

**Integrating Collaborative and
communicative learning activities in ESL
Grade 2 Classrooms**



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ESL Grade 2

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My primary teaching career in Thailand started in 2008. I was quite confused at first as to what to teach to my students because I didn't have the proper orientation from any teacher in the public school where I was first assigned in Bangkok. It was more on spoon feeding; showed them some pictures, introduced the words, let them match to the correct picture on the board and then let them read the words as a class. After the word identification, copying of the vocabs in their notebooks/ worksheet activity would follow. After a term, I moved to Nonthaburi where I worked for over 8 years. Teaching there was quite "sabai-sabai", I loved it at first but eventually, I got bored and felt so professionally stagnant. With the aim of improving myself, I looked for a more challenging teaching environment where I won't just be teaching but will also be learning something. So, I applied to this school because I heard that this school provides that "growth" that I am looking for and luckily, I got hired.



When I first came here, I felt ashamed of myself for not being able to use the projector correctly. Been teaching quite some time but never used such technology in my classroom since projectors are only available in the computer room. Right after my demonstration teaching, I got interviewed by Teacher Neung and Teacher Prang, when asked by the interviewers about my weakness, I was so quick in telling them that "I'm not good in using the computer". T Neung told me that "It's OK, you will eventually learn". Being able to observe for a term before I was assigned to the battle field (the classroom), I had the chance to learn from the previous teacher (T Milk). I've learned the "Plearnpattana way" of doing things with that one term of observation (kidding). It means that, in here I won't only be teaching, checking my students' workbooks and quizzes but there are still more stuffs that I need to do.

At the beginning of each term or even before the previous term ends, the teacher needs to prepare the following:

- ❖ Design term plans and syllabi (from the year plan given by Academic team)
- ❖ Design workbook according to the syllabus
- ❖ Make lesson plans

After making the plans, there will be a **Pre-teaching** meeting with the ESL teacher supervisor. After the meeting, expect to make some changes (plans and materials).

Teacher will then teach the approved plans and materials which we deemed worthy for the benefit of our student. **While teaching**, teacher needs to reflect on how good the plan was, on how did students reacted and then put them into writing. There's also the so-called "**Buddy observation**" where T needs to observe and record students' reactions towards the plan.

At the end of each week, there's going to be the so-called" Post teaching meeting" where will be talking about our plans all over again and note down the success and problems that we encountered as we implemented the plans we collaboratively made. Again, there's a form for that, other than Post that we made.

I'm not saying that doing the lesson study is not beneficial, indeed it is. But, if there's a way to lessen the burden of the teacher, why not do it? Why not just let the teacher note down the parts that needed to be changed, revise the plan right away and Viola! The plan is ready for next year's use.

After almost 2 years of teaching here, I believed that I've learned more things other than designing lesson plans, checking students' workbooks and giving grades. I believed that I've grown somehow professionally though beset with endless paper works (some are redundant), meetings and revising plans, workbook activities and test papers.

Plearnpattana School aims to produce students with strong language skills in reading and listening that's why we integrated a number of texts to our plans. And

then, we change, this year; the academic team helped us in restructuring our plans and making them more collaborative and communicative.

During a **collaborative learning session**, students not only work on academic assignments but also get to develop their **social skills** and learn together which improves their relationships with others in the class. It gives them a chance to learn their **strengths** and **weaknesses** as they work in groups.

Term 3



We integrated collaborative learning in our class as we taught about poems.

Plan 401- Poem: Fly my kite

After reading and reciting the poem “Fly my kite”, with the aim making kids work collaboratively; we asked them to design their own kite and then present their kite to the class as they recite the poem as a group.



Grade 2/3 students presenting their kites while reciting the poem

Here's an excerpt from T Rasna's LS

Step 3:

- This step was hard to do since every time when the instruction was given a Ss or a group of Ss would start talking.
- This happened in spite of the telling Ss to clear everything and keep their stationary under their desk so that they would not have any distractions.

An improvement of giving instructions is needed and for the next time T. has to be firm while giving instructions and only give them when everybody is listening.

