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**An Activity Theory Interpretation of University ESL Students’  
Experiences of Classroom Group Work**

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**An Activity Theory Interpretation of University ESL Students'  
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**by**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents

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# **An Activity Theory Interpretation of University ESL Students’ Experiences of Classroom Group Work**

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This study investigated the experiences of university-level ESL students engaged in classroom group projects. Using the lens of Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987, 1999; Leont’ev, 1976) I attempted to discover how students’ expectations and goals concerning small group work were enacted in their group interaction and participation. I conducted a qualitative case study of one class of nine students in a university-level English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Advanced Listening and Speaking class. I observed all classes during a 3-month instructional term, recording students’ small group work. In addition, I conducted interviews with 4 focal student participants and their instructor. I investigated students’ goals and expectations for group work, as well as the dynamic interplay between these factors and the local context as it unfolded in the work and interaction of each group. I also investigated the sources, effects, and interconnections of contradictions that emerged within and between activity systems in which the students engaged.

An analysis of students’ interaction and self reports indicated that students’ expectations about the objectives, partners, distribution of tasks, and suitability of artifacts for each group task influenced their task-related and social goals for group activity. As the groups worked, contradictions within current activity systems and

between current and past activity systems emerged. These contradictions necessitated the formation of new goals and activities, thereby promoting or limiting opportunities for interaction. Creative forms of L2 interaction, including negotiation, joking, teasing, and discussions of language form, emerged in response to contradictions. However, other contradictions involving the division of labor within the group promoted conflict or constrained interaction.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Over the past two decades, humanist and social-constructivist views of the nature of language learning have brought about an increase in the use of group work in the second-language classroom. Research has revealed both benefits and drawbacks to the use of group work, but it has proven to be an important component of Communicative Language Teaching approaches. In the ESL classroom, a number of factors related to L2 proficiency, personality, affect, and social relationships can influence students' participation in group work, and by extension, the success of the group. In addition, beliefs about the nature of effective language learning, proper teacher and student roles, and group relationship management can also influence the dynamics of group work. An issue of great interest has been the extent to which culture may affect students' perceptions of group work. This study employed the lens of Activity Theory to investigate the connections between students' expectations and goals for group work and their experiences of collaboration in two group assignments in an Advanced Listening and Speaking ESL class.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Types Of Classroom Group Work**

Group and pair work in language classes can be classified into three types: cooperation, collaboration, and interaction. Oxford (1997) outlined the differences

between these as follows. Cooperative learning “has taken on the connotation of a set of highly structured, psychologically and sociologically based techniques that help students work together to reach learning goals” (p. 444). Cooperative learning is characterized by a high degree of structure, teacher guidance, and *positive interdependence* (p. 444).

Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is characterized by a “variable degree of structure,” “low prescriptiveness” of activities, scaffolding, and “reflective inquiry” (p. 444). Oxford noted that “collaborative L2 learning, when compared with cooperative L2 learning, seems less technique-oriented, less prescriptive, and more concerned with acculturation into the learning community” (p. 449). Interaction, finally, is more broadly used for any activity in which learners can communicate with one another in a meaningful way. Bruffee (1993) also noted a difference in the goals behind collaborative and cooperative learning—“an important goal of cooperative learning is to hold students formally accountable for learning collectively rather than competing with one another, whereas an important goal of collaborative learning is to shift the locus of classroom authority informally from the teacher to student groups” (p. 88). This difference is reflected to some degree in the difference in teacher-provided structure in each type of activity.

Common cooperative learning tasks include the Jigsaw task (Aronson et. al. 1978) and other information gap activities; collaborative activities include group projects, peer review, and writing circles. For language classes, collaboration is often associated with writing instruction. Murray (1992) distinguished between two types of collaborative writing processes: “those in which the majority of the interaction occurs on paper and

those in which the text is constructed through oral discussion” (p. 101). These group activities have been associated with a variety of positive outcomes in both L1 and L2 classes.

### **Benefits Of Group Work In Cooperative And Collaborative Learning**

Among the benefits cited for cooperative learning in general are: increased self-efficacy (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), learning motivation (Sharan & Shaulov, 1990). In addition, the joint responsibility and interdependence fostered in cooperative learning groups can “promote positive peer relationships, social support, and, partly for that reason, higher self-esteem and academic achievement” (Kohonen, 1992, p. 35).

Cooperative learning can allow both more- and less-adept students to benefit from teamwork interaction (Kohonen, 1992), and cooperative learning can allow learners to apply their individual learning styles and strengths (Hughes Wilhelm, 2006). According to Hughes Wilhelm, cooperative learning can be especially useful for adult learners because “it encourages learners to draw upon already developed interpersonal and problem-solving skills to utilize their prior knowledge and experiences” (p. 154). Oxford (1997) argued that collaborative learning can help students to build their knowledge by working through the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) with more-knowledgeable peers and by easing their “enculturation into the learning community” (p. 449).

In language classrooms, numerous studies have indicated that group work can benefit learners’ language acquisition. Pair and group work can provide increased



opportunities for negotiated interaction (Varonis & Gass, 1985; Gass & Varonis, 1989; Pica, et al. 1996) and scaffolded learning (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 1995; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Truong & Storch, 2007). Finally, group work allows students to practice language with their peers before speaking in front of the whole class, which may make it less anxiety-provoking (Tsui, 1996). Of course, these are the benefits of successful cooperative and collaborative groups. Unsuccessful groups can be plagued by interpersonal conflict and non-collaborative relationships (Morris & Tarone, 2003; Nelson & Murphy, 1992; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996). The intended social, affective, and educational benefits may therefore be lost. The effectiveness of group work may be largely dependent on both what happens during the interaction and what students expect or hope to happen when working with peers. For this reason, researchers have been interested in studying students' perceptions and beliefs about group work.

### **Beliefs About Group Work**

Research has explored students' experiences and perceptions of group work in the language classroom. Most of this literature has been conducted on peer review groups. A smaller number of studies have investigated second language students' work on collaborative projects in which the students worked together at every step of the productive process. Studies have found that students in both EFL and ESL contexts have mixed views about whether group work is either useful or enjoyable. Reported benefits of group work are: opportunity to share ideas and clarify class concepts; chances to make friends and learn about other cultures (Li & Campbell, 2008); speaking and listening

practice (Li & Campbell, 2008; McDonough, 2004); opportunity to share the workload in group projects; opportunities to speak in an environment that is less anxiety-inducing than speaking in front of the whole class. Numerous studies have also indicated that students may have difficulty with group work. If students have never experienced group work before, they may not know how to participate, or see the value in working with others. In addition, low perceived L2 proficiency can cause students to avoid participating in group tasks (Leki, 2001; Yang, 2006). Group members may feel unable to criticize or to accept others' criticism of their language output because all the members are learners (Roskams, 1999; Sengupta, 1998). Finally, group members evaluate others' language proficiency. Group roles may be assigned or withheld based on perceptions of each member's language ability (Leki, 2001; Amores, 1997; Strauss, 2001), and students' levels of engagement and expectations of success for the group endeavor may be based to some extent on their evaluation of others' proficiency (Jin, 2007) .

An additional factor influencing students' enjoyment and evaluation of group work is the distribution of work and rewards in the group. Students may enjoy and value group work more when all members contribute equally and each member is assessed according to his or her individual contribution (Li & Campbell, 2008; Strauss, 2001; Yang, 2006).

Much of this literature has provided a helpful but ahistorical snapshot of individual students' views during or after an instructional term. Little research has connected students' learning and working histories with the views of and expectations for

group work that they bring to their ESL classes, or to explore in detail the processes of change that can occur as students work and interact together.

### **Cultural Influences on Group Work Beliefs and Practices**

With the increase in the number of international students studying at universities in countries where English is spoken as a first language, and with the accelerated worldwide spread of English language learning (often coupled with communicative language teaching approaches), a number of scholars have begun to focus inquiry on the degree to which group work is an appropriate methodology for all students and in all contexts. These scholars have argued that group work either complements or conflicts with the culturally-based learning and communication orientations of different groups, most especially students from East and Southeast Asia. Several studies have attempted to connect students' perceptions and behavior in group work to broad cultural values such as collectivism, power distance (Sengupta, 1998; Hu, 2005; Carson & Nelson, 1994; Nelson & Carson, 1998), and Confucian learning traditions (Hu, 2005; Flowerdew, 1998).

In some ways, however, this research, as pointed out by Spack (1997) in her criticism of the work of Nelson and Carson, rests on assumptions based on a view that essentializes culture. These views fail to take into account the fluidity and mutability of culture across time and space, and of the cultural identities that individuals continually co-construct in interaction with the world around them (Chuang, 2003; Kramsch, 2002; Moon, 2008; Su, 2008). As argued by Kumaravadivelu (2009), "While communities and

societies as a whole do perform gatekeeping functions, it is individuals and groups of individuals that largely shape the contours of cultural transformation” (p. 18). In fact, continues Kumaravadivelu, “cultures are not an island unto themselves; they are all interconnected, making every culture a hybrid culture” (p. 18). With this view of culture and individual in mind, it is necessary to provide a richer view of ESL students’ expectations, perceptions, and actions regarding group work that accounts for their learning trajectories both as members of groups guided by enduring norms and as active individual agents in local environments.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Activity Theory**

Activity theory, rooted in cultural historical psychology, was initially developed by L.S. Vygotsky and is most closely connected with A.N. Leont’ev. It conceptualizes all human activities such as work and learning as motivated by object-directed needs and as mediated by culturally- and historically-fashioned artifacts. Like cultural historical psychology or sociocultural theory, Activity theory is concerned with the way in which individuals and groups develop knowledge and tools over time through social practices. Engeström (1987) proposed a model of human activity that situated individual activity within *activity systems*, each with its own rules and division of labor. Contradictions within and between activity systems cause conflict but are valuable opportunities for growth and learning (Engeström, 1987). Activity systems connect and interact with each other through shared objects (Engeström, 2001). According to Lantolf and Thorne

(2006), activity theory can serve as a bridge between widespread, enduring social practices and individual emergent situated activity; between human agency and the community norms that constrain it; between local practices and individual goals; and between a student's past and present experience. Over the past decade, activity theory has increasingly been used to examine second and foreign language learners' classroom experiences. Activity-theoretical studies have been conducted on individual/whole class (Haneda, 2007; Lantolf & Genung, 2002), dyadic (Storch, 2007), and group (Yang, 2006) interaction. Activity theory has proven especially useful in the study of how group members' goals, tool use, and rules for collaborative work mediate telecollaboration (Basharina, 2007; Jin, 2007; Thorne, 1999, 2000).

## **RATIONALE**

University ESL classes bring together individuals with widely-varying experiences with group work. In addition, they bring a widely-varying expertise in the use of physical (for example, PowerPoint or course-management software) and symbolic (English language, academic genres) tools to use in their collaborative work. Activity theory allows an opportunity to take a deeper look at the processes through which ESL students' existing goals and expectations for group work change through activity and contradiction in classroom practice.

## **THE PRESENT STUDY**

To gain insight into the interaction between learners' existing expectations about group work in the ESL classroom, their goals for particular tasks, and the local context in which they pursue situated activity, I conducted a semester-long multiple case study of one group of learners in an ESL English for Academic Purposes classroom. Using Engeström's (1987, 2001) Activity System model, I sought in this study to illuminate the relationships between each student's current, local classroom and small collaborative groups and the geographically and temporally distant language class activity systems in which he or she had participated, each bearing its own rules and distribution of labor with regards to group participation.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Throughout my inquiry, I was guided by Activity Theory as a lens to address the following questions:

1. What expectations, goals, and motives do ESL students have for participation in collaborative group projects?
2. How are students' expectations, goals, and motives for group work reflected in their participation and interaction in a group project?
3. What kinds of contradictions arise within the activity systems of groups working on group projects in an ESL class?
4. How do contradictions that arise between and within activity systems influence students' participation and interaction in group projects?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section, I will review research relevant to the present study. This includes research on three areas: the use of group work in language classes, culture and collaboration in language classes, and activity theory. In the first section, I provide a brief discussion of types of group work in language classes, the benefits and drawbacks of group work, and students' reported attitudes towards group work. In the second section, I discuss research on the connections between group work attitudes and culture. Finally, I provide a discussion of activity theory, by giving will give a brief history of activity theory, its evolution, and its application in second language studies.

### **GROUP WORK IN LANGUAGE CLASSES**

Research has pointed to a number of benefits of group work in language classrooms. However, studies have also revealed a number of factors which can make group work an ineffective and sometimes unpleasant learning experience. In many studies, the students themselves voice mixed feelings about the value of group work in their language classes. In this section, I discuss the benefits of group work and factors which can negatively impact students' group work. I follow this with a description of studies reporting foreign and second-language students' perceptions of group work in ESL, EFL, and mainstream classes.

#### **Benefits of Group Work in Language Classes**

A common rationale behind the use of group work in Communicative Language Teaching approaches is that group and pair work provide opportunities for negotiated

interaction. The linguistic benefits of learner-learner interaction have been well studied. Varonis and Gass (1985) found that NNS-NNS (Non-Native Speaker) dyads demonstrated more negotiation of meaning than did dyads with a NS. The dyads in their study that used the most negotiation of meaning were NNS-NNS dyads with different language backgrounds and different proficiency levels. Gass and Varonis (1989) reported in a study of NNS-NNS dyads that instances of repaired utterances were infrequent, but that when they did occur, they generally tended to be more target-like than the original utterance, and that students did not repeat their partners' errors. Pica et al. (1996) reported that NNS-NNS pairs were able to provide opportunities for modified input and output as well as feedback but that these were opportunities generally fewer than those available in NNS-NS speech. These studies indicate that pair work between learners provides valuable opportunities for interaction that facilitates second language acquisition.

A second frequently-cited benefit of collaboration in language learning is the opportunity it encourages for scaffolding (Wood, et al, 1976). Scaffolding is normally conceptualized as assistance given to others in completion of a task, and is often discussed in connection with the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). As Ohta (1995) proposed, the ZPD is the gap between what a language learner can do with the help of a teacher or more able expert and what he can do alone. Scaffolding allows a learner to bridge this gap through the assistance of another. This assistance is gradually removed until the learner can do the task himself. While the "scaffolder" is often an adult



or expert, a number of studies have suggested that language learners can provide scaffolding for each other.

In a study of three third-semester French as a Foreign Language students, Donato (1994) reported that students can provide “collective scaffolding.” Three students, working in a small group to prepare for an oral activity, were able to help each other make meaning and repair language forms. The combined knowledge of the three was greater than that possessed by any individual, and the students benefited from group expertise. Ohta (1995) recorded the interaction of American university students studying Japanese. In dyads, Becky, a more proficiency student, was able to help other less-proficient students to construct and repair language through feedback and language play. In a later study, Ohta (2000) found that, when two American university students of Japanese worked together on a translation task, both students helped each other and both benefited from the exchange. Hal, the more experienced student, provided his partner Becky with “developmentally appropriate” assistance—that is, he was able to notice Becky’s linguistic needs and to help her only when needed.

Scaffolding is not a one-way interaction. Students can provide scaffolding for each other, and the “scaffolded” student plays an active role. Ohta (2000) noted that Becky, who received the greater share of assistance from her partner, was not a passive participant. While she rarely directly asked for help, she often gave subtle hints that help was needed, which allowed her partner Hal to assist. The active role of the “scaffolded” student was again reported in Ko, Schallert, and Walters (2003), who investigated the scaffolding behaviors and outcomes of 21 ESL students participating in story-telling and

question-and-answer sessions. Each student told a short, prepared story to a small group and answered questions from the group members. In these question and answer sessions, the audience provided feedback and scaffolding for the speaker, which the speaker could then incorporate into an improved re-telling for a second audience. However, the researchers noticed differences in the extent to which students incorporated their peers' feedback in the retelling. They suggested that affective factors and proficiency played some role in the participants' ability to receive, and willingness to use, feedback. The speaker, then, is not passively scaffolded, but plays an active and constructive role in the process.

Scaffolding, and by extension the entire collaborative process, depends on the collaborators' establishment of intersubjectivity (Rommetveit, 1985). Intersubjectivity is a willingness and ability on the part of collaborative partners to create a shared understanding of the process and goals of a task (De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000; Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). Without intersubjectivity, scaffolding cannot occur and the benefits of collaboration for learning are lost. De Guerrero & Villamil (2000) suggested that intersubjectivity, including an affective dimension, can foster learning in peer-review tasks. In their study of two students working together in a peer-revision task, the participants successfully provided support, encouragement, and tailored assistance to each other. Their sensitivity to their partners' needs and receptivity to the other's feedback were essential for creating intersubjectivity.

## **Factors Influencing Group Work Interaction**

The literature on group work in foreign and second language classes suggests the importance of task, social, and language factors in determining the roles students take in the activity, the interaction they engage in, and the eventual success of their groups.

Nelson and Murphy (1992) addressed the task and social aspects of collaboration in a study of ESL students working in peer-review groups in a writing class. They found that, in the group of four students, particular roles emerged: attacker, weakest writer, strongest writer, and mediator. The “attacker” constantly made negative comments about others’ writing and interrupted discussion repeatedly. The weakest and strongest writer roles were apportioned by the group to two members based largely on the surface features of their writing. Finally, the “mediator” attempted to keep cohesion and reduce conflict. The attacker’s negative feedback and uncooperative attitude seemed to cause a great deal of distress within the group.

Storch (2001) also found members of collaborative writing dyads settling into interactive roles. She identified these roles as “dominant/dominant,” “dominant/passive,” “expert/novice” and “collaborative”. In dominant/dominant pairs, both partners struggle for control of the discourse. In dominant/passive groups, one partner speaks and controls the task while the other adopts a passive role. In expert/novice pairs, one student emerges as a teacher and works to help the other, and in collaborative dyads, the two work with mutual receptivity and participation. Although each of these types of interaction can be of some benefit, Storch argued that the expert/novice and collaborative types are most beneficial for learning.

Similarly, Lockhart and Ng (1995) analyzed the talk of 27 peer response dyads in an ESL writing class, and found that readers took four distinct stances towards their peers' work: authoritative, interpretive, probing, and collaborative. These stances influenced the interaction that took place between readers and writers, and the benefits each stood to gain. The authors suggest that all four stances can benefit writers in some way, but that the probing and collaborative stances "engage students in a fuller understanding of the writing process" (p. 606). They proposed several factors that could influence the stance taken by readers, including personality, past experience, active or passive role of the writer, and degree of receptiveness to peer response.

Vilamil and de Guerro (1996) also noted roles and stances taken in peer-review. They reported several social activities that students engaged in—"management of authorial control" (p.63), "collaboration", in which "both individuals recognized and respected the other's private world..." and "one of the participants attempted to see through the eye of the author in order to help him/her achieve the task goals." (p.63) Not all pairs worked successfully, however. "Noncollaborative interventions, on the other hand, were characterized by either an authoritative attitude or resistance to collaboration." (p. 65) Noncollaborative interactions could also form "because of limitations—linguistic constraints or lack of knowledge" (p.65) despite collaborative intent. They also observed affectivity—"camaraderie, empathy, and concern for not hurting each other's feelings" (p.63) and students' "adopting reader/writer roles" (p.65). Storch (2001) similarly found that in dyads working on together on writing and editing tasks, four interaction patterns developed, displaying varying degrees equality (of

participation) and mutuality (of engagement with their partner). “Dominant/Dominant” and “Dominant/Passive” patterns provided less opportunity for scaffolding and knowledge transfer than did “Collaborative” and “Expert/Novice” patterns.

Just as positive affect and good social relationships can promote smooth interaction, cooperation, and collaboration, negative affect can arise and have the opposite effect. As Morris and Tarone (2003) noted, social ties or animosity can negatively impact interaction. Morris and Tarone studied pairs of university French as a Foreign Language students working on a picture-description task. In several cases, students reacted negatively to their partners’ comments or recasts, interpreting them as verbal attacks rather than as feedback, regardless of the intent of their partner. The authors noted that in the students who reacted angrily had negative prior experience or attitude towards their partners, and may have interpreted the recasts as criticism based on these expectations. The negative effects of these interactions can be long-lasting. The researchers reported that when they visited the classroom later in the semester after the completion of the study, the students had separated into social groups that did not socialize with each other.

The type of collaborative task itself is important in guiding the stances and roles students take. Pica (1987) proposed that not all group tasks promote collaborative interaction. In her study, ESL students working together in group-decision tasks did not exhibit collaborative behavior. In these groups, more talkative students dominated the decision-making process while less-talkative students were largely left out. The task itself

did not encourage negotiation of meaning because the participation of every group member was not actually required to come to a consensus. Pica suggested that activities in which each student must get information from and provide information for others encourage participation and negotiation. Finally, the teacher and class environment may play an important role in shaping the way that students approach collaboration. Di Nitto (2000) studied student interaction in a beginning-level Japanese as a Foreign Language class. This teacher was incorporating new collaborative activities into a classroom which had been highly teacher-fronted and grammar drill-based. Two groups participating in collaborative tasks engaged in remarkably different interactions. One group successfully completed their task, stayed in the target language, and worked rather smoothly. In the other group, however, the participants took up “teacher” and “student” roles. One student dominated the group and took charge of controlling the task. Others in the group accepted more passive roles. DiNitto suggested that the students had become accustomed to the teacher-centered daily routine of the classroom and had no idea how to adopt cooperative roles in collaborative work.

These studies indicate that group work can be a successful learning experience when students adopt complimentary and collaborative roles and stances, and when the students create a positive atmosphere. Some tasks may be more effective than others at encouraging these positive interactions. While most of these studies give us the researcher’s view of what is happening in group interaction, fewer studies systematically investigate the students’ perceptions of group work.

## **Student Perceptions of Group Work**

The literature on group work in language classes reveals mixed attitudes about pair and group work among language students. In EFL, ESL, and content-class environments, language students and second-language speakers have reported both negative and positive views about their enjoyment and learning in group activities. The most common themes emergent in their reports are: problems related to L2 proficiency and L1 use, problems related to unequal participation, and problems related to a lack of familiarity with group work itself.

### ***L2 Proficiency***

Several studies have noted that L2 proficiency can be a factor in determining students' views of the usefulness of pair and group work. Students in these studies have felt that they or their peers, as learners, lacked the proficiency to give helpful and authoritative feedback. In other cases, they have felt anxious about exposing their work to criticism from others.

Roskams (1999) found that students in his Hong Kong study generally enjoyed pair work and found it useful, but that roughly half of them were unsure about whether they could provide fair and informed comments for their partners or whether they were fairly assessed themselves.

Similarly, Sengupta (1998) reported that the ESL students in a Hong Kong high school writing class had overwhelmingly negative reactions to peer review. The most common themes in this criticism were “evaluation is the teacher’s job”; “cannot evaluate

without knowledge of grammar” and “embarrassed to have others read the composition” (p. 22) Storch (2005) reported that while most students in her study liked collaborative writing in a dyad, and found it useful for pooling resources, others considered writing an individual task. Storch noted that the same two students additionally reported anxiety about their English.

