the team had to participate.

Teams could also be penalized if they did not stop talking when the teacher wanted silence. To alert students when they needed to be quiet and listen to the teacher or end the task, the teacher placed a large stop-sign transparency on the overhead projector. This

worked very successfully when the teacher was near the front of the class. However, when the teacher was circulating, using the overhead became more problematic. Some practitioners of cooperative learning hold up their hand to signal the need to be quiet. While this is effective in smaller classes, in a large class this signal might be difficult to see. A laminated cardboard stop sign would be easier to identify.

Keeping track of points could be difficult, especially if the teacher was circulating around the room. One solution would be to designate one member of each team as scorekeeper, changing to a different student each class period. For example, one day each team number 2 could keep score, the next day number 3 could do so. By comparing all the score sheets at the end of the class period, the teacher could establish the correct scores.

For long-term implementation, the teacher could keep a running tally of the team scores, recognizing the winning team on a weekly or monthly basis. With six teams, two leagues could be formed, so that even if a team did not win, the members could cheer for their league team. Teams could be changed at the end of the semester to create different dynamics among the students; however, it is important for students to develop long-term loyalty to the team and its members in order for Team English to be successful.

The use of colors and numbers provided several benefits. Teachers were able to call on students and identify those not on task quickly by using the team name and number, for example, "Red 3" or "Blue 5." Colors promoted team unity. In place of color names, students could choose team names based on the colors, such as the Cardinals for red or the Blue Jays for blue.

Instead of the arbitrary numbers used in many of the classes to identify students, the project numbers made the students part of a team, just as in sports. Student names would also be easier to learn because teachers could associate the name with a color and number, in addition to a face. Of equal importance, the use of team jerseys changed the classroom atmosphere and the students' attitudes, making the learning of English something energetic and exciting to do—like sports—rather than a dull subject with no personal engagement.

While the jerseys in most cases allowed easy identification of team and number, there were some problems. The original prototype could not be made reasonably in-country, and a bulkier version was finally produced, causing some difficulties in transporting the jerseys. Also, because the numbers were smaller and lower on the jersey than originally planned, in some classrooms the desks hid part or all of the number when students were seated. Alternatives to these jerseys could include bibs or banners, with the number large and high enough to be easily identified, preferably on both the front and back. Hats could also be used. However, for sanitary reasons, the hats would have to remain with the individual student and not be re-used in other classes.

## RESULTS

The project teachers found that, in contrast to a traditional approach to teaching EFL, Team English provided students with more occasions to speak English, increased opportunities for sharing ideas and expressing opinions, greater incentives to pay attention in order to gain team approval, and more enjoyment of the activities used in class. Teachers reported benefits for

themselves that included the challenge of using a new and more effective way to teach communicative language, better control of students in group work, and happier, more motivated students.

However, using Team English still presented difficulties. Teachers found that a few students lacked confidence, regarded the activities as games rather than academic lessons (which is not always a negative), relied too much on the captain to do the work, or, in isolated cases, refused to participate. Teachers likewise reported that they, themselves, had problems such as uncertainty as to the objective of the lesson, worry that parents would not view group work as preparation for exams, and insecurity from the loss of a teacher-centered classroom. In addition, a few teachers still had some difficulties with large-class management. Another problem for some was limited access to communicative activities beyond those supplied in the workshops (although one teacher, C, was very successful in adapting her own materials to communicative formats). Finally, a few teachers did not have sufficient time to explain and do the activities within a single class period. To address this last difficulty, one teacher, G, introduced the activity in one class and implemented in the next.

## DISCUSSION

Writing about feedback on implementing cooperative learning, Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec (1993, p. 425) note that teachers who have mastered the use of cooperative learning often tell them, "Don't say it is easy." Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec agree, pointing out that "it can take years to become an expert. There is a lot of pressure to teach like everyone else, to have students

learn alone, and not to let students look at each other's papers." Implementing cooperative learning group work is even more challenging with large EFL classes. However, in time many of the problems reported with the Team English project could undoubtedly have been overcome, as both students and teachers adjusted to and gained experience in the new classroom culture.

Team English provided potential solutions for most of the problems related to large classes identified by LoCastro (2001), which were discussed at the beginning of this article. These solutions include:

### Pedagogical

- Carrying out speaking, reading, and writing tasks by having students work in groups
- Monitoring work and giving feedback by holding teams accountable and circulating throughout the classroom
- Individualizing work by assigning appropriate tasks to each ability level of the group
- Setting up communicative tasks by using groups and communicative materials

### Management Related

- Correcting smaller numbers of essays due to group authoring
- Making pair and group work easier to execute through the organizational framework
- Lowering noise level somewhat with group work by using signals to quiet students
- Attending to all students by circulating during class time
- Encountering fewer discipline problems because of team pressure

### Affective

- Learning students' names through number and color association
- Establishing good rapport with students by talking with each group
- Mentoring weaker students by using more advanced students
- Avoiding crowd phenomenon through team accountability
- Assessing students' interests and moods by talking with captains and individual students when circulating during group work

However, Team English did not solve one problem identified by LoCastro (2001, p. 294): "Tendency to avoid activities that are demanding to implement." It is easier to continue the teacher-fronted status quo, especially when there are no rewards for the extra time and effort required to implement successfully communicative group activities. Likewise the Team English project did not address several of the constraints Gahin and Myhill (2001) identify in implementing a communicative pedagogy: lack of resources, examination pressure, role of culture, influence of colleagues, and teacher's academic abilities. In fact, these factors contributed to the institution's not continuing the project into the next academic year.

### **CONCLUSION**

The appropriateness of using Team English in Thailand will depend on the future of English-teaching policies. Changes advocated by the 1995 Elementary and Secondary Education Act promote communicative language teaching in a student-centered environment. Team English provides a means to this end. If there are changes in the university entrance exams, moving towards a more communicative

measure of competence, this will further necessitate teaching communicatively and using techniques to do so in large classes.

English-teacher preparation programs in Thailand are graduating students with increasingly greater fluency in communicative language and the ability to create and implement communicative activities. During the Team English project, the project director judged a regional Outstanding Teacher competition. Of the competitors, who each taught an hour class at the project institution, all but one employed innovative activities promoting student interaction in a communicative context. However, the greatest difficulty they all faced in their teaching demonstrations was managing a class of over 50 students. Although several attempted group work, they could not control the number of students involved. These teachers would have profited from Team English to structure and manage the groups.

Ideally, English teachers in Thailand will not have to worry about large classes in the future. As was mentioned at the beginning of this article, one condition for an optimal language-learning environment is a class size far smaller than that encountered in the project. Team English should not be a substitute for these smaller classes. However, as long as large classes are a reality, Team English can help to lessen the difficulties of using groups to teach communicative language in large classes.

As those practicing cooperative learning point out and those working with large groups know only too well, it is not easy. Trying to do both—using groups for communicative language teaching in large classes, especially with adolescents—takes an even greater commitment of time and

energy, a willingness to accept change, and the courage to face those who do not support this change. In spite of the difficulties encountered, the Team English project did successfully demonstrate that teachers can use group work with 50 or more teenage

boys—and girls—with raging energy, affording these students more individual attention, greater opportunities for interaction in the classroom, and better motivation and accountability to participate and excel.

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