Step 4:

- Since some didn't listen, they didn't know what they had to do. T. Claire helped in explaining and also showed Ss more examples.
- The activity was meant for Ss to work together as a group and collaboratively decide how they would make their own kite, yet some Ss were unable to do so and needed T.'s help in showing them the steps.

I didn't encounter such problems in my classes but it happened in Class 4. It can happen again to our class next year therefore, it is essential for us to consider in re-designing our plan for next year.

Plan 501- Poem: Rain, Rain go away

After reading and reciting the poem "Rain, rain go away", students made a 3D umbrella and write words with long-a sound on the raindrops and stick them in a cardboard. Students also presented their works in front of the class by reading the words that they've written on the raindrops.



Grade 2 Class 2 students making and presenting

Our plans were collaborative but the problem was, craft-making was quite time-consuming, thus, we don't have much time for sharing. Most of the times, and not every group had the chance to present their work. Our plans might be **collaborative** but not **communicative** enough. Thus, next year we still need to work on it, on how to make our plans both collaborative and communicative.

Term 4

We tried to incorporate more speaking activities in our plans that would encourage our students to use the language. We don't only provide them the chance to speak more in the class, we also see to it that they have some fun activities to look forward to in learning the language. For Grade 2, we're still providing students sentence patterns in asking and answering questions.

Problems we faced in the class in using communicative learning:

1. Most students would prefer to use their mother tongue
2. Classroom management becomes tougher
3. Difficult to monitor 30 students to check if they're really using the language as they carry on the task
4. Takes a lot of time that most of the times there's no more time for sharing

Students need to be encouraged to use the language as much as they can both in and out of class because using the language during ESL classes alone is not enough. Moreover, students are more motivated to use the language when they're having fun so; we will continue to find more activities that we can introduce to our students with the help of other ESL teachers and the Academic team.

A communicative classroom wouldn't be possible with a teacher-centered classroom. So, what's the difference between a teacher-centered and a learner-centered classroom? According to Pearson (Ashley Peterson-DeLuca, Community Manager, Pearson- October 11, 2016)

Teacher-Centered	Learner-Centered
Focus is on the teacher	Focus is on both students and teacher
Focus is on language forms and structures (what the instructor knows about the language)	Focus is on language use in typical situations (how students will use the language)
Teacher talks; students listen	Teacher models; students interact with teacher and one another
Students work alone	Students work in pairs, in groups, or alone depending on the purpose of the activity
Teacher monitors and corrects every student utterance	Students talk without constant teacher monitoring; teacher provides feedback/correction when questions arise
Teacher answers students' questions about language	Students answer each other's questions, using teacher as an information resource
Teacher chooses topics	Students have some choice of topics
Teacher evaluates student learning	Students evaluate their own learning; teacher also evaluates
Classroom is quiet	Classroom is often noisy and busy

It just sort of sounds good as it rolls off the tongue, "student-centered classroom". We've all heard the phrase coined before, yet most educators would agree that

developing a student centered classroom is becoming more of a necessity and norm these days than a luxury or innovative new approach to teaching.

The traditional classroom where students sit quietly and attentively in their seats, while the teacher pours vast amounts of wisdom and knowledge into their sponge-like brains is over (assuming it ever existed).

Developing a student-centered learning environment will help our students become independent learners who will ultimately take charge of their own education—students who are curious, eager to learn, and willing to do whatever it takes to be successful.

Unfortunately, developing a student-centered learning environment isn't always easy, especially if you experience frames learning in a more traditional way. For many, implementing a student-centered learning environment sounds great in theory, but putting it into practice is a different story.

So, as a millennial teacher, what should be my role in the class?

I want to develop a student-centered learning classroom, no matter how difficult and complicated it is considering my students' level. I will continue to incorporate more fun activities to encourage my students to use the language, to shift their negative thinking of ESL learning from “negative” to “positive”. I am here to guide them and encourage them to be more confident users of English as their second language. I am second language speaker myself and I know that they can do it, too.

Looking back to our Week 1 plan

To help our students better, it is just but necessary to look back and reflect on our plans. Were they student-centered enough? Sad to say, they're not really student-centered though we incorporated some activities that would encourage them to speak more.