Students’ perceptions of their own and others’ L2 proficiency can also influence the roles taken and distribution of labor and status within a group. In a study of international students studying in mainstream courses at an American university, Leki (2001) found non-English speaking students to be marginalized by native-English speakers in their group project teams. The 6 participants, East Asian and Europeans who had been in the US for between 1 week and 2 years, had had “generally positive” (p. 47) past experiences with group work but reported overwhelmingly negative experiences with group work in American courses. Leki said that in some cases, NNS group members were treated as “novices, incompetents, or apprentices” by NS group members (p. 60), based on “an a-priori expectation on the part of domestic group members that the bilingual students would not or could not be able to make a significant contribution to the project” (p. 47). Because of the perceived lack of language skills, the non-native English speakers were given simple tasks to accomplish, and their contributions were often devalued.

Power differences based on language proficiency are not confined to native-speaker non-native-speaker dynamics. Social stratification based on proficiency can also occur within learner-learner interaction in groups. Amores (1997) studied peer review groups in a Spanish composition course. Interviews revealed that participants’ reactions



“appeared to be influenced by the participants’ perceived role and status within the group” (p. 516). Unequal power-relationships formed, including “a student-teacher relationship” (p. 516) Amores noted the importance of students’ perceived language proficiency in constructing status in these groups. To investigate the role of proficiency in students’ roles in pair work, Watanabe (2008) studied the interaction of 3 ESL students working alternatively with higher-level and lower-level peers. The students took on different roles in peer revision with classmates of different proficiency levels. In some cases, a more proficient learner’s low evaluation of his partner’s proficiency, or a lower-proficiency learner’s undervaluation of his or her own abilities can cause a dominant/passive relationship. However, in some cases, even different-proficiency pairs can develop collaborative relationships—“it seems that the way individual learners interact with their partners affect the way their partners interact with them, regardless of their proficiency differences (Watanabe & Swain, in press)” (627). While proficiency perceptions did play a role, participants generally preferred working with partners who shared a lot of ideas, even in cases of marked proficiency difference.

### ***Distribution of work and assessment***

Another factor which influences ESL students’ enjoyment of collaborative activities is the way work is distributed and assessed. Some studies have suggested that when collaborative groups distribute work to be done by individuals alone, the process and result may be less satisfying than when students work together on all stages of the project.

Kobayashi (2003) examined the group work processes, both inside and outside of class, of Japanese ESL learners in Canadian university ESL program working on a group project. In this data, taken from a larger study of collaborative groups, Kobayashi focused on one group of three students collaborating on a class presentation about their volunteer experience in the local community. The group spent several hours working together off campus, preparing through “sub-activities such as negotiating task definition and teacher expectation, sharing experiences, making a PowerPoint document, and rehearsing and performance-coaching” (p. 346). Most of the time in preliminary stages was spent on developing content, mostly in Japanese. Later, they focused on particular English language points when constructing the PowerPoint, which Kobayashi says “seems to have served as a tool for establishing and sustaining a shared focus among the three students and made available their L2 production for joint inspection and contemplation” (p. 356). Finally, the three helped each other in practicing their delivery of the presentation. Kobayashi notes that not all of the groups he studied in the larger study of which this article was a part had such collaborative interaction. This group spent much more time working together on each step, while other groups assigned work to each member to work on separately and did not have a cohesive presentation. Kobayashi’s study also points to two additional factors which may make collaboration easier and more enjoyable—self-selection and the ability to work in the L1 when all group members come from the same background. (cf. Miao, Badger, and Zhen, 2006; Villamil and de Guerrero, 1996)

Unequal participation by group members, as well as the practice of group assessment can also affect group work. Li and Campbell (2008) conducted an interview study of Asian (mostly Chinese) undergraduate business students in New Zealand to explore their perception of group projects in their content classes. These students valued group collaboration as an opportunity to get new perspectives, practice English, learn about other cultures, and make friends. However, they had negative opinions of the group-assessment policy of their instructor. The authors noted that “Asian students expressed their strong negative feelings about the value and legitimacy of such an assessment approach” and “unanimously disliked group assignments where all members shared the same marks regardless of the contribution made by the members” (p. 209). These students were concerned with the unequal contribution of “social loafers” and “free riders” (p. 209) within the group and the effect these students’ effort would have on their grades. Finally, unfamiliarity with group work and a lack of support from teachers can cause problems for ESL and EFL students. Li and Campbell suggest the need for more support and guidance from teachers of how to do group projects.

### **Culture and Students’ Attitudes Toward Group Work**

The studies outlined above indicate that the way in which a student approaches a collaborative task, his view of what is expected of him, and the social relationship formed during the interaction can be strongly influential in the direction the collaborative group will take and the outcomes each student can achieve. Different approaches to group work

may also influence the way that students participate and, in turn, the way that other group members perceive their behavior and value as collaborators. A growing body of research has investigated cultural differences in beliefs about and approaches to group work. This section will discuss different views reflected in the literature on cultural influences in group work attitudes in language classes.

### ***Cultural Influences On Group Work***

In the search for teaching methodologies which are more sensitive to students' cultures and local educational environments, many researchers have suggested that group work is either especially well- or poorly-suited to different cultural groups, most notably to those of East Asia. Phuong-Mai, et al. (2006) caution against the use of Western pedagogies in countries with a "Confucian Heritage Culture" (p. 1). They argued that western teachers should be aware of the influence of how cultural value dimensions like individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and short-term/long-term time orientation can conflict with the values inherent in cooperative and collaborative learning. Flowerdew (1998) proposed that group work is well-suited to students from a "Chinese cultural background" since it "is sensitive to three key Confucian values: co-operation, the concept of 'face', and self-effacement" (p. 323). Group work "exploits the Confucian value of co-operation" and can "counterbalance the Confucian concepts of 'face' and self-effacement" which can hinder language learning (p. 327) Huang and Brown (2009) agree that Chinese students struggle with group work in American classrooms because of face concerns and the traditional teacher-student

dynamic--“the Chinese teachers are always explainers, and the Chinese students are just listeners and note takers” (p. 649). Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) argued that many common practices in ESL writing classes privilege western notions of individualism and individual voice, thus devaluing the beliefs and practices of students who may not share these values. The authors claimed that peer review is one of these practices, proposing that peer-review places greater value on individuals than on the peer-review dyad by asking them to critique the work of others. This focus on individualism may be at odds with the practices of members of collectivistic cultures, because

Cultures oriented to more interdependent representations of self appear to emphasize the relatively strict observance of social hierarchies [Chao, 1994; Nakane, 1970; Roland, 1988; S. Scollon, 1989]. When asked to critique others’ work, these students may find it less natural than do some of their counterparts (and certainly than do many native English-speaking U.S. students) because it implies assuming a higher-status role with someone who is really a peer. (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999, p. 59)

Carson and Nelson (1994) also argued that students from collectivist cultures may have difficulty adapting to collaborative learning activities as practiced in the US, which “function more often for the benefit of the individual writer than for the benefit of the group” (p. 22). They wrote that Japanese or Chinese students may not wish to upset group harmony by commenting negatively about others’ writing—“the impetus/motivation behind their responses is likely to come from a need for a positive group climate rather than to help an individual writer with his or her writing” (p. 23). Further, ingroup/outgroup dynamics may complicate the collaborative relationship. If students from collectivist societies see their collaboration group members as belonging to an outgroup, they may “have difficulty in participating in the type of cooperative

interaction that is fundamental to the success of collaborative writing projects and peer response groups” (p. 27).

These conflicting views point to a rather murky picture when it comes to cultural explanations of group work perceptions and processes. Studies of EFL and ESL students, mostly of Asian students, which have sought to clarify the issue have reported mixed results. Nelson and Carson (1998) studied collaborative writing groups in an American Intermediate-level ESL class and found striking differences in the way that students approached the interaction. All the students, who came largely from Spanish-speaking and Chinese-speaking backgrounds, agreed that the purpose of peer-review groups is to provide negative feedback to group members in order to improve their writing. Positive comments were not valued as they were not seen to help with improvement. However, students from the two different L1 backgrounds differed in their perceptions of the social purposes of the task and in their approach to feedback. The researchers reported that the Chinese students were generally hesitant to give negative criticism to other group members, and sensitive about appearing too authoritative. For these students, maintaining group harmony was a second important function of the collaborative group. The Spanish speakers, however, were less concerned with maintaining harmony, or with avoiding critiquing others’ work, and focused more on the writing-improvement purpose of the group.

Tang and Tithecot (1999) studied 12 Asian students enrolled in a university ESL writing class that incorporated small-group peer response sessions. Students’ journal entries about their perceptions of peer response revealed generally positive opinions.

While students got along well with other group members, some students reported being anxious about the spoken interaction involved in peer response, as well as having to give negative criticism to peers' work.

Both Miao, Badger, and Zhen (2006) in China and Roskams (1999) in Hong Kong found that their students generally enjoyed group work but were unsure of its usefulness. Roskams (1999) studied the perceptions of dyadic collaboration and group assessment among 217 Hong Kong university EFL students. He used a questionnaire to determine whether their students varied widely on measures of achievement orientation and collectivism (two cultural factors often believed to influence Chinese students' beliefs about collaboration) and found that the students showed uniformly high collectivism and achievement orientation scores. Before the beginning of the course, students reported being concerned that collaboration (especially with less able or diligent peers) might harm their grades, or that they might not work well with strangers, concerns the authors related to achievement orientation and collectivism, respectively. Despite these concerns, the students reported at the end of the term that they had generally enjoyed collaboration and found it useful. While students generally preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback, few students held a strong preference. The most common perceived benefits were "share the work and get the projects done more easily" and "get mutual support and form new relationships", which were more often endorsed than "help me to learn more and improve my knowledge" and "improve the quality of my project work in order to get a better mark" (p. 95). Students were generally "unsure about the fairness of pair assessment" (p. 101), which the author attributed in part to "the traditional

perception of the status of the teacher in Asian cultures as an unquestioned source of knowledge” (p. 101). Miao, Badger, and Zhen (2006) reported that their Chinese EFL students found peer feedback somewhat useful for their revision in that it could help them see their weaknesses and model others’ strengths as well as solve problems in writing. The students, however, preferred teacher feedback, which was seen as more accurate. Miao, Badger, and Zhen (2006) argued that culture may be less helpful than local conditions in explaining their results. They claim that these results

...argue against the universality of Carson and Nelson’s (1994) and Nelson and Carson’s (1998) findings that students from countries with a large power distance may find participating in peer feedback groups confusing. This may reflect the use of pairs rather than small groups and/or that our students were studying in monolingual classes in China rather than in multilingual classes in an English speaking environment (p. 194).

Miao, Badger, and Zhen noted that several studies conducted in ESL environments (e.g. Zhang, 1995) report negative attitudes towards peer feedback or a strong preference for teacher feedback among ESL students. They proposed that because students in their EFL setting share a cultural background, they may “be more willing to take advice from their peers than if their peers came from culturally different backgrounds” (p. 194). Also, students in a second-language setting may have more access to NS input and may place less value on peer feedback. In a qualitative study of Chinese-speaking ESL students in Canada, Liang (2006) found individual students voicing both positive and negative views of cooperative work, and suggested that modern Chinese society combines both collectivism and individualism, and argue that a prevailing belief that group work is ideally suited to Chinese students fails to take the diversity of modern Chinese experience into account. Sengupta (1998) argued that students’ expectations for collaboration are



influenced by their educational experience. He suggested that the educational context of Hong Kong, where emphasis is placed on grades and testing, may not allow for peer review to be developed into a truly collaborative activity. He concluded that testing-focused learning had encouraged an atmosphere in which correctness of speech was valued, and in which the teacher was seen as the only authoritative evaluator. This view, coupled with the practice of reading to pass comprehension questions, had led some students to take an uncritical stance in their reading, with the result that they were unprepared to act as peer reviewers. These factors explain the negative reaction his students had to peer review activities. Zhang (1995) similarly found that Chinese ESL students in a writing class in Canada strongly preferred teacher feedback to peer feedback.

Other researchers who have conducted peer-review studies in Asian countries report that, while students may not be prepared at first to conduct collaborative activities, with adequate training, peer review can be used successfully in their classrooms. Hu (2005) reported on a 3-year study she conducted while trying to incorporate peer-review activities into her curriculum at a university in Singapore. In the first year, peer review was unsuccessful. Students did not feel able or willing in many cases to critique others or use others' comments in their work. Over the second and third years, Hu increased the amount of training each student received in peer review. She reported better student participation and more positive attitudes in the third year of the program. Likewise, Min (2005) wrote that after training in peer review, her Taiwanese university students became proficient at offering and receiving help in their writing.

This literature suggests that the attempt to identify how culture influences EFL and ESL students' perceptions of group work is frustrated by the variety of different tasks and environments in which they occur. Further, the different approaches students and teachers take also influence the outcomes of collaborative tasks. Local environments and teachers' classroom practices are fluid. Students' backgrounds, even within groups sharing a common language, vary widely. These views have led scholars to question the attempt to explain or predict students' behavior in terms of broad cultural values.

### ***Problematizing Culture As A Predictive Variable***

Ruth Spack, responding specifically to Carson and Nelson, took issue with the notion of ascribing students' behavior to presumed cultural differences, arguing that "labels that identify students by culture (e.g. Chinese students) do not capture the hybridity and complexity of students' cultural background" (Spack, 1997 p. 732). Worse, this type of labeling can lead to "developing and perpetuating stereotypes" and "underestimating students' knowledge and their writing skill" (p. 767).

Gieve and Clark (2005), in their study of Chinese students studying English in a British university, found that Chinese students were able to use both tandem and self-directed learning programs, leading them to question the idea that Chinese students are not autonomous learners. They concluded that "an appeal to culture as an explanation for variation in learning practices and preferences has the effect of making these practices appear less amenable to variation than if they were attributed to the context of situation" and take a view of culture in which "a Chinese culture of learning' would be seen not so

much as *the way they do things in China, as the way learning takes place in contexts often found in China*” (p. 274). They also argued for a more dynamic view of identity-- “A conception of identity which accepted fluid and multiple identities, however, would allow for students taking on the attitudes and practices of different social and cultural groups simultaneously, contingently, instrumentally, and flexibly” (p. 274). A number of scholars have argued in favor of a less essentializing view of culture and a less deterministic view of culture’s influence on communication. According to this line of scholarship, terms like *collectivistic* and *individualistic*, applied to whole cultures, fail to appreciate the fluidity and mutability of culture across time and space, and of the cultural identities that individuals continually co-construct in interaction with the world around them. Culture changes, experiences inner conflict, and cannot be simply connected with nation-states. (Su, 2008; Kramsch, 2002; Moon, 2008) Culture and sub-culture change so quickly in the modern age of globalization that teachers’ knowledge is quickly outdated (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

The literature reviewed in this section indicates that local, individual, and cultural factors can affect students’ views of and behavior during group work in their English classes. While culture cannot be discounted as an influence in these perceptions and processes, it is not clear how broad definitions of culture can illuminate the complex and constantly-changing group work practices in ESL and EFL classrooms.

## **ACTIVITY THEORY**

In this section, I will describe Activity Theory, which forms the theoretical framework for this study. I will begin by describing the origins and characteristics of Activity Theory. I will follow this with a discussion of the evolution and current state of Activity Theory. Finally, I will discuss the applications of the theory in second language studies in general and ESL in particular.

### **The Origins of Activity Theory**

Activity theory initially emerged in the efforts of Soviet psychologists Lev Vygotsky and A.N. Leont'ev to create an alternative to the behaviorist psychology prevalent at the time. (Engeström, 1987; Leont'ev, 1976) Both found unsatisfactory the dualistic subject-object, human-environment view of human experience prominent in the Cartesian philosophical tradition (Bakhurst, 1997; Thorne, 2004) and the response-stimulus behavior model of contemporary psychology. Speaking of the stimulus-response model, Leont'ev writes,

the inadequacy of this scheme is that it excludes from the field of research the cogent process in which real connections of the subject with the object world, his objective activity, are made...such abstraction from the activity of the subject is justified only within the narrow bounds of the laboratory experiment, which is designed to disclose elementary psychophysiological mechanisms. ( Leont'ev, 1976, p. 46)

Vygotsky and Leont'ev argued, that, unlike simple reflexive or instinctual behaviors, higher human mental functions cannot be explained by the two-part S-R model. Rather, they are agentic and mediated by a second factor. For Vygotsky, this

factor is the use of socially-constructed tools, especially the psychological tool or sign. For Leont'ev, a person's response to a stimulus is mediated by *activity*. Activity, a concept Leont'ev posed as a replacement for "behavior" in describing human experience, is intimately concerned with a person's motives as well as "conditions, goals, and means" (p. 50).

In Leont'ev's formulation of Activity Theory, all higher forms of human activity are directed towards needs. Activity requires two elements: an object and a motive. A need is focused on an object, and attainment of the object becomes a motive. In addition, Leont'ev specifies that no activity is without motive--"activity does not exist without a motive; 'nonmotivated' action is not activity without a motive but activity with a subjectively and objectively hidden motive" (Leont'ev, 1976, p. 62). An activity, then, can be identified by the object involved and the motive that drives the subject (individual). As Leont'ev writes, "the main thing that distinguishes one activity from another, however, is the difference of their objects" (p. 62). In summary, then, a particular activity "answers a definite need of the subject, is directed toward an object of this need, is extinguished as a result of its satisfaction, and is produced again, perhaps in other, altogether changed conditions" (p. 62).

The concept of activity predates Leont'ev, and Vygotsky is often credited with creating the first model of activity. However, Leont'ev undertook a detailed and systematic investigation of the nature and structure of activity. He developed a hierarchical model of activity composed of three tiers: *activity*, *action*, and *operation*. While *activities* are connected with motives that are often unconscious, *actions* are

directed toward conscious goals. In a sense, activities are comprised of smaller actions. A still smaller unit is the *operation*. Operations are “methods for accomplishing actions” (p. 65) and are connected to specific conditions. Operations originate as discrete actions with a conscious goal but later become included within complex actions. As an example of an operation, Leont’ev uses the act of changing gears while driving—which originates as a specific goal-directed action when one is first learning to drive a car. Over time, however, changing gears becomes automatized as part of a larger action with a goal of “changing the speed of the car” (p. 66) The operation may now be unconscious for the subject (Engeström, 1987). The structure of activity is dynamic and varied--the same action may be connected with different activities, and different activities may involve the same actions. In addition, activities and goals can change as motives and goals change. Actions can become activities, and activities actions (Leont’ev, 1978; Engeström, 1987). An example of this, provided by Engeström, is drinking—what originates as an action becomes an activity in its own right (Engeström, 1987).

Another characteristic of activity is that it is neither static nor individual. Leont’ev and Vygotsky were deeply concerned with the historical and cultural development of human activity. A critical feature of activity is its dynamic nature (Leont’ev, 1978; Thorne, 2004). As Leont’ev writes “activity represents a process that is characterized by continuously proceeding transformations” (Leont’ev, 1978, p.67) These transformations allow for the development over time of new activities, and also for the creation and refinement of tools which bear the imprint of past activity or “historically sedimented

patterns of usage” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p.234). Engeström refers to tools as “crystallized operations” (Engeström, 1987, p.67).

In addition to being dynamic and situated within a line of historical development, activity is also social. Activity is not the behavior of an isolated individual, but of a member of a social system. As Leont’ev (1976) writes, “the activity of the human individual represents a system included in the system of relationships of society.” Further, “the activity of every individual man depends on his place in society, on the conditions that are his lot, and on how this lot is worked out in unique, individual circumstances.” (p. 51) The artifacts which people use to mediate their interaction with the world are also inherently social.

### **Third Generation Activity Theory**

As discussed in the previous section, first and second generation activity theory, represented by Vygotsky and Leont’ev, respectively, have been accused of being too object-oriented or even mechanistic. In addition, some scholars have criticized these theories for their emphasis on individual, rather than social, phenomena. For example, Thorne (1999) notes, “a limitation of earlier instantiations of activity theory is its psychological orientation and its primary concern with individual human beings” (p. 86). In an effort to address these perceived drawbacks in the theory, some modern scholars have attempted to expand the theory to account for a broader range of human experiences, and particularly to illuminate their social nature. According to Zinchenko, “the logic of the development of the psychological theory of activity led to a situation in

which transmuted forms of object-oriented action-sensory, perceptual, memory, cognitive, affective, and so forth-were increasingly drawn into its sphere of analysis” (Zinchenko, 1995, p. 50). This development has resulted in what Engeström (1999) has called “Third Generation Activity Theory”. Much modern scholarship in activity theory is based on the influential Activity System model of the Finnish scholar Yrjö Engeström (1987, 1999, 2001).

### ***Engeström’s Activity System Model***

Engeström (1987) set out to create a new model of human activity which would better elucidate the relationships between individual and social system. He defined his search for such a model using four criteria: (1) “activity must be pictured in its simplest, genetically original structural form, as the smallest unit that still preserves the essential unity and quality behind any complex activity”; (2) “activity must be analyzable in its dynamics and transformations, in its evolution and historical change. No static or eternal models will do”; (3) “activity must be analyzable as a contextual or ecological phenomenon. The models will have to concentrate on systemic relations between the individual and the outside world”; and (4) “specifically human activity must be analyzable as culturally mediated phenomenon. No dyadic organism-environment models will suffice” (Engeström, p. 39). Engeström wrote that he had drawn his inspiration for the model from three scholarly traditions which provide a useful yet incomplete understanding of activity: Pierce’s theories on semiotic mediation and the later work of Ogden & Richards and Popper, symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead and



Trevarthen's theory of secondary intersubjectivity, and the theories of mediation and activity of Vygotsky and Leont'ev. All three of these traditions, Engeström argues, pose triadic, rather than dyadic, relationships between their constituent parts: in Ogden and Richards the triangular symbol-thought-referent relationship (p. 43), in symbolic interactionism the gesture-response-social act relationship (p. 51), in secondary intersubjectivity the mother-child-object relationship (p. 56), and in mediated action the subject-auxiliary stimulus-response relationship (p. 59). All three shed light on the process of human activity, but each is inadequate. Of the three traditions, the Cultural-Historical psychology tradition of Vygotsky and Leont'ev forms the basis for Engeström's model. He first presents a model of animal activity—a triangle with “individual member of the species”, “natural environment” and “population; other members of the species” as its vertices. The sides of the triangle are “social life (‘being together’)”, “collective survival (‘doing together’)” and “individual survival (‘doing alone’)” (P. 74) In the course of phylogenetic development, as humans evolve, these activities are disrupted, leading to further development:

The uppermost side of ‘individual survival is ruptured by the emerging utilization of tools...the left hand side of ‘social life’ is ruptured by collective traditions, rituals and rules, originating at the crossing of adaptation and mating. The right hand side of ‘collective survival is ruptured by division of labor, influenced by the practices of breeding, upbringing and mating...(Engeström, 1987, p. 74)

As a model of this transitional stage, Engeström overlays on top of the earlier triangle of activity a second with “emerging tool making”, “emerging division of labor” and “emerging collective traditions, rituals, and rules” as its vertices (p. 76). This represents

the emergence of collective human activity. Taken together, the two overlapping triangles represent human activity at this more advanced and social state. These new activities are not merely biological in nature. As Engeström argues, “What used to be adaptive activity is transformed into consumption and subordinated to the three dominant aspects of human activity—production, distribution, and exchange (or communication)” (p. 78). Further, all of these aspects of activity can be further broken down into smaller triangles of production, distribution, and exchange. However, by its very nature, all activity includes production: *there is no activity without the component of production*; only actions may be void of it (p. 80). Engeström’s model, therefore, more clearly explicates the relationships between individual and society.

### ***The Concept of Contradiction***

A crucial concept that emerged from Engeström’s model of activity is “contradiction.” Contradictions are inherent within and between activity systems and provide an opportunity for growth and learning. Engeström identifies four types of contradictions that occur in activity systems: The first is the “inner conflict between exchange value and use value within each corner of the triangle of activity” (p. 87). He provides as an example a basic activity of doctors: the treatment of patients. Drugs (tools) make up one corner of this activity system, and the inner contradiction involved is the conflict between the use value of drugs (they are useful for healing) and their exchange value (they are a commodity that can be bought and sold). This conflict between the scientific and economic value of prescription drugs necessarily figures into

the doctor's practice, and through its resolution, offers an opportunity for transformation in the form of new motives and practices. The second type of contradiction occurs between points in an activity system, for example "the stiff hierarchical division of labor lagging behind and preventing the possibilities opened by advanced instruments" (p. 87).

Engeström describes the third type of contradiction thus:

The tertiary contradiction appears when representatives of a culture (e.g., teachers) introduce the object and motive of a culturally more advanced form of the central activity into the dominant form of the central activity. For example, the primary school pupil goes to school in order to play with his mates (the dominant motive), but the parents and the teacher try to make him study seriously (the culturally more advanced motive). The culturally more advanced object and motive may also be actively sought by the subjects of the central activity themselves. (Engeström, 1987, p.87)

Engeström uses as an example of a tertiary contradiction a doctor who is ordered by hospital administrators to adopt a new type of treatment or technology (the "culturally more advanced form"), an order which may meet with resistance. Finally, the fourth type of contradiction brings into conflict one's main or "central" activity system and "neighboring" activity systems in which one is also engaged. Engeström's example is the patient who is asked by his doctor to start or give up routines for the sake of his health.

As is apparent in all of the examples given, contradictions are natural and inevitable within and between activity systems, but are necessary for the development of new activities. The value of Engeström's model for education lies not primarily in its descriptive and heuristic power, but in its power to provide educators and students with opportunities for contradiction and transformation.

Engeström's model initiated a new era in Activity Theory studies. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Third-generation activity theory exhibits the following

characteristics: “issues of mediation, the internalization-externalization dialectic, and object-orientedness (treating social and cultural properties as objective and meaningful) are foundational elements”; “the transformation of an object (a material object/artifact, a plan, a shared goal, an idea) into an outcome motivates an activity”; “All activity systems are heterogeneous and multi-voiced and may include conflict and resistance as readily as cooperation and collaboration;” Finally, modern Activity Theory stresses the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of activity systems: “Activity systems are not static or purely descriptive; rather, they imply transformation and innovation” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 226).

### ***Activity, Culture, and Identity***

The third generation of activity theory scholars has expanded activity theory to embrace other theoretical frameworks and explore topics like emotion (e.g. Roth, 2007), and power (e.g. Lantolf & Genung, 2002) that were previously outside of its scope. Activity theory is yielding important new insights into the study of culture and identity. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) provide an in-depth discussion of the history of activity theory, the current state of the theory in its Third Generation, and its implications for second language research. They consider activity theory useful for understanding the relationships between individual and culture. In their view, individual activity is neither determined by culture nor entirely independent of it. Rather, from an Activity Theoretical standpoint, human agency is “both enabled and constrained, on the one hand, by cultural-institutional factors developed over time, and, on the other hand, by the

dynamic of a particular interaction happening at a given moment in time” (p. 234). In third-generation activity theory, while culture and societal institutions influence and constrain individuals in their activity,

...current activity theory practitioners de-emphasize the stability of systems and the presumption of consistency across contexts, time periods, individuals, and communities. To take one example, the question of how to weight cultural-historical mediation versus emergent practice continues to be asked among current researchers within the tradition. This relationship of history to emergence forms a dialectic; activity produces, and is informed by, the historical evolution of participating discourses, institutions and artifacts. (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 229)

Just as activity is both culturally-constituted and emergent in interaction, identity is similarly dual-natured and formed through activity. In this sense, Lantolf and Thorne connect activity theory with the work of Bordieu:

As Bordieu and other structuration theorists have argued (and we maintain that activity theory is a part of the structuration lineage), participation in historical-cultural activity produces an individual’s *habitus* —a set of socially and interactionally derived generative dispositions that enable and constrain agency (i.e. Bordieu 1979; 1984) *Habitus* is not a deterministic or behaviorist construct; rather, in contrast to Kantian a priori categories of mind, it is formed through activity in the social and cultural-material world; (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 240)

### **Uses of Activity Theory**

Because of its power in analyzing the ways in which individuals and groups go about learning and using new tools, activity theory has been applied in research on work groups, educational practice, and technology development. The following section will discuss the use of activity theory in general education studies.

### ***Activity Theory in Education***

Cole (1999) conducted a complex longitudinal study of children's activity systems within an innovative learning environment known as "The 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension." The 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension is "a specially designed cultural medium for promoting the all-around intellectual and social development of 6- to 12-year old children. In Wartofsky's terms, the system is a tertiary artifact—a bounded alternative world with its own social norms, tasks, and conventions" (Cole, 1995, p. 197). Students entered into this learning and play environment to perform different tasks in different modular areas. As they gained expertise in particular tasks, they were able to move on to different ones, physically moving through a maze of modules at their own pace. The whole environment was structured through the use of certain playing cards and a mythology of fantastic characters. These cards and the exchange of knowledge and practices that grew up around them became part of a local culture within the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension. Cole noted changes in children over time as they became enculturated old-timers in the 5<sup>th</sup> dimension.

Further, separate versions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension were built in different locations, and Cole noted that although they were structured in much the same way, the activity pursued within different 5<sup>th</sup> Dimensions varied dramatically. For example, a 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension in a library provided a quiet, calming area where children spent more time and developed more relationships than did children who participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> Dimension at their local Boys and Girls' Club, where there was much more chaotic activity. Performance on measures of "the density and growth of the cultures" (p. 207) and the amount of shared knowledge suggested that the culture of the library's 5<sup>th</sup> dimension

experienced greater growth and a greater growth and diffusion of knowledge among the kids.

### ***Activity Theory and Second Language Studies***

Since the 1990's, researchers taking a Sociocultural approach to studying Second language acquisition, learning, and pedagogy have employed activity theory in analyzing the learning practices of students in diverse classroom environments. These studies have illuminated students' motives, their use of online resources, and their interaction with peers and teachers. Third generation activity theory has also provided a way to analyze the relationships among these factors as well as the influence on them of past experience and institutional norms.

### ***Activity Theory Studies and Foreign Language Classrooms***

A number of studies conducted in Foreign Language Classrooms have demonstrated that language students pursue a wide variety of activities, even though they may be working on the same tasks. These activities are guided by the different motives students have for the tasks, for larger class instructional practices, and for their learning in general. In an early activity theory study, Gillette (1994) demonstrated the connections between students' learning histories, goals, and activity in the classroom. Through examination of student diaries and class notes, Gillette found that some participants pursued "genuine learning of the L2" while others pursued "fulfilling an other-imposed requirement as efficiently as possible." (p. 197) These goals were influenced by the

participants' "exposure to the world at large" (p. 197) Gillette compared the learning experiences of effective and ineffective language learners and found that effective learners had studied in environments where language learning was seen as valuable. Effective language users used different strategies and had positive affect regarding language study, and are more comfortable with communicative activities. Less effective learners "felt more at ease in classes emphasizing grammar rules and rote memorization" and were "intimidated by situations where functional language use is required." (p. 205) Gillette applied SCT, with its focus on motives, activity, and outcomes to argue that "a student's goal in using a given language learning strategy helps determine its effectiveness" and that teachers wishing to teach strategies should "take students' goals and histories into account" (p. 212).

Motives can be strongly influenced by both a student's prior learning experience and by his or her current classroom environment. Lantolf and Genung (2002) studied the influence of power in the activity system of an American graduate student learning Chinese. By examining their participant's journal entries and retrospective commentary, the authors discovered that her learning motives changed throughout the course of the semester due to problems related to the class environment, class rules, and uneven power distribution between teacher and students. Her primary motive "shifted from long-term learning to presenting a performance that satisfied her instructors and that yielded a good grade on the unit tests." (p. 188) She therefore "focused on achieving short-term results rather than long-term learning." (p. 189) The authors concluded that PG underwent "a shift in her motives and related goals for being in the class, which in turn gave rise to a



shift in the ways in which she behaved mentally, and even physically, in the classroom community. Thus motives, goals, and their affiliated behaviors are very much emergent.” (p. 191)

Basharina (2007)—studied an intercultural telecollaborative exchange between classes of Mexican, Japanese, and Russian EFL students. She used activity theory to investigate these students’ patterns of participation in an intercultural online discussion board. She found the participants reporting three types of contradictions--intracultural contradictions within each classroom (for example, deciding whether to post or not to post and choosing an appropriate level of formality), intercultural contradictions between classes in different countries (perceptions of unequal participation by their partners in another country, genre clash and accusations of plagiarism, and clash of appropriate topic choice) and technology-related contradictions (based in different computer-use practices among the three classes). She argued that the intracultural contradictions represent contradictions within activity systems pursued by the student writers, while the intercultural contradictions are contradictions between the activity systems of each group. Part of the intercultural contradictions and conflicts between the three groups is attributed to different local educational contexts: the curricular paradigm used by Russian students and the interactive learning paradigm of the Japanese and Mexican participants. Other intercultural conflicts stem from the different objects pursued by the groups of students: some saw the discussion as free interaction and others saw it as an academic assignment.

Contradiction is a recurrent theme in activity theory studies. In Basharina (2007), differences in the approaches taken to the same task and to the use of the same tool

created conflict between the students participating in a collaborative project.

Contradictions can also influence students' literacy practices. In a study of nine advanced students of Japanese at a Canadian university, Haneda (2007) applied a modified version of Wells' (2002) model of activity theory to investigate the reasons for students' different modes of engagement in writing and their attendant influence on investment in learning.

Different students approached the same writing tasks with different goals and modes of engagement. She identified three modes of engagement among the students-- "writing as a language exercise", "writing a coherent argument" and writing "as a communicative activity" (p. 317-318). Each of these modes entailed a different focus—for example, a focus on grammar, "clarity of expression" (313), or "rhetorical effectiveness" (314)

Haneda goes on to relate these modes to Wells' model of discourse use in activity systems. The "Writing as a language exercise" mode focuses on the writer (subject) and language (the linguistic tool), but not on the imagined Japanese reader or language community, its rules and division of labor—that is, "the cultural activity system in which the writing is embedded" (p. 317). The second mode gives more attention to the reader, but like the first, does not situate the activity within a "cultural activity system" (p. 317).

The third, however, considers the writing task as a communicative activity meant for a Japanese audience and following Japanese writing conventions. Haneda goes on to describe pedagogical implications of these findings--she points to the contradictions between a Japanese heritage student's writing activity system and that of his imagined readers (native Japanese): different communities, different "linguistic tools...that is to say, the sociocultural conventions and rules of writing" (p. 321) and differences in "the

expected division of labor between reader and writer” (p. 321) These contradictions can cause difficulty, but provide an opportunity for growth if resolved. She argues that activity theory can be used to “inquire into the nature of the literacy practices in which students are engaged and the reasons for the ways in which they invest or do not invest in FL writing.” (p. 320)

The importance of taking students’ varied communication and literacy practices into account when studying classroom interaction was demonstrated by Thorne (2000). In a study of university French as a Foreign Language students participating in Computer Assisted Class Discussions (CACD), Thorne found that students past experiences with non-academic computer mediated communication (CMC) influenced their interaction in CACD. He reports that “exogenous digital cultures, and the process of becoming a competent member of such speech communities, play substantive roles in the ways participants carry out electronic discussion in educational settings” (p. 2). In particular, CACD had its own way of stratifying students according to their online communication expertise-- “CMC supports the evolution of stylistic and aesthetic forms of communication, and that fluency with these forms couple with inclusionary and exclusionary social judgments” (p. 10).

Thorne argues that any classroom activity system is intertwined with such “exogenous” activity systems in which students are or have been engaged. The expertise obtained as a result of practice within these activity systems can itself serve as a tool for use within other systems: “the internal tools include the mediating signs of the participants’ L2 (here French) and native languages, acquired expertise with internet

communication tools, and importantly...the sense of communicative aesthetic accrued from participation in non-academic digitally mediated cultures.” (p. 2) The influence of these external activity systems leads Thorne to conclude that activity theory studies should look beyond central activity system (Engeström, 1987) under investigation: “this study addressed the limitations of a bounded unit of analysis, e.g., focal events within a networked computer classroom, and has attempted to demonstrate that a research framework which incorporates exogenous activity systems (digitally based non-academic speech communities) can more fully account for the focal activity system being researched” (Thorne, 2000, p. 10).

These foreign language studies demonstrate the usefulness of activity theory in exploring language learning practices. activity theory may be especially useful in investigating second language classrooms, in which the variety of students’ beliefs and experiences, and the activity systems in which they have participated make contradictions even more prominent.

### ***Activity Theory and ESL***

Influenced by widely varying cultural, institutional, and linguistic practices, ESL learners bring a great variety of life and learning experiences to the classroom. activity theory researchers have begun to explore the variety of motives, beliefs, and interactional norms that emerge in this environment.

In an early Activity-Theoretical exploration of SLA, Coughlan and Duff (1994) describe the results of two studies in which English learners participating in the same

tasks pursued quite different activities. The researcher presented a participant with a picture of a beach scene and asked him to either describe the picture or tell a story based on it. He chose to describe the picture, often seeking confirmation from the researcher. Coughlan and Duff said that he was pursuing a different activity than the one intended for the task--“the intended monologue thus occasionally becomes a dialogue between subject and interviewer” (p. 180). Other participants (in another study) presented with the same picture-description task approached the task differently, imagining stories about the picture. Coughlan and Duff argued that the participants are not merely working to complete a task, but rather engaging in “an ongoing negotiation of the activity by researcher and subject” (p. 183) are negotiated by the interviewer and subject. They suggested that one factor which may influence the activity of each participant is the amount of time available for the task—when more time was available, there was more freedom for negotiation. In addition, the authors suggested that the participants interpreted the task differently—as “an exercise in visual acuity, the object of which is to notice (and name) as many things in the picture as possible”, or “to relate the picture to personal experience” or “so unnatural and devoid of communicative interest or import that it did not warrant further elaboration” (p. 184). In addition, the same participant may engage in different activities when given the same task on separate occasions. They conclude that “any event that generates communicative language is unique—an activity born from a particular constellation of actors, settings, tasks, motivations, and histories” and that researchers must “exercise caution when attempting to generalize about data from similar, but distinct activities” (p. 190).

Storch (2004) applied activity theory to an investigation of dyadic interaction in an ESL class. She analyzed the interaction of 4 pairs during short composition, editing, and text reconstruction tasks. She reports that “Patterns of dyadic interaction can be traced to the participants’ goals and to whether or not members of the dyad share these goals” (457) Storch notes such goals as “sharing resources and completing the task together” (467), “display their knowledge” (469) and “completing the task more quickly and with less effort” (471) These goals may be shared or conflicting, and may diverge or converge over time. Distinct patterns of interaction (for example, collaborative, dominant-dominant, expert-novice) emerge through the pursuit of these goals. Storch, however, focuses only on the relationship between subject, object, and artifact in the formation of goals and does not discuss the rules and division of labor of the system within which activity is situated, nor does she discuss the students’ learning histories.

Jin (2007) used Engeström’s model of Activity systems to investigate peer review activity in ESL and did take into account students’ past experiences with using particular artifacts (MSN Instant Messenger) and literacy/learning practices. She investigated the activity systems of ESL students participating in Computer-Mediated Peer Review sessions. In order to understand the role of a computer environment in mediating students’ activity systems, she observed the onscreen and off-screen behavior, as well as the revisions made by 5 Intermediate level ESL students in a Level IV University ESL writing class. Participants in the study worked on several writing modules and conducted peer response sessions using MSN Instant Messenger. Jin found that students participated in a variety of different activity systems while working on the

same task. Students pursued not only task-directed activities related to improving writing skills, but also affective and social motives such as included “to have fun with her friends online”, (p. 152) and “having fun in IM chat” (p. 154). Other motives, bound up with self-image, included “maintaining a good-student image” with other students or the teacher and “maintaining an image of a competent writer” (p. 164) In addition, the same students appeared to be engaged in different activities across tasks. One factor which influenced their changing motives and activity was their expectation of a peer review partner’s contribution. When paired with a partner whose English proficiency, computer proficiency, or work habits were considered inferior, based on past classroom experience, some students had lower expectations of success for peer review. These students were less engaged in the task and pursued activity systems not related to learning. When paired with students whose proficiency or diligence seemed more likely to help with writing improvement or successful completion of the task, the same students were more engaged in learning-directed activity systems.

In terms of students’ goals, Jin reported a number of goals related to helping and receiving help, but also to finishing the task, communicating, and maintaining relationships. She noted that

...even within one CMPR task, participants’ goals shifted because they were simultaneously involved in more than one activity system the interaction of which stimulated new actions driven by newly formed goals. In other words, the conflicts between motives engendered the emergence of distinct goals. (Jin, 2007, p. 189)

The use of the internet and of MSN for online peer review mediated students’ activities in several ways—it allowed them to pursue different, often conflicting motives

simultaneously (for example, surfing the internet or chatting with friends through a second open chat window while waiting for their peer review partner to respond) Jin reported that students' participation in the CMPR tasks was mediated by their histories of non-academic MSN and computer use.

In a study of ESL students' collaborative group work from an activity theory perspective, Yang (2006) investigated activity systems of International students participating in writing groups in University mainstream business classes. All but one of these participants came from Mandarin or Cantonese language backgrounds (one spoke Vietnamese as his first language) and attended commerce courses at a Canadian university. Yang investigated the students' goals and interaction during group writing projects. She found the groups had different motives for taking the classes (elective, mandatory), adopted different L1 and L2 use practices depending on the makeup of the group, and had different perspectives of the usefulness of the task once it had been completed. Among the factors that influenced the three teams' work were: the perceived relevance of the course to each participant's future; group members' personalities; English proficiency; and familiarity with the classroom expectations of a Canadian university environment. These factors led to different levels of engagement for the three groups: one group, which saw the course and task as directly related to their motives, generally viewed the project as an enjoyable and valuable experience. Yang reported that for another group that was taking the course an elective, however, "students tend to resent the intellectual and social effort involved in their group tasks for their elective course" (p. 224). Their primary motive seemed to be "to get the job done easily and quickly for the



sake of a course grade rather than to learn by doing the assignments” (p. 224). For this group, “task avoidance, mutual dependency, and group harmony emerged as implicit group rules” (p. 218) and both “free riding” and “social loafing” (p. 224) hampered group effectiveness. In addition, self-consciousness about English proficiency and a lack of familiarity with Canadian academic writing conventions led some students to avoid taking up speaking tasks or being open to peer revision of written contributions. Students in this group reported much lower satisfaction with the group project experience. A final factor which facilitated harmonious and effective group work was prior experience with group work in school or previous ESL classes. Yang suggested that the students in the group which struggled most were unfamiliar with group work, “reluctant to propose individual opinions forcefully” (p. 217) before knowing their partners well, and “appeared to have great difficulty speaking out in participatory-style lecture classes” (p. 226). She noted that these characteristics have been reported in Chinese students in other research, and attributes the hesitation to give individual opinions to “cultural background”(p. 217). However, the other two groups, also comprised primarily of Chinese students, had gained some familiarity with group work in their learning histories and were consequently more successful.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this literature suggests that activity theory is ideally suited to analyze the learning activities of ESL students because it avoids connecting their classroom communicative behavior with cultural stereotypes. Rather, it situates students’ motives and activities within systems that are influenced by both enduring cultural ideologies on

the one hand and locally-emergent, constantly-changing classroom practices on the other. According to Thorne (2004), “A strength of activity theory is its inherent dialectical sensitivity to the inventiveness of human activity *and* the normalizing pressures of expected forms of behavior” (p. 53). Therefore, “activity theory offers a descriptive and analytic framework that problematizes some of the reifications that occlude more holistic approaches to SLA research and praxis” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 230). Accordingly, in the case of ESL students, activity theory can call into question beliefs about ESL learners that either ignore or reify the influence of culture in their learning.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

In this study, I investigated the experiences and goals of ESL students with regards to group work in their ESL classroom, through the lens of activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Leont'ev, 1978; Luria, 1976) In particular, I was guided by the following questions:

1. What expectations, goals, and motives do ESL students have for participation in collaborative group projects?
2. How are students' expectations, goals, and motives for group work reflected in their participation and interaction in a group project?
3. What kinds of contradictions arise within the activity systems of groups working on group projects in an ESL class?
4. How do contradictions that arise between and within activity systems influence students' participation and interaction in group projects?

In this chapter, I discuss the research methods used in this study. I begin with a rationale for my choice of qualitative methods, followed by a description of the research context. I then describe the methods I used for collecting and analyzing data and for ensuring the trustworthiness of my analysis.

## **RATIONALE FOR METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES**

In this study, I investigated the experiences, interactions, and relationships over time of a small group of participants. I approached this study with the understanding that human experience and knowledge are co-constructed by human actors and that events are subject to multiple interpretations. These principles fit within a constructivist theoretical or interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Denzin and Lincoln, “the constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (p. 24). This paradigm is particularly suited for a study grounded in sociocultural theory or activity theory with a focus on the social construction of knowledge, rules, historical artifacts, and activity.

A constructivist paradigm is one of the principal paradigms within the qualitative research tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A qualitative approach is normally used to describe phenomena in a natural setting and to see these phenomena from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002; Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982). Qualitative research approaches take as a starting point “the view that reality is constructed by individuals with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Qualitative research is often inductive and process-oriented, rather than starting from clear hypotheses (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002; Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982). This methodological approach was suitable for my study because I frame my investigation

using sociocultural theory and activity theory, but did not begin with any predetermined hypotheses.

This study aimed at learning about the ways in which individual students' goals and expectations are intertwined with their emergent activity in a particular time and place. I do not intend to generalize these findings to describe or predict the behavior of ESL students in general, but rather to gain a deep understanding of the activity systems of individuals within a specific community. For these reasons, I used a multiple case study (Stake, 2005) methodology. According to Merriam (1998), case studies are an appropriate methodology when "the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). The unit of analysis in a case study should be a *bounded system* (Merriam, 1998; Smith, 1978). Merriam adds that "if the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). Stake (2005) also stresses that the case is a system, one with identifiable "activity patterns" (p. 444). The cases in this study were individual learners within an ESL class, and the activity systems in which they engaged. Because activity theory studies usually focus on activity systems constructed by individuals or groups, researchers interested in activity normally employ a case study method, as, for example Jin (2007), who studied multiple individuals within a writing class, and Lantolf and Genung (2002) who focused on one individual.