H. SITUATION: You want to know the places that your friends want to go in the holidays. Ask your friends and write down the answers, using the below conversation.

Where do you want to go?
Why?

I want to go to the mountain.
I like to go hiking.

Friend's name: Jennie

He/She wants to go to the sea
because he/she likes to go fishing

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Situational problem for plan 102

What actions did we take?

In Plan 402 we used the same format in asking and answering questions for the Situational Problem but this time, the vocabs were about Places and activities in the city. As a result, students became more confident in asking and answering the questions as they're already familiar with the sentence pattern. In this way, students were given the confidence in using the language without the fear of committing mistakes.

G. SITUATION: WHERE DO THEY GO?
Ask two friends and write their answer. Cut and paste sticker for the place.

Where do you want to go?

I want to go to the hospital.
I want to see a doctor.

Alex Alice

Friend's name: Alice

He/She wants to go to the hospital
He/She wants to see a doctor

Friend's name: Miaohuina

She wants to go to the restaurant
She wants to eat food

Situational problem for plan 402

According to psychologists, second language speakers often suffer from **foreign language anxiety**, or **xenoglossophobia**.

It is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language. The feelings may stem from any

second language context whether it is associated with the productive skills of speaking and writing or the receptive skills of reading and listening.

The effects of foreign language anxiety are particularly evident in the foreign language classroom, and anxiety is a strong indicator of academic performance. Anxiety is found to have a detrimental effect on students' confidence, self-esteem and level of participation.

Anxious learners suffer detrimental effects during spontaneous speaking activities in performance, affective reactions and their overall attitudes towards learning their target second language. Furthermore, they may lack confidence, be less able to self-edit and identify language errors and more likely to employ avoidance strategies such as skipping class. Anxious students also forget previously learned material, volunteer answers less frequently and tend to be more passive in classroom activities than their less anxious counterparts.

How could we help as teachers?

Iakovos Tsiplakides authored a case study entitled **“Helping Students Overcome Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in the English Classroom: Theoretical Issues and Practical Recommendations”**.

Here are his recommendations:

Teachers should realize that language learning, and particularly oral production, is a potentially stressful situation for some students, and that the “tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession” (Horwitz, 2001: 122). The recommendations we make are congruent with previous studies suggesting that teachers should not be consider withdrawn students as lazy, lacking in motivation, or having “poor attitude” (Gregersen, 2003: 30), when in fact they suffer from anxiety. Instead, they should identify anxious learners and

make interventions to help them overcome foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994). Because foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom may stem from fear of making mistakes and the consequent fear of negative evaluation, and students' perception of low ability in relation to their peers, we suggest that teachers may want to consider the following interventions.

First, teachers can incorporate project work, because it can provide anxious and non-anxious students alike with abundant opportunities to use language in a non-threatening context. We argue that the first step in reducing anxiety is to actually have students participate in speaking tasks. Because students are more eager to participate in oral activities in small groups (Young, 1990), project work can be very helpful.

We are doing this in our class by providing opportunities for students to present, in groups, their output using the language. In addition, students practice speaking in small groups and pairs as some students might not be comfortable in asking and answering questions with the teacher and that's understandable.

SITUATION: Tell the direction

You're walking on the street. A stranger asks you for the direction to a place. Look at the map and tell him/her the direction.





In plan 301, as we learn about Prepositions; instead of letting them do the listening activity with the teacher, students wrote random preposition in the sentences provided and then read it to his/her friend. The listener will then draw a certain picture according to what he/she hears.

Second, the creation of a friendly classroom atmosphere is important. The case study presented in this article showed that a supportive classroom atmosphere, in which language errors are considered as natural in the process of language acquisition, without overcorrection which can “draw students’ attention away from communication and toward a focus on form and accuracy” (Gregersen, 2003: 31), can be instrumental in helping anxious students overcome their perception of low ability and fear of negative evaluation.

How do I correct my students in the class?