## CONTEXT

### Research Site

*The program:* The program described in this study is a small intensive English program at a large university in the southwestern United States. Students attending the program come primarily from East Asia, South America, and the Middle East. Although it is part of the university, the program had traditionally accepted any students interested in studying English as a second language. This included short-term study abroad students, local residents, and prospective university students. However, the program was, at the time of the study, going through a transition so that only students who had gained at least provisional admission to the university would be accepted. These students, who were required by the university to take one or more ESL courses in addition to their academic workload, were labeled with the status of “Bridge Student” with the program. A small number of students who had not yet been admitted to the university continued to study in the program in order to meet English requirements for admission (either a minimum TOEFL score or through exiting the highest level of the ESL program with an A or B grade). I will refer to these students as having “ESL student” status. A final group of students were on one-year study abroad programs with the university, and were enrolled in both ESL and academic content classes. I will refer to these students as “study abroad students.”

Depending on their requirements, students were allowed or required to enroll in as many as four or as few as one of the ESL program’s following skill tracks: reading, writing, grammar, and listening-speaking. All of the current students were current or

aspiring university students. The program's curriculum had a strongly academic focus, with preparing students for university coursework and university life its primary goals.

***The instructional term:*** The Fall 2010 instructional term for this course began on August 30<sup>th</sup> and ended on December 6<sup>th</sup>. In total, the class lasted 15 weeks, with holidays for Labor Day and Thanksgiving reducing the total number of class meetings to 27 (81 instructional hours).

***The class:*** The class involved in this study was the Advanced Listening and Speaking class. *Advanced* is the program's highest level. The course had a special status because Students who successfully complete this course (with a grade of B- or higher) exit the program's listening and speaking track. If a student successfully exited all tracks in which they were enrolled, they were eligible for full admission to the university without a TOEFL score. Therefore, the participants in this study could be expected to have a strong incentive to obtain a good course grade because it would bring them one step closer to university admission.

The Advanced Level Listening and Speaking class focused on preparing students for academic course work through building discussion, note-taking, and presentation skills. Although the curriculum retained continuity from semester to semester, the teacher had authority to modify the syllabus at her discretion. The syllabus for the Fall 2010 semester laid out the following course description:

*This course is an advanced level course designed to help you improve your oral (speaking and pronunciation) and aural (listening) skills. In this class, students will work on sharpening the skills from the previous level. We focus on comprehending college level, academically oriented lectures, note-taking, and understanding and using complex English idioms, discussing and supporting*

*ideas and opinions, and comprehending and responding to different (oral) English texts. In addition, students will hone their discussion skills as well as their ability to give clear and detailed presentations on various “academic” level topics.*

(Course syllabus)

***Rationale for choosing this site:*** Stake (2005) has argued that one rationale for choosing a case in a case study is the case’s potential for illuminating a phenomenon, that is, the researcher may prefer “those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn,” adding “potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness” (p. 451). This program provided a good environment in which to study the complexity of experience in the ESL classroom. First, there was great diversity in the student body at this site. Since my first semester at the school, I had taught students from over 28 countries and 16 first-language backgrounds. The students brought with them a vast variety of experiences and goals for their English learning. Second, my familiarity with the program was a great advantage. Because I had worked in this program for two years, I was familiar with the students, instructors, and staff. I was also familiar with the daily routines and policies of the school. Perhaps more importantly, the students and instructors at this site were familiar with me. This created a shared comfort and trust that could aid in creating rapport with participants and would also allow for the collection of richer data.

***Role of Group work in the class:*** This class aimed to provide students with opportunities for various types of English input, interaction, and public speaking. The two group work activities that form the focus of this dissertation fit into the “Presentation and Discussion Leading” assignment category of the syllabus, which accounted for 25%



of the students' total grade. Students were expected to do three major presentations, perform a short skit, and lead the class once in a discussion of a topic of their choice. Therefore, each of these activities accounted for approximately 4% of the total grade.

***Class routine:*** The class met Mondays and Wednesdays from 6:30 to 9 pm. Many of the students would have just finished a 30-minute break following their other ESL class of the day, which began at 3:30 and finished at 6. This provided them little time for dinner, and many students used the time for buying coffee. Despite this inconvenience and the general unpopularity of the night schedule, students usually arrived on time, and absenteeism was rare. However, fatigue seemed common, and students were generally antsy and ready to go home as the 9 o'clock hour approached. Because the class ended late and students had to negotiate various forms of transportation to get home from school, the teacher tried to end class early when possible.

***Classroom:*** The class spent the first week of the term in a small classroom that afforded little movement or space for the students. In the second week, the class moved to a larger room. This room was still relatively narrow, with no windows. Each student had his or her own chair-desk. The teacher began the semester with the seats arranged in two ranks facing the front. She conducted her work at the front of the classroom with a blackboard and projection screen, occasionally utilizing the blackboards on the other three walls when necessary. In addition, she normally used media carts containing a document cam or a laptop, small speakers, and a projector. The room was made all the more crowded by the teacher's desk and a rarely-used overhead projector. Finally, the

room was uniquely crowded with the addition of me and two American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for a deaf student in the class.

Later in the semester, the instructor arranged the seats in a single semi-circle along the three walls facing the front and removed unneeded seats from the class, providing plenty of room for movement and flexibility for pair and group work. Because the classroom was small, it allowed the teacher to access all areas of the room, providing help for all students as needed. Once the original two-rank configuration was abandoned, the room was just large enough to allow three groups of three or two larger groups situated at either side. Unfortunately, when the teacher formed groups of three, the groups were often only a few feet apart and it became very noisy.

***Class Activities:*** Through my observations and collected class materials, I was able to identify a number of primary activities conducted in the class. These included: discussion of lectures and listening material students had studied for homework; introduction, discussion, and practice of different note-taking strategies; student-led discussions of socially-relevant topics; and student presentations. The teacher made frequent use of group work. Each class meeting contained group activities. Group activities designed by the teacher included: negotiating meanings of vocabulary; comparison of lecture notes; Conversation Circle—in which students led a discussion of a topic of their choice with two partners, then discussed the topic with another group; tasks and discussion related to text. Finally, the teacher included two larger group tasks, the idiom skit and group presentation. The teacher allotted a great deal of time and student

freedom for group activities. As students worked, the teacher usually moved from group to group to monitor their progress, help, or engage in the talk.

## Participants

*The Students:* The class consisted of nine students whose demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Members of the Advanced Listening and Speaking Class

Name	Gender	Nationality	Age	Student Status
Aki	F	Japan	23	Bridge
Antonio	M	Angola	20's	ESL
Kaori	F	Japan	20's	Study Abroad
Emi	F	Japan	21	Study Abroad
Hyeon-Sook	F	Korea	43	ESL
Jinhee	F	Korea	25	ESL
Marisol	F	Venezuela	18	ESL
Rami	M	Saudi Arabia	20's	ESL
Yi-Ning	F	Taiwan	23	Bridge

Although all nine students agreed to participate in the study, not all of them responded to my emailed interview invitations. I was therefore unable to interview three of the participants, and could interview two others only once. Four students, Hyeon-Sook, Jinhee, Aki, and Yi-Ning, generously agreed to come to all three interviews and so provided me with a fuller picture of their experiences. These four students became the focal participants of my study.

### ***The Focal Participants:***

#### **Aki**

Aki was a 23 year old student from Japan. She had been in the US for only 4 weeks when the semester began. However, she had extensive experience with study abroad. She had spent four summers studying in Seattle, taking university courses in political science and women's studies. In addition, she had traveled to Canada and Slovenia. Aki's first formal English experience with English came in junior high school. She enjoyed English study as a junior high school student, when she often listened to English songs and watched English media. Even before starting to study English formally, she had been exposed to English in everyday life and had thought it was cool. Aki noted that she has always been interested in learning new ideas from other cultures and interacting with people from other countries.

Aki was seeking a master's degree in political science. She had received a bachelor's degree in Japan in Childhood Education. Her choice of majors was influenced by her mother, who was herself a kindergarten teacher. Aki had intended to follow in her footsteps as an educator until she became interested in political science during study abroad. Her future plan was to earn a PhD in political science.

Aki remembers her junior high school English classes having between 30 and 35 students and being textbook-focused, with the teacher introducing dialogs for pronunciation and grammar practice and discussion. The classes also had a native English speaker who assisted the primary instructor who led communicative activities. Aki remembered activities like talking with the assistant, discussions, information gap

activities, and performing role plays and skits, and group activities, which she enjoyed. These gave her a chance to produce practiced phrases. She also enjoyed watching others' skits. Although she enjoyed them, she didn't see them as opportunities for peer learning or teaching. In addition, she felt the students in class were not active within their groups unless joined by the TA.

Aki's enjoyment of English faded in high school as the courses became focused on preparing for college entrance exams, with little interaction. There were some group activities, but they didn't stand out in her memory. She felt that the other students were not aggressive about speaking in class because they were not confident, worried about their pronunciation, or were afraid of making mistakes. The activity Aki recalls as especially helpful for her learning was speaking with native speakers. When she talked with native speakers and was unable to express herself as well as she wanted, she felt discouraged. This feeling, however, spurred her to study harder to speak faster and more clearly.

If she could teach an English class herself, she'd try to get more authentic texts, music, film, and opportunities to talk with NS. She also liked skits because they were fun and gave the student a chance to express themselves while taking on a new character. Language teaching should allow students to make an emotional connection with the language. Even years later, she could still remember vocabulary from skits because of this connection. According to Aki, the best way to learn a language is to take any opportunity, no matter what one is doing, to practice. Any simple activity can be turned

into a language learning moment. Especially valuable are opportunities to talk to native speakers of the target language.

Aki had extensive language-learning experience beyond English. She has also studied German, Arabic, Chinese, French, and Slovenian. (She learned Slovenian as part of a short-term, informal, student-led class to prepare for a trip abroad. She enjoyed the class and learned some useful phrases and slang.) As an undergraduate, Aki worked in her university's cross-cultural education center office, helping international students and assisting her supervisor. Although she worked with a couple of other student workers, she mainly worked on her own. She preferred working alone because it gave her greater control over planning and tasks, and allowed her to exercise greater creativity.

When she arrived in the US, it was difficult for her to get used to a new type of classroom interaction in which students were expected to speak their mind. This was rare in Japan, she said, because students fear being judged by others. She said she likes this new type of classroom culture because speaking up can lead to "real relationships". Aki's goal for the current course was to improve her academic speaking skills (for example presentation and discussion) to help in her political science classes. The academic classes she was currently taking required little participation.

### **Yi-Ning**

Yi-Ning was a 23-year old woman from a major city in Taiwan. She had been in Texas for 1 year, and had visited the United States a number of times before. She first visited the US at the age of 6 or 7 and had visited the US several times since then.

Because of this frequent contact with the US, she felt comfortable when she arrived at the university for study abroad.

Yi-Ning's first experience with English came at a very young age. Her father, who had majored in English, taught her the alphabet when she was just a child. Beginning in late elementary school, Yi-Ning started taking English lessons after school in a "tutorial school." She enjoyed these lessons since they were mostly centered around playing games, rather than serious study. She found it interesting and enjoyed learning about a new culture. Her formal English education began in junior high school, where 3 to 4 hours of weekly English instruction are required. In junior high school, the class mostly followed the textbook. The teacher generally provided explanations of grammar and vocabulary. The students' normal activities were largely limited to reading silently or reading aloud. Most of the information was a unidirectional flow from teacher to student, with very little group work among the students. Yi-Ning noted that the teacher tended to skip group work activities that appeared in the textbook. All of the work was conducted in Chinese with little English input or interaction. The effect of this, she says, is that Taiwanese students are good at reading but poor at listening and speaking through lack of practice opportunities. She notes that she herself was "really really bad" at speaking English when she arrived in the US and found it very difficult to adapt to the smaller, more active American ESL classrooms where there is more interaction between student and teacher and students speak up at will.

While the teaching style in Taiwan helped her with reading and writing, Yi-Ning generally disapproved of it. Her ideal English class would feature more teacher-student

interaction, such that students are encouraged to speak up and ask questions right away when they have them. Both teachers and students could benefit from this two-way communication. In addition, Yi-Ning's ideal class would be fun, not boring.

Yi-Ning had majored in French as an undergraduate. She also took the required 3 semesters of English, but quit as soon as she had completed this requirement so that she could focus on French and not get the two languages confused. At the time of this study, Yi-Ning had changed her major from French to business. Her career goal was to get an MBA and enter the field of international business, where she could use her Chinese, French, and English.

### **Jinhee**

Jinhee had been in the US for about 1 year, having come from Korea at the age of 24. Like Yi-Ning and Aki, she had been to the US before, during a 4 month university exchange program. When she came to the program a year ago, she planned on staying only a year and then returning to Korea. Since then, she had changed her mind and now wanted to stay in the US and study for a master's degree in early childhood education. Like Yi-Ning, Jinhee could remember learning English at an early age. Her mother had been a teacher. She said that as a child, she picked up some English words or phrases from watching television. This surprised her mother, a teacher, who was pleased to see her learn and say new words so quickly. Jinhee began to study English after school, and later studied English in mandatory the middle and high school curriculum. She took grammar and speaking/listening classes on alternate days. Jinhee said that she had found



the classes interesting and enjoyable--One class she remembered incorporated a lot of speaking, especially public speaking. She recalled a particular class in which the students and teacher listened to and discussed information about the US invasion of Iraq. Later, Jinhee studied for 4 months on an exchange program with a university in the US. Before coming to the US, Jinhee had worked for a consulting company, where she helped students plan for study abroad.

### **Hyeon-Sook**

Hyeon-Sook had come to the US a year before from her hometown, a small city in Korea. It was her second time to visit the US, having been to Hawaii once. She was currently studying English with the hope of passing the TOEFL test and gaining admission to the university, where she planned to study Education. Education was important to Hyeon-Sook for both personal and professional reasons. As an undergraduate in Korea, she had majored in Korean literature but had lost interest in the subject. After the birth of her son, she became interested in education and had read widely to learn how best to promote her children's education. She also realized that she could pursue a career in the field.

At 43 years old, Hyeon-Sook was the class' oldest member. She was also the only member of the class raising children. Her two sons lived together with her, her brother, and her cousin. One of the sons was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and the other had just started kindergarten.

Hyeon-Sook started learning English at the age of 12 when she entered junior high school. The class was required for all students and focused on grammar and reading. The classes were large—usually 50-55 students, and largely teacher-centered. The teacher read from the book and the students repeated. In addition, they listened to explanations of grammar rules and word meaning. They also listened to some materials in the language lab. Hyeon-Sook said that students participated in some exercises, like pronunciation practice, but there was no conversation in class because they didn't know enough English. Hyeon-Sook noted that teaching style had changed since she was in junior high school.

Hyeon-Sook remembered having less variety of activities in her high school English classes. She recalled only memorizing vocabulary, taking tests, and solving problems. She had found this classroom and teaching style helpful and suited to her learning preferences. In high school, Hyeon-Sook also studied French an hour a week for 2 years. However, it didn't make a lasting impression, for now she only remembers "bonjour." That had been her only language study experience until just before coming to the US, when she had taken English classes 4 four hours a week in a private school for four months.

At the time, Hyeon-Sook was taking four ESL classes and found them difficult, especially the ones that required her to speak. At first it was difficult for Hyeon-Sook to adapt to the classroom norms and learning style expected in her American ESL class. She noted that in Korea, students normally didn't participate a lot in class and don't ask questions. Her ESL teachers here didn't follow the textbook as closely as her childhood

teachers had, but rather pointed out important points and then tried to create discussion. This was hard for her at first, but she was getting used to it, and teachers were encouraging.

Hyeon-Sook found other aspects of ESL courses challenging. Because she could not always comprehend what her classmates said, she could not respond during discussions; presentations posed a challenge because her knowledge of computers was limited. At the outset of the Advanced Listening and Speaking class, Hyeon-Sook had difficulty understanding Lisa's announcements because her speech rate was too fast. However, she expected that she would get used to it. She found the class stressful and wondered whether she ought to give up on the Advanced level and return to the high-intermediate course. But determination to improve her speaking and listening was pushing her onward. Even when she misunderstood, she felt that she could learn from her mistakes. Her goal for the current class was to improve her speaking and listening, which would help her both academically and personally—it would help succeed in academic classes and allow her to travel around the world.

Despite the challenges, Hyeon-Sook liked the variety of activities in her ESL classes and appreciated the usefulness of L2 medium instruction. In her view, the best way to learn a language was by doing homework carefully for practice and to make friends with whom one could practice English.

### ***The Teacher***

At the time of this study, Lisa had extensive experience in teaching English. She had been teaching for nearly two decades, both in the U.S. and in Asia, in a variety of

contexts—university intensive ESL programs, private EFL institutions, and local school-district based adult education programs for immigrant populations. She had experience with both proficiency-based and English for Academic Purposes curricula. This was Lisa’s first time to teach the Advanced Listening and Speaking class.

***Interpreters:*** Two American Sign Language interpreters were always present in the classroom to interpret classroom interactions for Rami, a deaf student. Their interpreting for Rami was the only interaction they had with class members. While the teacher lectured, one interpreter stood to the side at the front of the room and interpreted. The other sat at the seat closest to the door. They alternated roles every 15 minutes. When the students engaged in group work, the interpreter sat together with the group in a position where Rami could see him or her. Two interpreters came to class throughout the semester, but on rare occasions they were replaced by substitutes. The two primary interpreters gave their consent to recording of their work during class once Rami had given his own consent.

## **MY ROLE AS A RESEARCHER**

In qualitative research, the researcher is often considered “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7), and is inherently subjective. To enhance dependability of a qualitative study, it is therefore important for researchers to provide for the reader a description of his or her biases—“the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (p. 204). In this section,

I give a brief description of my language learning and teaching background and my beliefs about group work.

### **My Background**

I have taught English as a Second or Foreign Language since 2000 in Japan, Taiwan, Spain, and the United States. Whenever possible, I have used communicative language teaching approaches with an emphasis on cooperative and collaborative dyadic and small-group interaction in preference to teacher-fronted lecture or drilling. I believe that these activities promote language acquisition in accordance with the Interaction Hypothesis posed by Long (1996). An equally important motivation is that I believe such activities also provide social and affective benefits in class. I believe that this is true for both general proficiency-oriented and English for Academic Purposes classes. However, collaborative and cooperative approaches are born from and carry with them ideologies about the nature of communication and learning that may not be shared by one's students. Teachers and administrators should therefore employ them judiciously in accordance with local institutional and curricular norms and instructional goals, paying heed to the needs of teachers and learners who are more comfortable with other approaches. As a learner, although I see the value in group work, I do not enjoy it and often feel resistant to it. This is especially true in language classes, where I am particularly anxious. I think this helps me better understand the difficulties some students have with group work, but it may also influence my perception of students' actions as they participate in group work.

My interest in collaboration stems from my rewarding work in intercultural collaborative groups in the FLE program at UT, and from my observation of ESL and EFL students working in groups in their classes. This experience has shown me that intercultural collaboration provides rich opportunities for learning about other cultures as well as the content under study. In addition, members of different cultures often bring diverse perspectives, background knowledge, and approaches to their work, providing a flexibility that benefits the group. In an ESL class, students' language learning may benefit from intercultural grouping, not only because culture is often a topic of great interest and constant discussion for students, but because the lack of shared knowledge and understandings between members of different cultures necessitates more negotiation of meaning than students with more shared understanding would need.

Although any group will need to resolve differences in personality, work style, and goals, intercultural groups can face particular challenges. Members of different cultures may bring differences in assumptions and expectations related to communication, group dynamics, and work distribution formed through their prior participation in communities and institutions. These differences can cause intragroup conflict. My own experience has taught me that, although we are able to adapt, even individuals experienced in intercultural contact can have difficulty negotiating these differences with their colleagues. I dislike conflict and pursue harmony in my relationships; therefore I seek to avoid conflict in my own group work and minimize it in my classroom. However, these challenges and conflicts are not always detrimental; when properly managed, they can lead to deeper understanding and stronger relationships.

### **My role as researcher**

In this study, I was in some ways both an insider and an outsider. Having been a teacher at the school for two years, I was an insider of the community. I was familiar with both the teacher and many of the students. As a beginning language learner (of Korean) and someone who had lived abroad, I shared some similar experiences with the students. However, my differences from them in terms of background and power made me an outsider. I did not share a first language or culture with my participants, so I cannot claim to represent them from an emic perspective. Therefore, I needed to be continuously aware of my stances through *reflexivity* or “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210) as well as *member checking* and *peer debriefing* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), to ensure that the representation of each student’s voice was as rich possible and that I avoided essentializing or exoticizing these participants for my reader. Further, although I was not teaching these students during the study, my roles as teacher, researcher, and native speaker of English put me into an unequal power relationship with them. It was therefore necessary to consider how this relationship could constrain my perceptions of them as active agents in multiple different activity systems, and not as learners only.

### **My Role as a Teacher in The Program**

My status and role as a teacher within the program made reflexivity especially important. I began teaching part time at this program in the summer of 2008. Since then, I had taught one or two courses per semester. I normally taught either the High

Intermediate or Low Intermediate Listening and Speaking course every semester, and had taught the Advanced Listening and Speaking course only once--in my first term in the program. When the study began, I had already developed varying levels of familiarity with the participants. Some were strangers to me. For example, the three Japanese students were in their first semester with the program, and I met them for the first time when the course began. Although Yi-Ning was a returning student, I had never met her. Others I knew: Marisol, Antonio, Rami, Hyeon-Sook, and Jinhee had all attended my intermediate speaking and listening class the previous summer session, which had ended less than a month earlier. In addition, Jinhee had also attended my intermediate reading class the previous year. Therefore, these students and I had developed some familiarity with each other. I felt that this familiarity would present both an opportunity and a possible drawback. The conclusions they had formed of me, whether good or bad, would have an effect on the way they felt about my presence in the class and, potentially, on their behavior. On the one hand, the students might feel comfortable with me in the classroom because they had already spent a considerable amount of time with me. On the other, their relationship with me had been strictly that of teacher-student, so that they might be more likely to see me as an authority figure than they would a total stranger. They might be more likely to act in a guarded way, or to try to impress me, or to feel that I was acting in an official capacity in my observation. If they held negative feelings from the summer semester, they might object to my presence. This presented a serious consideration for me, and I felt a strong need to make them as comfortable as possible. For this reason, I was careful to avoid any suggestion that I was representing the school,



checking up on their progress or judging their work, or compelling them to take part. I made this clear in my initial introduction of the study, and in the wording and tone of my subsequent requests for interviews. In addition, I attempted to build rapport from the first day by being friendly, chatting before class with students, minding my facial expressions when observing to avoid appearing too serious, and by laughing and enjoying the fun moments in class. I believe this helped build rapport between me and some of the students I had taught before, because they occasionally joked with me either in person or by leaving funny greetings and messages on my recorder.

## **DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

Data for this study were collected over a 15-week period in the Fall 2010 instructional term. Because investigating the functioning of activity systems requires an understanding of the motives and rules that guide individual and group activity within the system, it is usually necessary to combine introspective methods with observation. The data collection methods I employed in this study were: participant observations, recording of classroom interaction, interviews, and stimulated recall. Using these methods provided for triangulation of data and thick description, allowing for a more thorough and faithful presentation of the students' voice and experience.

### **Observation**

Observation is commonly used in activity theory studies because it is necessary to observe interaction or record instances of talk-in-interaction to see how motives are pursued, tools are used, and labor is divided within the activity system. Some activity

theory studies have used observation within the classroom (Lantolf & Genung, 2002; Storch, 2004) or through analysis of online discussion data (Basharina, 2007) or both (Jin, 2007). I observed every class beginning with the third meeting. The purpose of observation was to document and understand the routines, participation structure, and inter-student relationships evolving in the class. In addition, I wanted to be able to describe the activity system of the class as a whole and provide as much context as possible for situating the individual students and small group tasks. A final reason for attending every class was to allow the students to become comfortable with my presence.

Throughout the semester, I kept a notebook in which I took continuous field notes on several aspects of class life: physical configuration of students; classroom tasks and the time taken for each; students' participation patterns; signs of friendship or other relations between students; and general mood of each class and activity. As the semester progressed, I began to focus especially on classroom phenomena connected with components of Engeström's activity system model: classroom rules, use of artifacts (for example, computer use and the use of psychological tools such as the L2 and various L1s in class), and divisions of labor.

For observation, I adopted a "Participant as Observer" role (Gold, 1958). The small classroom necessarily put me in close proximity to students, so although I was a guest, I became a part of the class. The students talked with me in and after class, joked with me, and sometimes shared their snacks with me. I did not participate in any class activities, but Lisa occasionally drew attention to me by joking about me, asking me questions, and even twice having me assist by drawing lots to decide students'

presentation order—an act that brought an avalanche of laughter from the students. Some of these actions, like involving me as the “objective” lot-drawer, may have brought me closer to the students and made me seem less serious or mysterious. Others, like asking me how many syllables were in a particular word, perhaps affirmed my teacher/expert status, endangering my rapport with the students. When attention was drawn to my teacher status, I felt quite uncomfortable. I found it difficult to build rapport with both teacher and students while avoiding aligning with either in such situations. Balancing my obligations to both teacher and student as participants in my study, and then balancing both with my aims as a researcher, became a daily concern, one I managed with variable success.

### **Video and Audio Recording**

Video and audio recordings comprised a second source of data for this study. I recorded virtually all group activities in which the students engaged over the semester. I chose to record classroom interaction with both audio and video because video can yield important information about students’ participation that audio cannot. Video can record students’ physical configuration in group work, their use of tools. In addition, video recordings can reveal important interactional components such as posture and gesture that indicate affect, attention, and the intended addressee of utterances when several people are present. Therefore, despite the difficulties that video recording can add to data collection and analysis, it was important for my study. I recorded all group work using two tripod-mounted digital video cameras. Only four inches in height, the small cameras

were less obtrusive than older video cameras but still plainly visible to the participants. They were placed in the corners of the room as far as possible out of the way of the teacher and interpreters. In addition, I audio recorded all group interaction with three small digital voice recorders that I gave students as they prepared for their group activities. They kept them on their desks as they worked.

I began recording whenever the teacher announced the start of a group task. This presented some timing challenges. Before each class, I met with the teacher to find out the day's scheduled class activities. Nevertheless, the teacher had to adapt flexibly to the class environment, changing timing and activities as needed. It was therefore often difficult to predict exactly when a task would begin. As a result, I sometimes did not capture the initial stages of tasks, including the teacher's task setting and group formation. In addition, without knowing which students would be grouped together for particular tasks, a decision that was usually made at the last moment, I could not ask the students to keep the recorders from the beginning of class, but rather handed them out to each group at the start of the task. This kept me from being able to catch some of their talk as the group was in the process of forming. I improved my recording techniques as the semester went on, so that I began to catch these early stages of tasks with a separate recorder.

## **Interview**

A number of researchers (Basharina, 2007; Haneda, 2007; Jin, 2007; Storch, 2004) have used interviews to elicit students' goals and perceptions of tasks in L2 classroom activity theory studies. Because participants' learning histories, goals for group work, and

classroom experiences were at the heart of my study, I conducted in-depth interviews (Johnson, 2001) with participants to get their perspectives and learn about their experiences. Interviewing was necessary both to get students' perceptions of classroom events and to find out what students did when working on group tasks outside of class. I conducted three interviews with participants during the semester. Each interview was audio-recorded and lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes. All interviews were conducted entirely in English. The first interview focused on the participant's personal, educational, and work background. I also spoke to each student about their language study history, especially their experiences of language study in school. The second round of interviews was conducted at the end of September and focused on the student's experiences during the skit activity. The final interview took place during the last two weeks of the semester. This meeting was longer than the others and focused on the participants' experiences in the group presentation activity. I included a stimulated recall session for all participants except Hyeon-Sook, who did not have enough time. The schedule of conducted interviews is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Interview Schedule

Interview	Date	Subject
First	September 8-16	Background and history
2 <sup>nd</sup>	September 28-October 5	Skit
3 <sup>rd</sup>	November 15-December 9	Group presentation, wrap-up

### **Stimulated Recall**

During the third interview, I used stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2000) to inquire into students' perceptions of events during specific interactions. Storch (2004) used stimulated recall to elicit ESL students' perceptions of their dyadic interaction in writing tasks. In doing so, she was able to identify students' perceived roles and "situation definition" (p. 459), at specific times during the task as they emerged and were negotiated by the interactants. During stimulated recall, I played selected portions of video from their group work and asked them to pause the playback when any memories came to mind or they wanted to make any comments. I noted in my interview notes the points in the video on which each participant had commented.

### **Post Task Reflection Sheets**

Research suggests that one weakness of introspective interviews is that participants' recall of specific events is subject to memory constraints. Because students have busy lives and the teacher's use of group activities may not be scheduled well in advance, it may be difficult to interview students immediately after group activities. In

order to encourage students to reflect on their experience of collaboration and provide immediate introspective data for my study, I asked each student to fill out a Student Reflection Sheet after their performance of the skit. This consisted of one page with a small number of open-ended questions. The sheets prompted the student to reflect on their participation, perception of the task, effectiveness of the group and its participants, and feelings during the activity. I made arrangements with the teacher to hand out the reflection sheet at the end of class on the day of the skit presentations. Because the teacher normally finished class early (10 minutes before the 9:00 hour), if students wanted to stay and fill out the questionnaire after being dismissed, they would have time to finish it before 9. However, because classroom activities had taken longer than expected on skit performance day, I was not able to hand out the reflection sheets until 8:55. All of the students stayed at least ten minutes, and many of them stayed longer to answer the questions. I felt that this had caused an inconvenience for many of them, but the answers did not yield useful insights about their feelings about the skit. It was clear that it would be impractical to ask the students to fill out a reflection for each type of activity. When I later focused my attention to just the four focal participants, I decided that in addition to the observation, recording, and interview, the reflection sheet represented an unnecessary additional burden for the participants. I decided that interviewing should be the only introspective method used for the remainder of the study.

## **Documents**

Documents collected for this study were the course syllabus and course handouts related to group assignments. These were analyzed to discover examples of rules governing the class and each assignment and the expectations of the instructor. I also used them to confirm or disconfirm due dates and timelines noted in my field notes.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis for this study was a recursive process in which analysis of collected data informed subsequent observations and interviews. Merriam (1998) recommended concurrent data collection and analysis, because “data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 162). During the data collection period, I reviewed my observation notes after each class to look for patterns in classroom rules and regimen, student participation, social relationships, and use of technology and language. This informed subsequent observations. As soon as possible after each class, I expanded my observation notes from memory to provide a richer description of classroom events. Each week, I used video and audio evidence from the class to fill in missing information and to corroborate or disconfirm my notes.

Analysis was conducted both deductively, using an Activity theory Analysis based on Engeström’s (1987, 1999, 2001) Activity System model, and inductively, using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Activity theory analysis provided the framework for categorizing individual behavior and components of the activity system for each group. Inductive analysis was used to identify activities and



motives in each student's actions as well as to analyze the influences of activity system contradictions on the interaction and participation of group members. I will now discuss the analysis of data related to each research question.

**Research Questions 1 and 2: What expectations, goals, and motives do ESL students have for participation in collaborative group projects? How are students' expectations, goals, and motives for group work reflected in their participation and interaction in a group project?**

To reconstruct the classroom activity systems in which the participants engaged, I conducted multiple macro- and micro-level analyses of video and audio recordings.

During the data gathering stage, I watched video recordings and listened to audio recordings of each episode of group work as soon as possible after each class. I looked for signs of engagement, general mood of the group, and signs of cooperation or conflict. I took notes of these interactions and added information to my field notes. In addition, I roughly transcribed excerpts of talk from particularly interesting interactions. These notes helped me refine my ongoing observation and interview questions. As a result of this analysis, I decided to focus on the two more structured group assignments rather than on less-structured tasks such as lecture note comparison or conversation circle.

The second analysis of video and audio recordings involved transcription of interaction for each group in the skit and presentation assignments. The majority of this analysis took place after data collection had ceased. I transcribed each video and audio file myself. In order to create the most detailed representation possible of the interactions

between students, I combined transcripts of audio and video recordings for each group, adding information gleaned from different recordings captured by each device. When video was available of an interaction, I added non-verbal operations (for example, smiling, gestures, and body movements) and actions (for example, manipulating objects) to the transcript. In the margins, I took notes on my thoughts about each interaction.

After multiple viewings of available video and readings of the transcripts, I was able to identify stages of work undertaken by each group as they proceeded through the assignments. Transitions from one stage to another were typically initiated by one member of the group. I created a table describing the work stages and their transitions for each group.

Next, I conducted a line-by-line analysis of the entire interaction for the group, coding each utterance for the speech act performed. Speech acts were labeled using a scheme adapted from the Speech Act Annotated Corpus (Leech and Weiser, 2003). Typical acts included: suggest, inform, request, acknowledge, complete utterance, and joke. I called each of these speech acts “actions” in the individual’s activity system because they seemed to be complex, goal-directed behaviors. Verbal and non-verbal actions for each participant were added into the table of work stages. I then used the constant comparative method to identify larger clusters of related speech actions for each participant. I labeled these patterns “activities.”

From this preliminary analysis of Jinhee’s group presentation, I began tentatively identifying actions and activities in their interaction. However, I also found that a moment-to-moment analysis of both verbal and non-verbal interaction was finer than

needed. In addition, video was not always available for every student in every interaction, and some transcripts contained inaudible or incomprehensible segments. This made an extremely fine microanalysis of gesture, proxemics, and tool use, as well as precise content analysis, impossible or impractical. Therefore, I decided to focus on each student's interaction at the action and activity levels. I repeated the above steps for each focal participant and group within each task.

As Jin (2007) argued, it is necessary in analyzing data within an activity theory framework to differentiate between motives, which are often unstated, and goals, which can be described by participants. In the current study, I followed the same distinction, in that I considered goals to be short-term, conscious, and definite in nature whereas motives were more indefinite and not likely to be noticed by participants unless raised to consciousness. To identify goals for each participant, I analyzed interview transcripts and post-task questionnaires to find goals that were directly stated in response to my questions. I also looked for statements of attempts to do things and desired outcomes of actions. I compared these statements with actions and activities labeled in the interaction transcripts to match goals with actions in group work and interaction. To identify expectations, I analyzed interviews for statements related to participants' beliefs about usefulness, enjoyment, or anxiety, preferences, or prescribed behaviors connected with group work in general or about a particular task. I then connected each expectation with related points in Engeström's activity system model. To identify motives, I compared the interaction transcripts and the activity tables with participants' interview responses related to their expectations and actions they performed during group assignments.

Once I had identified each individual's activity systems, I used audio and video recordings, interview transcripts, and course handouts to construct a model of the activity system of each group. I examined these data for instances of tool use (use of physical tools and symbolic tools such as language), for speech and actions revealing the division of labor within the group, and for speech and actions revealing the rules created by the group and teacher.

**Question 3: What kinds of contradictions arise within the activity systems of groups working on group projects in an ESL class?**

To identify contradictions between points in an activity system (between division of labor and artifact use, for example), I examined the video, interaction transcripts, and interview transcripts for examples of difficulty, misunderstanding, or frustration that arose for group members. I then coded each of these according to its apparent source in Engeström's Activity System model.

To identify contradictions in the goals and motives of different individuals, I compared and contrasted the activities of each focal participant with those of other group members to find potential differences. I also analyzed the interview data to find instances of interpersonal conflict, conflicting goals, or differences in task approach. Comparing and contrasting these two data sources, I identified instances in which the goal or motive of one group member conflicted with those of another member or with the group as a whole.

To identify contradictions between components of the small group or central activity system (Engeström, 2001) and those of an individual's other present activity systems or past activity systems, I compared interaction transcripts and activity tables with interview data to find examples of differences between a participant's past or outside-class group work experiences or expectations and their current experiences in each assignment.

**Question 4: How do contradictions that arise between and within activity systems influence students' participation and interaction in group projects?**

To answer this question, I conducted a microanalysis of segments of interaction in which each contradiction found in the analysis of Research Question 3 occurred. I then coded each segment according to the characteristics of interaction in each segment. I compared the codes with interview responses to find corroborating or disconfirming cases. After creating a table of contradictions, arranged by source within or between activity systems, along with the influence of each contradiction on interaction, I compared and contrasted the cases to create categories of influences.

**ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that one critical component in establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative enquiry is demonstrating its credibility. They described several procedures for enhancing the credibility of a study: *prolonged engagement*, *persistent observation*, *triangulation*, *peer debriefing*, *negative case analysis*, *referential*

*adequacy*, and *member checks*. I used several of these techniques to establish credibility in my study

### **Prolonged Engagement, Persistent Observation, And Triangulation**

*Prolonged engagement* is “the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture,’ testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.408). *Persistent observation* allows the investigator to build meaning from his or her observations by deciding which occurrences are important for further study. Lincoln and Guba stated that “if prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (p. 410). In this study, I spent three months in the classroom among the students. This allowed for both prolonged engagement and persistent observation. A third method recommended by Lincoln and Guba is *triangulation*. Triangulation enhances credibility by “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). I used different data collection methods: observation, analysis of talk, and introspective methods to achieve triangulation.

### **Member Checks**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checking as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 418). Member checking is a process “whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of

those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected” (p. 418). I conducted member checks with participants, both students and teacher, during interviews and follow up conversations to check the accuracy of my interpretations. I conducted additional member check interviews with two participants later in the analysis process nine months after the end of the initial data collection.

### **Peer Debriefing**

Peer debriefing allows a researcher, by sharing findings with a peer, “to test working hypotheses that may be emerging” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 413) and to be questioned about his or her “posture and process” in data analysis. In this way, “the inquirer’s biases are probed, meanings explored, the basis for interpretations clarified” (p. 413). I met several times with my advisor and a peer in my PhD program throughout the data collection and analysis stages of this study to establish and maintain reflexivity and to gain different perspectives to compare with my emergent analyses. My peer, a doctoral student in foreign language education from Korea, was especially helpful in providing the multiple viewpoints from her experiences as a language learner and English teacher, raising important issues for me to consider in my analysis.

### **TRANSCRIPTION**

I have attempted to represent the lively and rapid nature of interaction between the participants in this study by using the following conventions:

[        ]        overlapping speech  
=                linked utterances

CAPS	utterances louder than the rest of speech
(5.0)	pauses longer than 1 second
(( ))	transcriber's comment
h, hh, hhh	exhale, laughter
(h)	laughter within a word



## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS: THE IDIOM SKIT ASSIGNMENT

In this chapter, I present the findings related to the first group assignment, the Idiom Skit. I begin by describing the assignment and then move on to a description of the activity system of each group and the activities of its members. Finally, I describe the contradictions that emerged within and between activity systems for each group.

### THE ASSIGNMENT

The skit activity was the first structured group task of the class. Lisa, the teacher, planned it to wrap up a short unit on idioms that she had incorporated into the syllabus.

The directions for the assignment, printed on a class handout, were as follows:

*In small groups, you will plan a skit (maximum 3 minutes) based on a dialogue using any of the idioms we studied on Monday, 9/20. You may use any of the idioms studied, or additional favorite idioms in your skit, but be sure to include at least 5 idioms introduced Monday. While planning your skit, please be sure to a) Assign everyone a speaking role. B) check the writing for grammar or context errors. The skit should be entertaining and make sense. The meaning of the idiom should make sense within the context of the skit. C) rehearse the skit outside of class.*

(Course Handout)

In the previous meeting, the class had worked in small groups to provide the meanings of nine idioms printed on a handout. At the end of the meeting, the students watched a short clip of Townes Van Zandt performing the song “Pancho and Lefty,” from which several additional idioms for the unit had been taken. On the second day, the students worked together in the same groups to finish further exercises related to these idioms. In the second half of the meeting, Lisa introduced the idiom skit.

The idiom skit was intended to give the students an opportunity to use the idioms they had learned in a creative way. Each group of three students was instructed to plan, compose, and perform a short skit using at least five of the idioms they had studied. The activity was structured to allow the students about 45 minutes of planning in class on that day; in the following meeting, they would have approximately 15 minutes to practice before performing their skit for the class. The skit would be videotaped so that the students could watch their own skits and reflect on their performance. Lisa informed the class that although they would have class time to prepare, they should schedule meeting time outside of class to work on the skit. The skit activity proceeded as follows:

Table 3: The Idiom Skit Schedule

<b>Day</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Day 1: Wednesday	Announce assignment Prepare together (45 min)	Make progress on skit
Day 2: Monday	Perform skit	Perform skit Watch video Give self- and peer-feedback

## **THE GROUPS**

### **Group 1: 10,000 Shoes**

Aki, Jinhee, and Yi-Ning comprised group 1. When the groups formed, Yi-Ning and Aki were already sitting next to each other. Jinhee was absent on this day, leaving eight class members. Thus, as their classmates formed groups of three, Aki and Yi-Ning were left as a pair, with the understanding that Jinhee would be their third member when she returned. Throughout the first day, Yi-Ning and Aki sat parallel to each other, facing the front of the classroom. The two collaborated well, with nearly constant interaction and sharing of ideas about the task. They quickly settled on a broad theme, “cultural

difference,” for a comedy skit. By the end of their planning session, they had chosen the idioms they wanted to incorporate and outlined a plot. On the second day, joined by Jinhee, the group practiced and successfully performed their skit, which they named “10,000 Shoes.”

Aki and Yi-Ning showed a high degree of engagement and intersubjectivity for much of their planning. In the following excerpt, the two discuss how they could use the idiom “beat around the bush” for their “cultural difference” topic:

- Yi-Ning: Or maybe this one we can use like  
because in our culture everybody  
should be more polite and so  
if you want to ask something  
or you want to do something,  
Sometimes we we will do this=  
Aki: =This=  
Yi-Ning: =action=  
Aki: =Action=  
Yi-Ning: Yeah, just ask mo:re...  
and not reallyhhhh  
Aki: Oh we can beat around the bush  
Yi-Ning: mhm  
Aki: Okay let’s think about it yeah  
But what kind of s-, like=  
Yi-Ning: =Situation?  
Aki: Mhm

In this excerpt, the two partners discuss another example of cultural difference:

- Yi-Ning: Or, like, um, could you say culture gap?  
So like for example last time I checked with Jinhee=  
Aki: =Jinhee? Okay=  
Yi-Ning: =and we talked about, I don’t know why,  
but we talked about watermelon  
Aki: Wahhhtermelon? hh okayhh  
Yi-Ning: and she said that’s really expensive  
Aki: uh huh here

Yi-Ning: In Korea  
Aki: In Korea  
Yi-Ning: but in Taiwan it's super chhheap  
Aki: Ah? Yeyeyeyeh=

These two excerpts exhibit some typical characteristics of the interaction between Aki and Yi-Ning. Both members laughed often and appeared to enjoy working together. The two built intersubjectivity through frequent backchanneling, echoing, and utterance completion. Aki was especially active in this way.

### ***10,000 Shoes Group Activity System***

The community for this activity system consisted of the three group members and the teacher, Lisa, all situated within the class as a whole. At this early point in the semester, Lisa, Aki and Yi-Ning were not yet familiar with each other. By contrast, Yi-Ning and Jinhee were close friends who spent substantial time outside of class together. The group followed class rules and the rules for this particular assignment, follows: all students in the group must have a speaking role in the skit; the members should meet outside of class when necessary; and the skit should use a minimum of five idioms learned in class and be a maximum of three minutes in length. Group 1 divided labor equally between the two members on the first day, with Yi-Ning taking a more active role and being in some ways the leader of the dyad. On the first day, Aki and Yi-Ning sketched out a general plot and some ideas for dialog. The group then met Jinhee on the following day and discussed these plans. Jinhee volunteered to write and type up a script

alone at home, which she delivered to the group on the day of the skit. Each member participated in the performance, with Jinhee receiving the largest speaking part.

The 10,000 Shoes group's primary objectives for the skit were to produce a 1-3 minute humorous performance for their class and to learn and use five idioms correctly. The group used a number of physical and psychological artifacts to accomplish their primary objectives. These included paper, writing utensils, assignment handouts, the course textbook, electronic dictionaries, desks, and a computer. Psychological tools used included spoken and written English language, mathematics, background knowledge, and past skit experience.

### ***Yi-Ning***

Yi-Ning's primary goal for the skit was learning how to use idioms in daily life, and she expected that the skit would be helpful for her to learn situations in which she could use them. She also thought that listening to other groups' skit would add still more ideas. However, she also expected it to be difficult to create a story around newly-learned idioms.

In addition to learning about idioms, during her work and interaction in the skit she appeared to engage in several activities focused on her group membership and relationships as their objects. The motives for these activities were *Being a Good Group Member*, *Relationship Building*, and *Having Fun*. These were enacted through actions such as suggesting, joking, asking questions, laughing, and attempting to initiate chat.

*Being a Good Group Member.* When I asked Yi-Ning after the skit to describe the best kind of group work partner, she replied,

*Like what I said, provide ideas. And during discussion—if he's the leader of the group it's fine—but if he or she doesn't, he shouldn't, like, 'you should do what' or like, order people 'you should...' , what you should do. (Yi-Ning)*

These two qualities, active involvement and not assuming illegitimate power over others, are evident in Yi-Ning's interactions with Aki and Jinhee throughout the skit planning and performance.

While planning the skit with Aki, Yi-Ning made numerous suggestions about task approach, topic choice, plot development, and use of idioms. Yi-Ning's biggest single contribution was the idea around which their comedy revolved: the potential for confusion inherent in international currency exchange. The pair then built their story around a misunderstanding based on the 10,000 Won price of a pair of shoes (Won is the currency of South Korea).