It really depends on the aim of the lesson; I usually give immediate corrections when the aim of the stage of the lesson is to promote accuracy, particularly during **Phonics** and during **guided practice** (words or sentence level). Attention to mistakes in these stages improves the chances of correct use of language later, while mistakes made during less-guided practice often indicate that the teacher has not dealt effectively with mistakes at the accuracy stage.

When the aim is fluency, however, I give less intrusive, 'gentle' in order not to damage either the flow of the activity or the confidence of the learners.

The final conclusion is that teachers need to assume the role of the researcher in their own classrooms. Before employing strategies to help students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety, foster motivation, and increase foreign language performance, practitioners should get to know their students, their attitudes toward oral production, and to shed light into the reasons that underlie their low performance and their unwillingness to engage in speaking activities. It is suggested that “**teacher as a researcher**” approach is an invaluable tool. **Such an approach**, which brings together theory and practice, can have positive effects both on the professional development of English teachers and on students’ anxiety levels, motivation and language acquisition.

Teacher as a researcher

We are doing this Routine to research, meaning we are doing this already in our class. We're taking records of our students' learning in class. We recorded them in our "LS and wrote the necessary changes in the "Records of Quality Improvement"

Posts for Week 1 & 2

Post Teaching

Week :1 Date: 11 January 2019 Time: 16:00 -16:30

✍ **Point of Success and ways to expand (refer to the seven steps or Kao Por Dee)**

In plan 102, (Step 1) the tongue twister activity using the focused words was a success; ss got the chance to read and remember the words. Also, they had fun in pronouncing the words eloquently.

✍ **Difficulties/obstacles and ways to correct/overcome (refer to the seven steps or Kao Por Dee)**

In plan 102, there was two listening activities and I think it was just too much to have 2 listening activities at the same plan. The second listening activity was even confusing because it was a narration of Paul family's favorite places. T simplified the text by reading it one by one and by using "His father..." instead of "My father.." to make it easier for students.

✍ **Very important points that should be improved immediately for next class (choose from the above two)**

For plan 103, the situational problem should be changed. Ss needed to write in the postcard words in past tense which they never learned. Ss were taught implicitly only on that day and it's not enough for them to grasp the idea especially for the B and C students. It can be changed or should include Grammar topic "Past tense verbs" prior to this activity.

Post Teaching Record

Week: 2 Date: 18 January 2019 Time: 13:30-14:30

✍ **Point of Success (from concrete evidence) and ways to expand (refer to the six steps or Kao Por Dee)**

- ❖ The listening activities (vehicle sounds and checking the right box) conducted this week were a success as Ss got to practice their listening skills and transfer the information they listened into writing.
- ❖ The listening activity of 'By the Stream' in plan 202 was a success. Ss were able to listen to the story in a different accent and sounds. Furthermore, they tried to copy the way the speaker was speaking. It became more engaging than planned.
- ❖ The spelling bee in plan 202 went well, too. Ss helped each other in spelling the words correctly. Ss were excited to pick scrambled words from the box and helped each other in coming up with the correct spelling.

✍ **Difficulties/obstacles (from concrete evidence) and ways to correct/overcome (refer to the seven steps or Kao Por Dee)**

In plan 201, the situational problem was a bit challenging to some Ss since they didn't have enough practice using the sentence structure.

✍ **Very important points that should be improved immediately for next class (extract from the above two)**

In order for Ss to use the sentence structure while speaking and writing in plan 201, the input step should be more engaging and interactive. Instead of T. asking the question and Ss answering, the slides should have lesser words and more pictures. In this way, Ss can read the words in the question and by looking at the picture they can fill the blanks with the words.

This should be done as a class first then and the Ss should be divided into two groups where group A asks the question first and then group B answers and vice versa.

To conclude, after reflecting on what we are doing here in Plearnpattana School, though tiring, it is but essential to do all this to better improve our teachings for the benefits of the students. Quite contradicting with first part of my writing? That's because the more I continue searching and reflecting for this writing, the more I realize that, it is indeed important and this is actually for me as well, to **grow professionally**.

No teacher would want to stay dormant, we all aim to grow professionally because the students that we teaching are the hope of tomorrow. New techniques, new strategies should be adapted to better suit their needs and to learn better.

As Confucius had said, **"Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure."**