As she and Aki worked to build the plot and incorporate idioms, Yi-Ning came up with new ideas very quickly and easily found ways to connect nearly all of the idioms with their topic and evolving storyline. For example,

Yi-Ning: ....Or maybe we can create a situation not shopping  
shopping mall and=

Aki: =uh huh=

=maybe we can talk

about shopping, online shopping, and like this one  
we can say "picture can give more information  
than words alone." Maybe just one of us  
sees some advertisement=

Aki: =mhm=

Yi-Ning: =and we can just use some words  
from advertisements unit=

Aki: =mhm=  
Yi-Ning: =Uh huh.  
Aki: Uh okay.  
Yi-Ning: Like one person sees an advertisement,  
she talk about it with another person  
and a third person join us.

The process of sharing ideas fit with Yi-Ning's conception of how a good group member should act. For her, a good group member was someone who shared their ideas and opinions. Past experiences in group work had given Yi-Ning a preference for partners who spoke up without being asked. She disliked working with people who didn't contribute to discussion: "I really don't like to be a partner with keep silent people and we just work on it." A good partner should also speak up when they feel the group has made a mistake. For this reason, Yi-Ning did not mind group assessment, saying: "before you are graded, you already know—if you think some part is not good you should tell them. You should told them or you should spoke out before the grade."

Later in the semester, however, Yi-Ning also told me that disagreeing with another member of the group could be difficult if that person was not a friend. With those considerations in mind, after the skit had finished, Yi-Ning considered Aki and Jinhee good teammates because "they won't keep silence. They will keep to provide different ideas and join discussions" and they had made her feel comfortable.

Yi-Ning seemed to be the more active partner through her more abundant talk and frequent suggestions, and Aki later identified Yi-Ning as the leader during her interview with me. However, Yi-Ning did not see herself as the group's leader. No one had been selected to lead the group, and the three members had divided the work evenly. With no

one in charge, each member should state their desires politely, rather than ordering others around: “he should, like, ask, ‘is it okay if we do this one?’ Be more polite way.” Yi-Ning accepted many of Aki’s suggestions as they collaborated on the skit. Even when Aki’s suggestion seemed to diverge from the plot or logic they had been developing.

Aki: How where are we going to do this one this idiom,  
 Butterflies in my- In my stomach, I’m nervous.  
 Yi-Ning: But it’s kind it’s like you have some exam or performance  
 Aki: Yeah, so it’s not fit to our skit.  
 Yi-Ning: Mmmm  
 Aki: Fit our skit.  
 Yi-Ning: If you really want  
 Aki: Okay  
 Yi-Ning: Just put one information here, like uh,  
 she said “my sister older hand me down her clothes  
 but I cannot have a important party”=  
 Aki: =Ahhh party=  
 Yi-Ning: =This weekend.  
 And she just saw a dress=  
 Aki: =dress=  
 Yi-Ning: =really official dress online.  
 Because official dress are usually should be expensive  
 Aki: Ah yeah okay.  
 Yi-Ning: If you really want this one=  
 Aki: =dress. She’s=  
 Yi-Ning: =Like she need to have a  
 speech  
 on a in party, or speech in a maybe just like a company party  
 Aki: =Ohkayhhokay=  
 Yi-Ning: =Company party or whatev- Whatever=  
 Aki: =Okay.  
 Yi-Ning: Mhm. And like she’s going to have a speech  
 in a company party  
 so if you want to use this one, you can use

Sharing ideas, accepting the contributions of others, and working to find ways to incorporate divergent ideas appear to be connected with Yi-Ning’s concept of what it



means to be a good group member. For this reason, I proposed *Being a Good Group Member* as a secondary motive for Yi-Ning.

*Having Fun And Relationship Building.* In addition to her approach to the task and group membership, Yi-Ning had more social motives while working with Aki; to have fun and build relationships with others. These were secondary to task-related motives for the majority of the planning session, yet both appeared important to Yi-Ning throughout the day.

*Actually, during the class time we can't chat or really talk to each other, so sometime group working make us have a chance. Every time Lisa she assigned a topic for group work, but it's easy for people maybe finish earlier or something but we can talk about another...maybe our personal life, and that's a chance to chat more with your classmate.*

(Yi-Ning)

These two motives were apparent in Yi-Ning's interactions with Aki. She and Aki chose to create a humorous skit to amuse the audience and themselves. As they worked on it, Yi-Ning laughed and joked often. In addition, Yi-Ning got Aki's attention on several occasions to talk both before and after they focused their work on the task. I will go into greater detail about these occasions in my discussion of contradictions at the end of this section.

Yi-Ning pursued both task- and social- related activities simultaneously for the planning session. On the day of the performance, there was less social talk as Yi-Ning focused on several task-related activities: memorizing and practicing her lines, setting up for and performing the skit, watching her group's performance on video, and filling out a self-evaluation.

## *Aki*

Aki had performed skits before in her junior high school English study. She had enjoyed those performances and was comfortable with the prospect of doing another one in this class. Aki's goals for the skit were "to be confident in front of everyone....to be open and confident" and "I want to remember this one idioms and use it outside the class." The more important of these two goals was learning the idioms. She pursued this goal by making suggestions and trying to incorporate each idiom into the dialog.

*Improving Knowledge of Idioms.* Like Yi-Ning, Aki participated actively in creating the skit. She made fewer suggestions than did Yi-Ning, but many of her suggestions were ultimately included in their performance. For example, she and Aki collaboratively shaped the initial broad topic, "cultural difference":

- Yi-Ning: I'll talk to Jinhee. I think Jinhee she doesn't mind  
so we can do whatever one=  
Aki: =yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.  
Let's think about that.  
Yi-Ning: Chinese Japanese Korean (laughs)  
Aki: Yeah (laugh) or we can do this kind of background=  
Yi-Ning: =uh huh=  
Aki: =Korea  
and China  
Yi-Ning: Maybe in Korea or China will misunderstand (Aki laughs)  
—that kind of background  
Aki: oh yeah yeah yeah. Do you have any experience of gap?  
like culture gap? Culture gap, like something you (unintelligible)  
because of some Japanese culture?  
Yi-Ning: Okay okay

She also contributed the idioms "a penny saved is a penny earned", "around the clock", and some lines of dialog that would end up spoken by her character in the final version of the skit. Aki was more active in the initial stages of trying to choose a topic and in the

later stages of trying to create dialog. In the medial stages of planning, Aki mostly responded to Yi-Ning's suggestions.

*Having Fun.* Aside from trying to improve her knowledge of idioms, Aki engaged in several social activities while working on the skit. One motive for Aki's social activity during the skit planning was *Having Fun*. When asked by Yi-Ning what type of skit they should put on, she chose to do a comedy. Like Yi-Ning, Aki laughed throughout the session and suggested several humorous elements for inclusion in the skit. These suggestions were usually accompanied by her own laughter, signaling that they should be taken as humorous. For example, she suggested that they could build their skit around the three authors of their course textbook, or set the action in the supermarket. For this assignment, having fun appeared to be nearly as important as completing the assignment. In addition, Aki appeared to be very interested in watching the work of other groups. Because another group was working on their skit only a few inches away from her right shoulder, Aki was distracted by their talk and frequently paid attention to them whenever a lull in her work with Yi-Ning arose. She even became engaged in their talk at times. On rehearsal day, she again watched other groups practice whenever she had an opportunity. In her initial interview, Aki had told me that she enjoyed working on skits because they gave her a chance to practice expressions and that watching others perform was fun for her. This may be one reason for her interest in watching other groups throughout this project.

*Being a Good Group Member.* As shown in the excerpts at the beginning of this section, Aki built intersubjectivity during her work with Yi-Ning through back

channeling, finishing or co-constructing sentences, and seeking confirmation. She also showed her understanding of and alignment with Yi-Ning through non-verbal signals such as reaching out to touch her partner's arm or pointing back at Yi-Ning when she made funny comments. Throughout the planning session, Aki showed receptiveness and attention to her interlocutor and agreeableness to Yi-Ning's contributions. For this reason, I have proposed *Being a Good Group Member* as a secondary motive for Aki's social behavior during this interaction.

### ***Jinhee***

Jinhee was absent when the skit was assigned. She had been present for the previous class day (Monday) and the introduction of idioms and practice, but by being absent on Wednesday, she had missed several important points: discussion and practice with several new idioms, the opportunity to go over her idiom homework in class, the skit assignment directions, group formation, and all of the planning done by her partners. As a result, Jinhee was almost completely in the dark about what she was supposed to do for the assignment. Perhaps as a result of this missed day, Jinhee's goals for the skit were different from either of her partners. She was more interested in the performance only: "not learn idioms. Just be confidence people in front of a lot of people; just calm down, and speak clearly, and complete one...I mean prepare whole thing."

The first time that Jinhee heard anything about the assignment was when she met Yi-Ning and Aki on the following day. The three of them worked together for about half an hour between classes to iron out some ideas. Jinhee volunteered to finalize the script at home. As she put it,

*Aki and Yi-Ning, they are already decide to use cultural difference is the main point. But they didn't know how to solve or fluently make the situation, so last Thursday I suggest some new ideas, boom boom boom. So, totally summary of whole situation we wrote last Thursday and using the weekend, I made some whole situation in home by myself and then print them out to them yesterday before class, and then we finally total editing together and retyped and print out.*

(Jinhee)

One important detail that Jinhee did not know about was that the skit was actually going to be performed in front of class, not just read from the page or read in a small group. Jinhee did not know that she'd be performing the skit until just before class began on the day of the performance. Because of this, she said she'd felt a little embarrassed. She had no choice but to spend the short rehearsal period before performing on learning her lines. Nevertheless, she put on a good performance. Although she needed to read some of her lines from the page, she had learned them well enough to make eye contact with her partners, incorporate gestures, play to the crowd, and ad-lib.

Because Jinhee was absent for most of the project, and I have only limited talk data for her, I cannot propose motives for her. However, her actions appeared to be primarily directed towards the goals of learning her lines and giving an adequate presentation. In addition, because of the shock of having to perform publicly with such little preparation, she needed to calm herself down:

*Nothing to think, just do it. Because we were the first group to play. Of course, we had prepare time fifteen, but it was not remember, just prepare "Ah, I have to play in front of the audience." Just make sure my mind and then played.*

(Jinhee)

She would later tell me in an interview after the group presentation assignment that she did not like sudden surprises or changes in plan, but always wanted to have time for careful and thorough preparation.

## 10,000 Shoes Group Contradictions:

This group experienced several contradictions within and between groups that presented them with challenges and learning opportunities. These are represented in Figure 1 below:

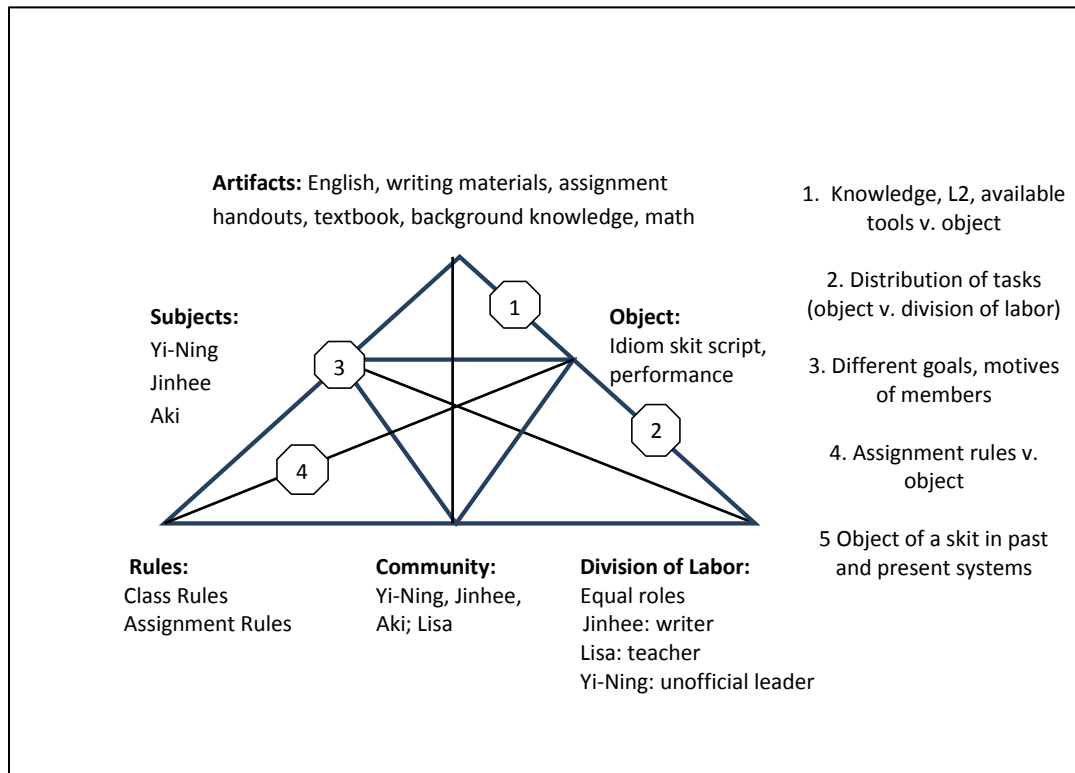


Figure 1: The 10,000 Shoes Group Activity System (Adapted from Engeström, 1987)

First, for Jinhee, there was a contradiction between the object of the group's activity (the skit) and the community's rules (assignment requirements). The requirement that the students use particular idioms in the skit limited their creativity to a certain extent. At first this worried Yi-Ning, who expected the assignment to be difficult:

*I think a little difficult and we really need to think about how should our skit...how should we write down our skit. Because you need to edit the sentence so*

*that means your story is limited. You cannot just expand the story whatever you'd like.* (Yi-Ning)

Nevertheless, Yi-Ning and her partners were still able to find inventive ways to use the idioms.

A second contradiction involved the artifacts available for the students and their object. Because they were free to use idioms from any of the worksheets they had used over the past days, the group members found themselves flipping through several papers and searching from handout to handout for the idioms they wanted to use. One handout with idioms available for the students' use had been turned in for homework and was not available for them to use, which Yi-Ning complained about to Aki. However, these were only minor challenges for the group.

Another contradiction came in the form of the need to create a comedic skit (object) in a second language despite having different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (artifacts). Although Aki said that expressing herself had been a little challenging, it had not caused her any real problems. Jinhee concurred that the task had been easy enough, and language had not caused a problem. The difference in cultural background, moreover, provided not only a chance to learn something about each other, but also the topic for the skit itself. Yi-Ning said in an interview that the cultural difference had given the opportunity to create an interesting idea. She added, "I think it's good, and it can combine different cultures and can have, like, some innovative ideas." Jinhee stated that the difference in culture had been an advantage: "we can use our cultural difference. It's a very special thing, I think."

One contradiction that caused more difficulty than benefit emerged between the division of labor, made necessary by Jinhee's absence, and the group's object (the skit).

The inability to finalize certain decisions on the first day, followed by Jinhee's decision to write and type the script herself, caused the group to lose preparation time. The first time the group was actually able to see the final version of the script was only a few minutes before they were scheduled to perform. Jinhee and Yi-Ning had to use most of the rehearsal time for learning their lines. Aki, who seemed to have learned hers more quickly, attempted to discuss some other aspects of the performance, such how the group would enter and where they would stand. She also commented on Lisa's rubric for the performance, noting that they would be expected to face the audience. However, her comments received no response because her partners were reading their scripts. This hurried and insufficient preparation affected the quality of the skit, as Jinhee and Yi-Ning had not memorized their lines and the group lacked polish or chemistry.

During the above rehearsal period, Aki and her partners were pursuing different immediate goals. Two other contradictions in actions and activities emerged between Aki and Yi-Ning. The first contradiction involved different approaches to the task.

Although both Aki and Yi-Ning had learning idioms as a primary goal for the skit, the two took different approaches to creating it. Aki sometimes attempted to build the skit from the bottom up, by beginning with trying to decide on words and idioms to use and from there to find a topic. On a few occasions in the early stages of their work, before they had firmly decided their topic, Aki asked Yi-Ning if there was any vocabulary she wanted to use and looked through her textbook and handouts for ideas. Later, Aki attempted to figure out the content and the wording of exact turns of dialog and wanted to write these down for later use. By contrast, Yi-Ning approached the task of



skit-creation by first choosing a topic and leaving the details, for example, the dialog, unwritten. She insisted that they did not need to decide such things or write them down until later, but rather simply come up with the general storyline and an outline of the dialog.

She had two reasons for this. The first was that she felt finding the main idea was the appropriate starting point, from which everything else would grow. A second goal was allowing her friend Jinhee to participate equally. Because Jinhee was absent, she would not have a say in the planning process. Yi-Ning wanted to avoid writing the script and finalizing any decisions until Jinhee could be included. As she later told me,

*I think that was the reason--because Jinhee, she was absent. So we don't want to make her feel we just put something on her and just ask her to do whatever we said. So that's why we just decided we want the general idea and the topic come out that day, and then after we met her we can really discuss together. And she can have more participation.*

(Yi-Ning)

This resulted in an alternation between top-down and bottom-up approaches. It also affected the interaction between the two partners, because each time Aki chose to look for specific idioms or vocabulary to use in the skit, she and Yi-Ning began to search through their papers and text, and conversation stopped. This was sometimes followed by disengagement by one or both partners. When Yi-Ning used her approach, in which she started with a concrete situation, shopping, and attempted to connect the idioms to the situation, the ideas and collaborative dialog flowed rapidly. Aki later noted that this tension between the two approaches had made her feel somewhat uncomfortable, but that it had not been a serious problem. Through the two approaches, Yi-Ning and Aki were

able both to imagine a variety of situations in which one might use the idioms they were studying and practice saying them as they discussed particular points of dialog.

The third contradiction between group members' activity systems occurred in the opening and closing stages of the planning session. This contradiction emerged between Aki's motives *Having Fun* and one of Yi-Ning's motive, *Relationship Building*. Before and after the task actually began, Yi-Ning attempted to get Aki's attention to talk to her on several occasions. First, as Lisa was giving task directions to the class, Yi-Ning reached out to touch Aki, spoke to her briefly, and laughed. Aki smiled, nodded, and returned to listening to Lisa. This pattern was repeated three times, with Aki in each case only nodding or responding briefly. Whether she was intent on showing respect to her teacher or on getting needed information for task completion, Aki prioritized other motives over attending to her partner. Later, when the pair seemed to have come to a stopping point in their work, Aki began to disengage from the interaction. Another group, sitting next to her, had attracted her attention numerous times during her work with Yi-Ning. At one point, she had even entered into their conversation, helping Emi work out the wording of the idiom "break a leg." As the pair had reached a conclusion in their work, Aki again became involved with watching this group practice their skit and listening to their discussion with Lisa, who had approached them to explain the meaning of some idioms. A few times over the next two minutes, Yi-Ning, who had yawned and appeared disengaged, tapped Aki on the shoulder to get her attention, and made comments to her about their skit but received only simple acknowledgement. After this point, Yi-Ning seemed to disengage completely. Aki occasionally turned to look briefly

at her but turned back to the other group. Yi-Ning finally took out a small notebook and started working on something else.

One final contradiction for the 10,000 Shoes Group emerged between Jinhee's past experience with skits and the local practices of this ESL class. Jinhee felt that a skit was for fun, not really an academic activity. This was based on her past experiences of performing skits in informal language classes. She had never performed one before in an academic program. Although this contradicted with her previous experience, she said that she had found it useful for learning how to use idioms in different situations.

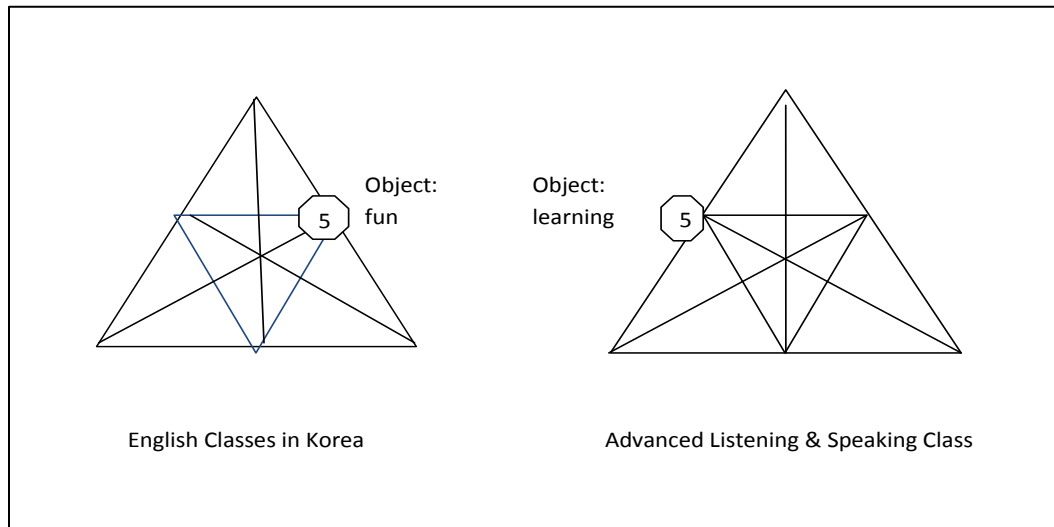


Figure 2: Jinhee's past & present language class skit activity systems (Adapted from Engeström, 1987)

## **Group 2: The Happy Family**

The Happy Family group was extremely active and lively. Hyeon-Sook and Kaori, two of the quietest students in most class activities, and Antonio, one of the most talkative, spent the entire planning session in constant talk and laughter. Their creation of the story of a parent-teen disagreement was marked by joking, teasing, improvisation, and stepping into and out of character. As a result, the lines between on- and off- task talk were blurred.

### ***The Happy Family Group Activity System***

The Happy Family Group, like The 10,000 Shoes Group, shared the communal goals of creating and performing a funny skit and getting a good grade. They followed class and assignment rules and divided labor equally among themselves. There was no appointed leader, but Antonio and Hyeon-Sook did the majority of speaking and Kaori took notes. Lisa checked in with the group periodically but largely left them to work independently. The group employed physical artifacts such as writing materials, assignment handouts, and their textbook to accomplish their work. Their activity was also mediated by language and accumulated knowledge and experience.

### ***Hyeon-Sook***

Hyeon-Sook had several goals for the idiom skit assignment. One goal was to learn idioms, especially for the planning session. However, two other goals competed for her attention during the assignment. As she said in her post-task interview, she simply wanted to do her part to complete the assignment and not let her partners down:

*Just I want to practice make a role, then just I want to complete my part but it's not perfect. So I'm sorry about other team players. Every time, I'm afraid that my skill is low, then I give some disadvantage for others. It's a problem for team play. If we get a same score in a group but my skill is low, then I give some disadvantage to others. So I worry about that.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

Another goal for the skit was to have a good time: "I wanted a fun thing because class is sometimes boring...just sometimes (laughs) and in fact, my oral skill is not good so I need some humor to cover my mistake or--so, I want." (Hyeon-Sook) Indeed, it seemed that many of her actions during the skit planning session were motivated by the desire to be a good team mate and to have fun. Both of these were in turn related to a desire to cover up or compensate for her perceived lack of English proficiency.

Hyeon-Sook seemed to enjoy her interactions with Kaori and Antonio. She laughed and joked continuously and engaged in several verbal jousts with Antonio. In addition, she was extremely active in making humorous suggestions for the skit's situation, plot, dialog, and idioms. Her first suggestion came immediately after the group started their work. As she later told me, because idioms are often used in giving advice, a scenario with parental advice seemed to be a natural fit for the assignment. She quickly conceived of the idea of a family disagreement. In this excerpt, she proposed the scenario for their skit:

Antonio: We need ideas.  
Kaori: So:  
Antonio: Hyeon-Sook. Ideas.  
Hyeon-Sook: Huh?  
Antonio: Ideas.  
Hyeon-Sook: Ideas? Do you need ideas?  
Antonio: Yes.  
Hyeon-Sook: Okay, I'll give you ideashhh.  
How about, I have to buy a new cell phone.

Antonio: You have to what?  
Hyeon-Sook: I have to buy a (unintelligible)  
Antonio: We have to put like a little story  
Hyeon-Sook: I have to buy a new bag so I need money  
so I...I ask, "Father? Father?"  
Antonio: Father? ((all three laugh. Kaori laughs especially loudly))  
This is getting better, right here.  
Hyeon-Sook: You are sister.  
Kaori: You are brother.  
Antonio: Jeez...we're gonna lose it.

This excerpt illustrates several recurrent patterns in the group's interactions: Antonio's request for input from his partners, Hyeon-Sook's creative suggestions, laughter from all the group members, and Antonio's commentary on the process.

In the early stages of the planning session, Hyeon-Sook, encouraged by her partners, built on this early start.

Kaori: And then?  
Hyeon-Sook: Yeah, then, so I need money but you arehhh [Kaori: (laugh)]  
Don't want to give a money [Kaori: unn] so s:o  
Antonio: Okay, lemme see. Your parents and you want to buy a house, is that it?  
Hyeon-Sook: House?  
Antonio: Yeah, what do you wanna buy?  
Hyeon-Sook: House? Just a bag or something...house is really big.  
Antonio: You need something that we can use, at least five so that's not bad.  
So in the beginning, you will be like hmm  
how we gonna start?  
HOW do we gonna START?  
Hyeon-Sook: I don't know! I just give you IDEA.  
Kaori: hahahahaha  
Antonio: Yeah okay, so what are you gonna buy=  
Kaori: =hahahaha=  
Antonio: =since I'm the father,  
I gotta give the negative here. It's like the point of view.  
Hyeon-Sook: I give...I already give an idea=  
Kaori: =and then=  
Hyeon-Sook: =then you develop=  
Kaori: =and then and then=

Antonio: We're gonna go=  
 Kaori: =and then=  
 Antonio: =with your idea so we=  
 Kaori: =keep on going keep on going=

Here, Antonio again sought input from Hyeon-Sook, and she insisted that she had provided the seed, and he should make it grow. Kaori then encouraged Hyeon-Sook to continue. This pattern was repeated throughout the planning session—Hyeon-Sook and Antonio engaged in playful talk over skit content or group role. Kaori attempted to encourage the creative flow.

As the group continued to work, they built the dialog line by line, changing occasionally when their plot ran into logical problems. As they continued, the dialog, situated within the overall plot, emerged from individual idioms. At one point, Hyeon-Sook and Antonio began to practice based on their vague plot outline. They then spent several minutes improvising lines, making each other laugh, and voicing their characters even as they broke out of the dialog. In the following excerpt, they are so engrossed in the interaction that they go in and out of character and harass each other even when Lisa has come to check on their progress:

Lisa: You have many stories.  
 Antonio: She told us she's a mother.  
 And she wants to interpret a girl,  
 a young girl that wants to quit school  
 to go to the music industry,  
 which we don't know if she is that good.  
 And I asked her, "what would you do  
 if your son comes to you and say that  
 'I wanna be a singer and quit school.'  
 She said it's okay  
 Kaori: =(laugh)=  
 Antonio: Which it's NOT. Hhh. IT'S NOT OKAY.

As he said this, he tapped on Hyeon-Sook's desk with his pencil. Kaori laughed again.

Lisa: So maybe you should be the father. Are you the son?  
Antonio: I AM ALREADY. And she's a mother (gesturing towards Kaori)  
but I want her opinion in real life.  
But she can't give it.  
Lisa: Ah that's alright. That's her real opinion. She says it's okay.  
Hyeon-Sook: Yeah, why not? WHY NOT? ((making a tough face)) HUH?  
Antonio: How old is he?  
Hyeon-Sook: (laugh)  
Lisa: He's six, seven.  
Hyeon-Sook: If he's over 18, then he can.  
Lisa: ha ha. If he's over 18, he can decide.  
Hyeon-Sook: ((to Antonio)) Yeah.  
Antonio: Not in our history.  
Lisa: Ha not in your story? Why not?  
Antonio: Because 18, he's still depending on us, so...  
Lisa: ahaha. You guys are funny. ((walking away))  
Antonio: It's true! "As long as you live in this house,"  
that's what many parents say.  
I'm responsible for you  
so the last decision comes from us.  
And we don't want you to sing without study.  
You wanna sing, you're gonna have to go study...

Throughout this session, Hyeon-Sook appeared to try to do her part for the team by adding ideas. In addition, her frequent laughter, displays of mock exasperation with Antonio, and humorous suggestions seemed driven by her desire to have fun and create a light atmosphere. This atmosphere allowed her to direct attention away from her English speaking skill.

### ***Antonio and Kaori***

On his post-task reflection sheet, Antonio's goal for the skit planning session was stated as: "I wanted to learn from classmates because is always good to learn new things."



(Antonio, post-task reflection) Antonio spent the entire class collaboratively inventing plot and dialog with his partners, joking, and teasing. He also on many occasions seemed to try to control the group's production by keeping them on task and seeking their participation.

I was not able to interview Antonio, but many of his actions during the skit planning appeared to have been driven towards the immediate goals of getting his partners to provide input or make decisions, making others laugh, providing his own suggestions, and keeping the group on track. He made several strong suggestions for the skit, often phrasing them with "you're gonna," "we're gonna," or "I'm gonna." He twice defended his own suggestions when Hyeon-Sook contested them, with each partner conceding once.

Although he made suggestions, he also attempted to get others to contribute or make decisions. For example, on several occasions, he asked others to make or give ideas. He also gave Hyeon-Sook the authority to make decisions about the direction she wanted to take the skit, saying "you can choose" and "how do we gonna start?" In addition, he specifically attempted several times to get Kaori to contribute to the dialog.

Finally, Antonio appeared to try to keep everyone on track. For example, on two occasions, when Hyeon-Sook appeared to be enjoying improvisation too much or to be getting off track, Antonio chided her saying "I need you to focus." At other times, he caught himself getting off track and attempted to get back on task.

In some ways, by being active, making suggestions, asking for input, and trying to move the group forward, Antonio appeared to be trying to lead the group. In others,

however, for example in his attempts to delegate decision-making and his own tendency to get off track, he did not seem to want to lead.

Kaori's goals for the skit planning session were "to decide roles and then to try to complete the story." (Kaori, post-task reflection) She was the least talkative member of the group. She primarily encouraged Antonio and Hyeon-Sook to keep coming up with creative ideas. However, on one occasion, after a break from talk in which Lisa discussed a homework assignment with Antonio, Kaori conceived the idea that gave structure to Hyeon-Sook's scenario and that would eventually form the plot:

Kaori: Okay, Uh I wanna I wanna continue to your story.  
My concept is that um one person, a high school student  
don't...who don't want to go to college  
but he or she wants to be a musician

She then proceeded to map out her idea for the plot all the way to the conclusion, taking the lead in the negotiation of this part of the story for the next few minutes. Although she remained engaged during the entire planning session, after this short burst of activity, Kaori rarely spoke except in short utterances. Despite, or perhaps because of, Antonio's repeated requests for her to speak up, Kaori remained largely silent.

Despite Kaori's silence during the planning stage, Hyeon-Sook noted that Kaori would later be the leader of the group on the second day, when they actually rehearsed and performed their skit. Kaori created the final script, initiated rehearsal, and gave Antonio advice about the upcoming performance.

### ***Happy Family Group Contradictions***

The Happy Family Group did not appear to experience many contradictions. Because I interviewed only Hyeon-Sook, I cannot report any contradictions experienced by Antonio or Kaori. Two contradictions that occurred for Hyeon-Sook involved the division of labor and artifact use in relation to her goals, as represented in Figure 2.

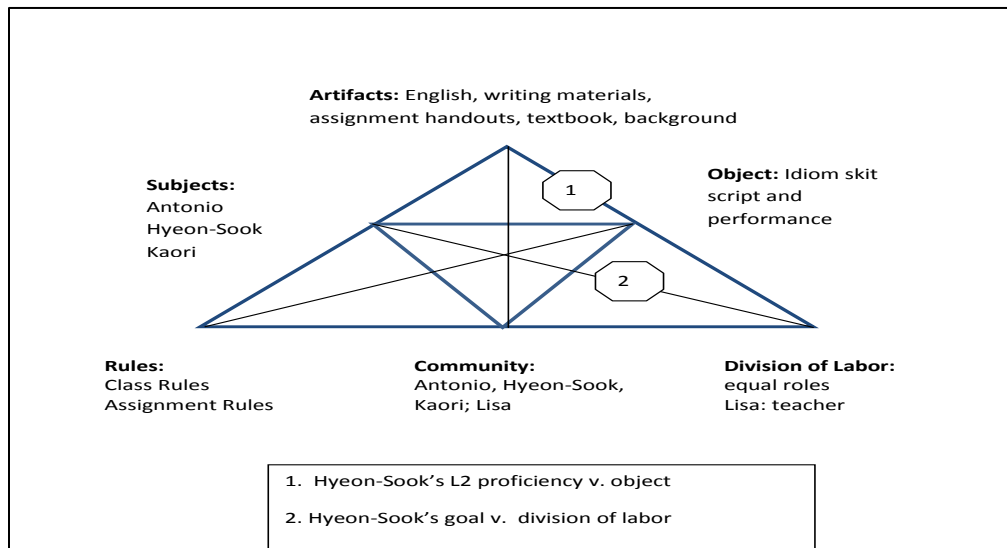


Figure 3: The Happy Family Group Activity System (Adapted from (Engeström, 1987))

Most of the contradictions that caused difficulties for Hyeon-Sook involved her English proficiency. She commented after the task that understanding others and being understood had been a challenge.

*Even we cannot use perfect English we can understand because we're in the same situation and same topic, so sometimes I'm amazed "wow they can understand my speaking" because I cannot use a perfect sentence. But sometimes we cannot understand each other because she uses Japanese style English, I use Korean style English. We cannot make sense sometimes.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

She said that context helped her to make meaning together with her partners, but there had been times when she had to give up on being understood.

Because she lacked confidence in her speaking, Hyeon-Sook wanted to avoid a large speaking role in the skit. However, because of the rules of the assignment, she was expected to speak. The division of labor that evolved during the planning session distributed speaking roles unevenly as Kaori did not contribute any lines of dialog to the skit. Hyeon-Sook then realized that she and Antonio had collaborated to build her own part (the daughter) into the starring role. At this point, she asked to change parts. She asked to be one of the parents, but this request was denied by Antonio, who, joking, said that she, a parent in real life, needed to take on a new role. Later, Hyeon-Sook voiced dissatisfaction with her role. When Antonio said the story was done and asked, “are you ready?” And Kaori asked, “Do you understand?”, Hyeon-Sook replied:

Hyeon-Sook: Yeah, mostly but I think you and you say a lot. A lot.

Kaori: Aloud?

Hyeon-Sook: A lot.

Antonio: A lot of what?

Hyeon-Sook: A lot of speech.

Antonio: So you’re saying, speak nothing?

Hyeon-Sook: Ah...no...

Hyeon-Sook, who, because of her low evaluation of her own English proficiency, had worried at the start about her ability to do her part in the skit, now found herself having to speak more than anyone else. As she later told me,

*...because daughter’s saying is a lot and finished the script so Ohhh I just wanted some small thing, so I wanted to change....Antonio or Kaori is better than me, but they didn’t talk the same, maybe. I don’t know.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

Despite her efforts to get a role with fewer lines, the skit went forward with Hyeon-Sook as its central figure.

Despite these contradictions, Hyeon-Sook reported feeling satisfied with the group's work process. The three team mates had worked together harmoniously. "Antonio is humorous and sometimes friendly," she said, but Kaori is "more correct or some perfect. She was perfect to make some complete." She added, "It's a good harmony. One is humorous, another is more perfect person, so just I joined." "I'm middle. I'm like middle." Through the largely harmonious functioning of the group, she felt she had achieved her goals and enjoyed the assignment:

*We can find out appropriate idioms and I can understand well about idioms.... We can understand exactly the meaning of idiom. It's interesting activity.*

(Hyeon-Sook, Post task reflection)

## **CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS: THE GROUP PRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT**

In this chapter, I present the findings related to the second group assignment, the Group Presentation, in which the three members of the 10,000 Shoes Group, Jinhee, Yi-Ning, worked in separate groups. I present these two assignments in separate chapters in order to present a clearer narrative of the work done by each participant in their groups. I begin by describing the assignment and then move on to a description of the activity system of each group and the activities of its members. Finally, I describe the contradictions that emerged within and between activity systems for each group.

### **THE ASSIGNMENT**

The Group Presentation was the class' second structured group activity. Each student had already delivered two presentations to the class—the first was the skit, and the second was an individual presentation about an aspect of their own culture. Lisa described her rationale for giving a group presentation thus:

*I thought working together would be more productive for them in terms of the process and putting it together and learning and using English to do that. And the other thing is that in an American university, they do have group projects, and I wanted them to learn, you know, experience that too.*

(Lisa, interview)

The theme for this presentation was “Science” and Lisa planned it to be integrated into the “science” thematic unit from the text, with the goal of providing a speaking activity that allowed students to practice vocabulary from the science unit.

*I wanted to integrate the different activities in class with what we're working on and I thought that would be a good opportunity for them to use the vocabulary that we learned, and put into practice some of the things that they talked about in the unit, the scientific experiments and the three basic steps to the scientific method and all of that. So although they're studying about this, I wanted them to really experience it, too.*

(Lisa, Interview)

Each group of three students was assigned the task of finding and reading an interesting research study and then reporting on it to their peers in a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation. The students were allowed freedom in choosing their topic and research article, but Lisa recommended that they not choose something too complicated or technical for the intended audience:

*I just wanna say one thing about that. Find an interesting experiment but make sure it's not too complicated. 'Cause remember you only have 15 minutes and you don't want to get bogged down with a lot of vocabulary that the rest of the class doesn't understand. And you're going to need to explain the experiment in a way that everybody can understand what happened.*

(Lisa, class observation, 11/1/10)

Lisa had planned the project to take four class periods (two weeks) and structured it in the following way:

Table 4: The Group Presentation Assignment Planned Schedule

Day	Description	Objective:
Day 1: Monday	Assignment of presentation, preparation in computer lab	Choose a topic Divide up the work
Day 2: Wednesday	Videotaped rehearsal	Rehearse presentation
Day 3: Monday	Feedback	watch video fill out self-evaluation receive teacher feedback
Day 4: Wednesday	Final presentation	Present final version of presentation

Lisa planned to give students one hour of class time to research and prepare their presentations on Day 1. Their rehearsals on Day 2 were to be videotaped so that students could watch and assess their own performances in order to improve it for the actual, final presentation on Day 5. However, Lisa had to deviate from her initial plan. When it became clear late in the first planning session on Day 1 that the students needed more time to research and prepare, Lisa revised the schedule to allow for one more 45-minute in-class preparation session so that the actual schedule as it was conducted took three weeks:

Table 5: The Group Presentation Assignment Schedule

<b>Day</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Day 1: Monday	Assignment of presentation, preparation in computer lab	choose a topic divide up the work
Day 2: Wednesday	Preparation in computer lab	Continue working on presentation
Day 3: Monday	Videotaped rehearsal	Rehearse presentation
Day 4: Wednesday	Feedback	Watch video fill out self-evaluation receive teacher feedback
Day 5: Monday	Final presentation	Present final version of presentation

Lisa had formed the groups ahead of time, using these criteria: (1) groups should not contain any two members who spoke the same first language, and (2) groups should be comprised of members who had not worked together on the skit. This yielded the



following groups: Group A (Kaori, Rami, and Yi-Ning), Group B (Antonio, Emi, and Jinhee), and Group C (Hyeon-Sook, Marisol, and Aki) When she announced the assignment, Lisa set only two conditions on the students' work. First, the groups were free to divide the presentation and distribute the work in any way they liked, as long as the work was shared equitably. Second, each group was informed that, although they would have class time to prepare for their presentation, they were expected to meet outside of class to finish their work.

## **THE GROUPS**

### **The Harmonious Group**

This group put Jinhee together with Emi and Antonio. Emi, a 21 year old exchange student from Japan, had worked with Jinhee on a few occasions in the class. Emi was of Korean-Japanese heritage, so she often expressed interest in learning about Korean culture or language from Jinhee and Hyeon-Sook. She also seemed interested in learning ASL from Rami and Spanish from Marisol. She had developed friendly relationships with most of the class, and often spent time chatting or playing with Marisol and Antonio. This group's work over the five classes was characterized by a lot of talk and jointly-focused attention, and by a relaxed atmosphere with a great deal of joking and teasing. This was promoted by the combination of personalities of the group members, by Jinhee's leadership, and by the interesting topic and media they chose. Because of Jinhee's organization and coordination of the group, I have named this group *The Harmonious Group*.

### ***Group Activity System***

The three members of The Harmonious Group used a variety of physical and psychological tools to mediate their activity and accomplish their tasks. All three used computers and the internet to search for information and to communicate with each other outside of class. Emi, who on day 1 discovered a video of an experiment conducted by the filmmaker Morgan Spurlock on McDonalds food, primarily searched for videos using YouTube, the HD trailer gallery, and WebMD. She also used Wikipedia, Google, JSTOR, and the Good Psychology webpage to find additional information. Antonio primarily used Wikipedia and Google in his search for articles, images, and other information related first to plastic surgery (his first topic choice) and then food additives. Jinhee brought her own laptop computer on day 1 but did not appear to use it extensively. Instead, she spent much of the two class periods planning using pencil, paper, and a highlighter. Throughout the project, the three used email to send each other sources and discuss the organization of the presentation. Finally, Jinhee used PowerPoint to put the presentation together. Other tools used by the group included assignment handouts and self-evaluation rubrics.

The group also manipulated their physical space and tools in a way that encouraged interaction. Jinhee brought her own laptop computer and sat between her partners (a position she occupied each time they met). By using her own computer, she was able to sit in a space where there was no desktop, thereby reducing the space between the three. At many times during their interaction, both Antonio and Emi oriented

their bodies to face each other, parallel across Jinhee's line of sight, thus creating a closed space for their communication. When this happened, Jinhee rolled her own chair back slightly to allow her partners to see each other clearly.

In this group, as in the other two, work was mandated by Lisa to be distributed equally. All three members were involved in decision-making, and Lisa largely left the group to work on its own. However, there was a clear leader in The Harmonious Group. There was no discussion of leadership, but Jinhee from the beginning began to organize, coordinate, and direct the group. The other members appeared to sanction her leadership. Antonio did not appear to want to take the lead—in the first minutes of Day 1, he attempted to sort out the question of group leadership:

- Antonio: We're gonna choose a topic, the three of us.  
And we're gonna research and divide in three parts.=
- Emi: =[yeah]=
- Jinhee: =[mhm]=
- Antonio: =And then we're gonna present. I don't know who's the head here.  
Are you? You the=
- Jinhee: =[you, you]=
- Emi: =[evenly]=
- Antonio: =gonna present first. (2.0) Hhh

As Jinhee began to emerge as leader, Antonio did not protest her decisions and appeared to tacitly acknowledge her leadership. Emi expressed her approval enthusiastically near the end of the second preparation session:

- Lisa: ((to class)) ...by the final presentation, I'd like to see the bibliography.
- Jinhee: Okay?

Emi: Leader. Leader! Hhh  
 Jinhee: hhhokay. If I can, I can make a PowerPoint first Friday  
 And then send it to you by email.  
 Emi: Thank you. Thank you leader, thank you.

### ***Jinhee***

When she heard the directions for the group presentation assignment, Jinhee said she initially felt embarrassed. She did not expect that a group presentation in an ESL class would deal with an academic topic like “science.” Rather, she expected to be assigned a topic related to culture, since ESL classes have students from different cultures and this is a common theme. The topic “science” worried her because she felt she didn’t have much background knowledge about the topic.

When the group began work, Jinhee started to establish herself as the leader of her group. In leading the group, she pursued several goals—staying organized, meeting assignment requirements, and finishing early. *Leading the group* was her primary motivation for much of her activity, and *Having Fun* was a secondary motive.

Initially, when her group first began working in the computer lab, Jinhee was unsure what the presentation assignment was all about. In a later interview, she admitted, “At first, I totally didn’t understand what she want me to do.” Jinhee set about trying to clarify what she felt were vague instructions regarding the task:

Jinhee: (10.0) Actually I don’t understand (2.5)  
 what we-- choose a topic [what’s for] for what?  
 Emi: [Yeah me neither]  
 Antonio: Oh you’re gonna speak.  
 Jinhee: Speak? Hh  
 Antonio: Huh huh  
 Jinhee: an(hhh)imals animals what? What animals?

Hhealth? Health for what?  
 Antonio: That's the point of oral skill--speak a lot.  
 Jinhee: The experiment what?

She then asked both her partners if they understood exactly what the assignment was. Later, when Antonio returned from a discussion with the teacher about the assignment instructions, Jinhee asked him what he had found out. Once the directions were clarified, Jinhee began trying to get the group to make decisions that would give their presentation a definite shape. The first step was choosing a topic together: She twice said "Choose a topic" and later also suggested a topic of her own—the effects of stress on eating. When the group seemed tenuously to accept Emi's choice, "preservatives in MacDonald's food," Jinhee attempted to establish this firmly as the group's decided topic:

Jinhee: Okay if we choose the topic, don't worryhhh  
 Macdonald's, how can we make the 15 presentation?  
 So we need to talk about the chemical,  
 chemical resource in food?  
 Antonio: Chemicals=  
 Jinhee: =mhm=  
 Antonio: =on fruit?  
 Jinhee: Chemi--In food.

Jinhee: (5.0) And then we choose the topic like...

Jinhee then began writing down an outline, talking to herself as she wrote: "who when where why"; "MacDonald's video." And one final time, she checked with the group to make sure they were all on the same page:

Jinhee: Then, our topic is chemicals?  
 Antonio: Ef[fects?]

Jinhee: [Chem]icals...yeah  
 Antonio: Yeah I put this one--the effects of using chemicals in food.  
 or you think I should try...

Later, Jinhee laid out her vision of what the presentation would look like:

Jinhee: Okay. Then your topic will be the chemical resources=  
 Emi: =yeah=  
 Jinhee: =in food, so we start the  
 showing the video the two you found =  
 Emi: =Yeah yeah yeah mhm  
 Jinhee: And we explain what is the chemical=  
 Emi: =yeah=  
 Jinhee: =res— sources or whatever=  
 Emi: =mhm=  
 Jinhee: =and explain and we expect chemical food on our body  
 Emi: Yeah yeah (unintelligible)  
 Jinhee: (1.0) and...  
 Emi: Mhm (unintelligible) some chemical  
 Jinhee: And so I read some article from the internet  
 and the people found some ingredients  
 or some nutrition things=  
 Emi: =yeah=  
 Jinhee: =from the bread.  
 Bread. Do you know the bread?  
 Emi: Bread?  
 Jinhee: Bread.  
 Emi: Bread?  
 Jinhee: Bread.  
 Emi: Ah yeah. Okay.  
 Jinhee: Yeah, bread. Bread. And bread has some ingredients,  
 so it is going to continue one month  
 Emi: =mm=  
 Jinhee: =without any change.  
 Emi: yeah  
 Jinhee: So: the writer let us know to this, this, this, this ingredient  
 make food uh too long. So don't buy eat  
 or don't eat=  
 Emi: =yeah=  
 Jinhee: =these chemical. So let us led to them  
 the chemical kinds.  
 Emi: Yea::h

Jinhee: mm. And finally, how to prevent the chemical food,  
or the way we need to conclusion right?

Jinhee's primary activity in this session was organizing and directing, spurred by the motivation of controlling the group's progress and production. Besides organizing the information, she also initiated most discussions of important group tasks: choosing the topic, deciding how to use the 15 minutes of presentation time, dividing up the tasks among group members, and setting up an after-class meeting.

Although she took the role of leader, the majority of Jinhee's directives were stated without direct commands. They were usually worded as statements of necessity "We need...", or as questions, "Maybe we need to meet before Wednesday class," "So we need to talk about the chemical, chemical resource in food?" "then your topic will be....so we start the....and we explain....," "we need to conclusion, right?," "How can we divide the work?," "How can we make the 15 presentation?" In this way, she simultaneously requested an action be taken by the group and solicited approval or suggestions.

Jinhee laughed often during this session and appeared to enjoy working with her partners. She usually responded positively to Antonio and Emi's jokes but made only a couple of her own: At one point she teased Antonio, telling him to wake up and snapping her fingers when he seemed to have switched tracks to a different topic. Later, there was this bit of joking between Antonio and Jinhee:

Antonio: (2.0) I'm going to ask my friend Wiki.  
Jinhee: O your friend?  
Antonio: =huh huh huh=

Jinhee: = He's my friend=  
 Antonio: =it's=  
 Jinhee: =No, he's my frie:hhnd hhh  
 Antonio: He's a good guy.  
 Jinhee: yeah

A few moments later, as the group watched the "Super Size Me" clip showing fast food's effects on the body, Jinhee commented, "That's liver? Oh my God." Her focus appeared primarily to be that of making progress on the task; she did not appear to have "having fun" or "relationship building" as primary motives. These appeared to be subordinate for her for most of the session.

During the second planning session, Jinhee continued to serve as leader. Her role consisted primarily of three tasks: Organizing the information and making the PowerPoint, coordinating the work of the group, and initiating important tasks. Throughout the session, she alternated between her two partners checking in on each individually in order to get information to plug into her storyboard. First, she checked in with Antonio to find out how he was progressing in his search for information about additives:

Jinhee: [Okay ummm]  
 Did you find some effects  
 on food additives in Wi[kipedia]?  
 Antonio: [videos?]  
 Jinhee: No.  
 Antonio: Some what?  
 Jinhee: Some effects...they have? By category.  
 Antonio: ((Unintelligible)) Oh I'll find it wait  
 Jinhee: Okay then I will make order.  
 We need to PowerPoint right?

Jinhee later explained to me why she volunteered to make the PowerPoint storyboard:



*....after class we...we didn't...we will not meet together so just take some part from each of you; for this I needed—I thought I needed to make a plan of PowerPoint. Then I ordered my members, our members, 'you need to fill out this part. I will fill out this part, you fill out this part' so I made some storyboard.*

(Jinhee)

By volunteering to make the PowerPoint, Jinhee could ensure that the team emerged from the work session with a tangible product, knowing that there would be little more time when the group could meet face to face before presentation day. She then turned to Emi and asked her if they would show her video first. She confirmed with Emi that it would be first, and then asked her to send the link to her by email so that she could include it in the presentation.

As the other two members continued to search for material, Jinhee created the storyboard, checking with Emi to see if she wanted to include a second video and then suggesting that a second one could be used as a “hook” to get the audience’s attention at the beginning of the presentation. Later, she turned to Antonio and asked what definition and categories he wanted to use. She worked closely with Antonio over the next few minutes to help him organize the vast amount of information he had found on food additives. Antonio had found in the literature that additives were divided into three categories: sweeteners, preservatives, and colors. He intended to provide three examples of each category, along with deleterious health effects of each. The two then worked together to decide on a way to represent this in the slides. At this point, Jinhee demonstrated that she was the physical and metaphorical hub of the group—talking to Antonio, she reached out, grabbed Emi’s arm lightly, and said, “Okay let’s do it together. How can we make? The PowerPoint?” At this point, the three were jointly focused on

the task of making the PowerPoint. She talked aloud as she wrote to confirm each point. For each new section of the storyboard, she asked for confirmation or suggestions from the group: “Do you wanna show some video?”; “Showing the MacDonald experiment, then three is definition, right?”; “And how to make the categories? Divide two parts? You wanna divide it to two parts?” She completed Antonio’s utterances in this segment as they scripted out his section:

Jinhee:	(private speech as she writes) Show food additives. Definition and this is the category. And how to make the categories? Divided two parts? You wanna divide it two parts?
Antonio:	The categories?
Jinhee:	Mhm
Antonio:	Yeah. We wanna call it three, right? Three. Or two for each.
Jinhee:	Flavoring=
Antonio:	=We’re gonna say [first the] flavorings and sweeteners=
Jinhee:	[inaudible] =okay fla=
Antonio:	=I’m sorry. Flavorings=
Jinhee:	=and sweeteners. Second?
Antonio:	Second’s gonna be... [preservatives]
Jinhee:	[preservation] Preservation and three...
Antonio:	Ummmm colors. Color additives and (inaudible)
Jinhee:	And effects right?
Antonio:	Yeah, two for each.

Jinhee continued to lead the discussion by asking questions of Antonio until they had his section scripted in the storyboard. Then she debriefed Emi on the outline. Later, Jinhee requested that the group plan their conclusion: “Let’s think about how can we make conclusion.”

In addition to getting information from everyone and keeping everyone on the same page, Jinhee also took the lead in ensuring that the work would continue outside of class by getting everyone's cell phone number and suggesting that they needed to meet. She suggested the time and place for the meeting, asking each member if her choice was okay. Finally, she sought the group's suggestions on how to present the effects of the two sections of the presentation—Emi's MacDonald's effects and Antonio's preservation effects.

Once again, Jinhee organized and drove the group forward through a combination of questions seeking input, hortatory utterances, and statements of necessity. Her leadership was enhanced by her central location between Antonio and Emi, putting her in a position to coordinate each of them and add their contributions to the storyboard as they worked independently.

In the second prep stage, Jinhee was not merely making a rough outline of the presentation. It appeared that her requests for information were aimed at making tangible progress by the end of the meeting. In this instance, she asked Antonio what he wanted to add to the PPT for his section. She asked for specific examples so that she could put them into the slides.

- Jinhee: So which part you wanna use in PowerPoint?  
I mean the definition of food additive.
- Antonio: The definition and the categories or the types.
- Jinhee: What types [can you show me
- Antonio: [yeah addit--of additives.
- This one I need image.
- Jinhee: Okay

Jinhee's requests for links and details throughout the session demonstrate an interest in seeing real, early progress either in her task specifically or in the group's as a whole. As in the skit activity, early and thorough preparation was key for Jinhee's feeling of confidence. As she later told me, "...to prepare something makes me feel comfortable..." To achieve this progress, Jinhee set deadlines for her teammates:

*So...and I made a time limit because without the time limit, they will postpone their work easily. So, 'okay, I will make PowerPoint. Then I need your resource before I make it. I need your resources until when?'*

(Jinhee, Interview)

After the second planning session, Jinhee made the PowerPoint and sent it to her partners with the instructions that they could add what they wanted and then they would put it all together at the meeting. Emi and Antonio added parts and they decided how to divide the speaking roles during the actual presentation. After that, the group rehearsed twice. The next time they would meet would be in class to present their work.

On presentation day, Jinhee focused on preparing the group and practicing her own part. Lisa gave all the groups 10 minutes to prepare before they gave the first presentation. Antonio arrived several minutes late to class. As he arrived, Jinhee took part in some joking initiated by Emi, with each student introducing themselves into my MP3 recorder. After a brief conversation about the experiment's results, Jinhee got things rolling by initiating a rehearsal:

Antonio: (laugh) okay, what am I gonna do?  
Jinhee: you start. We have 10 minutes for practice. So...  
Antonio: So...  
Jinhee: mhm  
Antonio: (laugh) I like to freestyle!  
Jinhee/Emi: Freestyle?  
Antonio: Yeah, what comes...okay.

Emi, Jinhee: (big laugh)

As the group practiced, Jinhee primarily worked on rehearsing and leading the group. She led the group through initiating the practice and ensuring preparedness and accuracy (confirmations, corrections, completing utterances). Finally, Jinhee laughed and made jokes on several occasions, indicating that having fun was a more salient motive in this interaction, although she continued to focus primarily on the task.

The final session of the project was the self-evaluation period. For large parts of the session, Jinhee was very focused on the task. She watched their video intently and spent several minutes writing on their self-evaluation form. In her interaction with Antonio and Emi, she continued to joke and tease Antonio. The group discussed several changes mentioned in Lisa's feedback, for example adding more credible sources. Jinhee continued to make suggestions and attempt to initiate new actions from the group by stating needs (e.g., "Okay then we need conclusion") and using questions (e.g., "how can we make more conclusion?"; "What do you want to add?")

Although she was focused on evaluating her performance and improving the presentation, Jinhee took several opportunities in the early stages to joke with Antonio as well. These exchanges were initiated by Antonio. For example, when Antonio examined my new MP3 recorder:

Antonio:	Oh that's new.
Jinhee:	A new one?
Antonio:	We're gonna test you now.
Jinhee:	Sing a song?
Antonio:	Uh huh hhh

Or saw himself on video:

Antonio: Oh look at me!  
Jinhee: ((high voice)) Hey hey! (unintelligible) see!  
Antonio: should look for camera.  
Jinhee: Can I see?  
Antonio: Oh no I'm not prepared.  
Jinhee: (laugh)

And later, while discussing Antonio's observation that he never spoke loudly enough when presenting:

Antonio: Yeah that's always my problem. Next time I will scream.  
Emi: Yeah hhh  
Jinhee: Uh huhuhuh (high voice) Hey guys, we have! Huh huh huh  
Emi: So noisy. hhhh  
Jinhee: ha ha ha  
Emi: so annoying  
Jinhee: Annoying hahaha Are you upset?  
Antonio: Nah, I'm gonna be bad.

In this session, as throughout the project, Jinhee tried to have fun at times but was primarily focused on task-related activities.

### ***Antonio***

From the beginning of the presentation project, Antonio was an active participant in all the group's work and discussions. Initially, he took up Emi's suggested topic, plastic surgery, and searched independently even as Emi and Jinhee seemed to be pursuing food and health. In time, he accepted Jinhee and Emi's food additives topic and spent the majority of the two preparation days searching online for categories of additives and their effects on human health. In addition, he worked closely with Jinhee to organize the material. On day 3, he rehearsed his part during the practice period before the

presentation. Finally, in the self-evaluation session, he focused on working with Jinhee to add more resources in order to follow Lisa's requirement that they make their presentation more substantive.

Throughout the project, Antonio frequently joked about the content they were researching, about their approach to the task, about himself, and about the other group members. These comments were most often met with laughter, and occasionally with encouragement or continued joking by Emi or Jinhee. This contributed to a relaxed and cheerful atmosphere within the group. In addition, whether searching independently or with his partners, Antonio often reacted verbally to images or text he had discovered, used private speech, read aloud, or complained about the slowness of his computer. Even when working alone, Antonio was interacting verbally with himself, the presentation content, or inanimate objects. He even addressed my new MP3 recorder:

Antonio:	Oh that's new.
Jinhee:	A new one?
Antonio:	We're gonna test <b>you</b> now.

This constant joking and commenting, both alone and with partners suggests that, in addition to learning about the presentation content and fulfilling the task requirements, the social aspect of group work, interacting, having fun, building a pleasant atmosphere for work and making himself and others laugh, were important to Antonio.

## *Emi*

Although Antonio was the most talkative member of The Harmonious Group, Emi was the quietest. In the opening stages of Preparation day 1, Emi was active in the initial brainstorming of topics, suggesting first plastic surgery, then beauty products, then genetic engineering in botany. Finally, Emi hit upon the topic that the group would eventually adopt: effects of Macdonald's fast food and health. Later, during her search, she found a video of Morgan Spurlock's experiment on Macdonald's French fries. This striking video immediately caught the attention of her partners:

Emi: It's a science!  
Antonio: It means an experiment with MacDonald's  
Emi: Yeah, Macdonald's has a lot of chemical things, and they never=  
Antonio: =ooh that's great  
Emi: Chemis...chemist  
Antonio: It means we're doing...(6.0) Ough! Come on...  
Emi: hhhh

Emi's choice of the "Supersize Me" video and MacDonald's use of preservatives provided the group with an interesting topic of conversation for the duration of the project, and the videos themselves were fun for the group to watch together. During the two preparation stages, Emi searched for videos and information related to Supersize Me. She spent most of her time working on this task, occasionally checking with Jinhee to make sure her selection of videos and plans for using them were acceptable. In terms of approaching the task and maintaining her place in the group, it appears that Emi was primarily concerned with proposing ideas and ensuring that they met the requirements posed by both Lisa and Jinhee. I was not able to interview Emi after the presentation, so I



cannot identify her goals during this task. However, her actions suggest that having fun, building relationships, and being a good group member were important to Emi.

Throughout the time The Harmonious Group spent together, Emi made several attempts at chatting with Jinhee—for example, she asked Jinhee where she had gotten her purse:

Emi: Did you...where did you get this? In Korea?  
Jinhee: Un. Korea. Airport (laughs)  
Emi: hhh [Duty free]=  
Jinhee: [duty free] hhh  
Emi: Yeah. Nice. hh

In the following excerpt, Emi asked Jinhee about the video she was watching at the onset of work on Day 1:

Emi: Who is this?  
Jinhee: A famous actor in Korea  
Emi: Korean=  
Jinhee: =uh huh=  
Emi: =pop star?  
Jinhee: uh huh  
Emi: hhh  
Jinhee: hhhh

At this point, Jinhee returned to talk about the task. In a later example, Emi asked Jinhee's personal preference with regard to fast food in the US and Korea:

Emi: So...which one is better--in American's MacDonald's or...  
Jinhee: Koreans?  
Emi: Yeah. I...I [ate] MacDonald's here. It was so good=  
Jinhee: [Mac]  
Antonio: Oh really?  
Jinhee: And the salty  
Emi: Salty? He[re?]  
Antonio: [I] prefer the burger in my country  
'cause here it's tasteless.  
Emi: Really?

Antonio:        Yes!

These questions seeking personal information or opinion on matters outside the task were always initiated by Emi. They always started new exchanges emerging from silences rather than as parts of ongoing conversations, and each led to a very short exchange as the group returned to their task.

While she addressed her personal questions to Jinhee, Emi also tried to have fun with Antonio. During the self-evaluation session, she picked up a pencil and wrote something on Antonio's jeans leg; later she reached out to examine his watch. For much of this session, she maintained close physical proximity to her partners. Throughout the first planning session, Emi often leaned her upper body close to Jinhee even when her lower body was oriented towards her own computer.

At times during the self-evaluation period, Emi seemed distracted, looking at the decorations on the wall, swiveling frequently in her chair, or rolling back in her chair to remove herself from the close group circle as her partners discussed their presentation. The ease with which Emi was distracted, her frequent use of play, her seeking of personal information from Jinhee, and her physical orientation towards her partners indicates that the social aspect of group work—having fun and building relationships—was important to her throughout the project. When her interest in the task waned, social activities came to the fore. This pattern was consistent with her activity in class throughout the semester, in which play and inattention were common in her interaction.

### *Harmonious Group Contradictions:*

The contradictions in this group's activity system are shown in Figure 4..

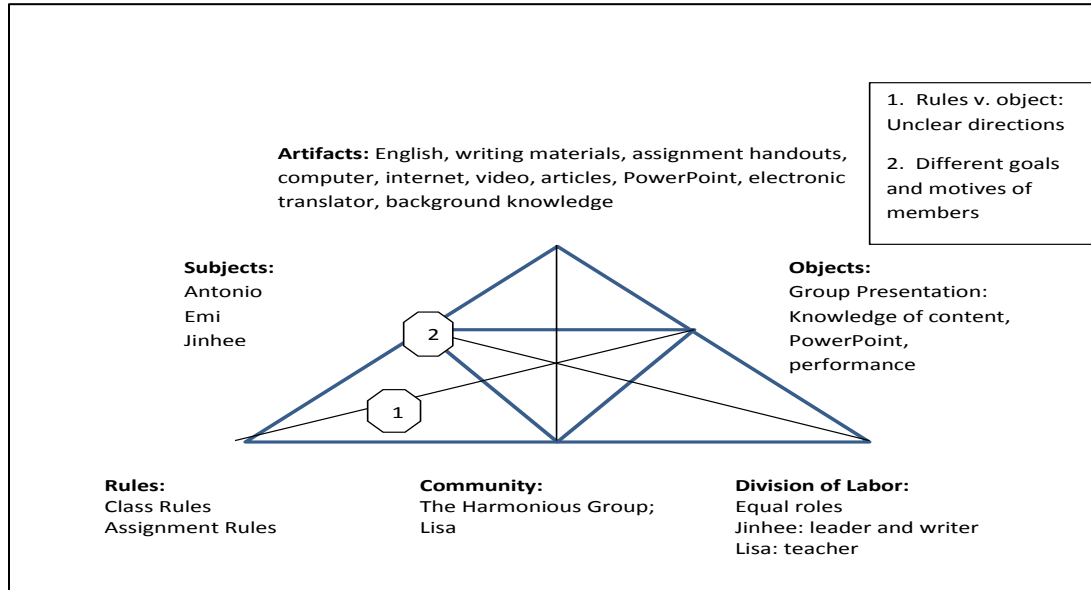


Figure 4: The Harmonious Group Activity System (Adapted from Engeström (1987))

I noticed few contradictions for this group, as they worked smoothly with a variety of artifacts to accomplish their tasks.

Only contradictions between the individual or community goals and the rules of the assignment seemed to cause difficulty for the group. For example, Lisa's initial instructions about the requirements of the presentation caused Jinhee some frustration and left the group confused about how to begin. Nevertheless, the problem was quickly solved as Emi suggested possible topics and Antonio asked Lisa for clarification.

More serious contradictions emerged between Jinhee, who focused almost entirely on the task, and Antonio, whose work style fused effort and humor in a desire to have fun. When Lisa first announced the groups for the presentation, Jinhee felt

concerned about her partner. This concern stemmed from her anxiety over Antonio's work style. As she later told me,

*And especially Antonio, his personality is 'Okay, I will do that right away.' Didn't prepare something, just do it without any rehearsal. So I am really afraid about that personality. But anyway he did it and he prepared. Actually, I ordered 'you need to prepare this, this, this, this thing until when and then send me by email.' And he did, so we finished it.*

(Jinhee)

This anxiety about partners who do not prepare in advance may have been rooted in previous negative group work experience in Korea:

*....six people charts one country from Europe, but because my friends—their personality is similar with me. So they prefer to prepare before, and prepare a lot, and prepare completely before the meeting. But some other men, male friends or some seniors of them, "ah, I can do that later. I can do that later. I will search with my computer within 10 minutes or 20 minutes." But I don't like that style because I am very nervous if I have to do something. If I didn't prepare a lot, I am nervous and didn't focus on that, so it will mess up my project. So I don't like that. Yeah, so, because they are my seniors, I didn't complain a lot to them. But anyway, it was not good experience for me.*

(Jinhee)

This experience in part influenced Jinhee's expectations of what group work could be like. This experience, combined with her impression, formed over the course of at least two semesters, of Antonio's work style, left Jinhee with a negative expectation of the group's chances of success.

Antonio's joking and relaxed personality brought a happy atmosphere to the group but may at the same time have strengthened Jinhee's image of him as inefficient. Indeed, Antonio himself made comments about intending to put the work off on his partners. On Day 2, he pretended to assign Jinhee and Emi to do the presenting so he could relax:

Antonio: I'm picturing you speaking.  
 Jinhee: Hm?  
 Antonio: I'm visualizing you two guys speaking, and I'm watching.  
 Jinhee: N::o way::  
 Emi: hh NO  
 Antonio: That's good!  
 Emi: NO  
 Antonio: And I'll be like, hh. So good...hhh [heh heh heh]  
 Jinhee: [Uh ha ha ha.h]  
 Antonio: I can't even speak. I'm speechless.

Antonio repeated the joke on self-evaluation day to Jinhee:

Antonio: I can see you speaking for us.  
 Jinhee: Hhhhh

In the following excerpt, he told his teammates what to do as he appears to shirk another task:

Jinhee: Okay, let's do together. How can we make...the PowerPoint?  
 Antonio: Uh, the PowerPoint will be you two guys.  
 Jinhee: We'll make whole.

From the first day, Jinhee dealt with the prospect of an unequal effort by taking charge, as seen in the line from Jinhee's interview quoted above: "Actually, I ordered 'you need to prepare this, this, this, this thing until when and then send me by email.'" Throughout the project, what may initially have been a minor concern became an ongoing part of Jinhee's leadership. On numerous occasions in their work together, Antonio seemed to have different ideas about the task than Emi and Jinhee, who were more on the same page. In addition, he occasionally became distracted, forgot items, or was unaware of important assignment requirements. Whenever this occurred, Jinhee

responded to it. In this way, the contradiction between Jinhee's and Antonio's different approaches to the task manifested itself in their interaction.

When Antonio and Jinhee were not on the same page, Jinhee usually responded to him with teasing. The first case of Jinhee's teasing came on Day 1, when Antonio appeared to want to leave the decision making to his partners:

- Jinhee: Okay if we choose the topic don't worryhhh  
Macdonald's, how can we make the 15 presentation?
- Antonio: Five minutes... each.
- Jinhee: Yes each. But the whole content is the 15 minutes.
- Antonio: Okay I'm gonna continue with my ball toss (??)
- Emi: Ball tosshhh
- Antonio: hhh
- Jinhee: NO! WE NEED TO CHOOSE O(HH)NE.
- Emi: yeah
- Antonio: I'M TRYING TO FIND ONE  
so we can see if it works or not.  
That's image. Can you explain this in 5 minutes?
- Emi: Mm. No.
- Antonio: We're gonna need like images.

On day 2, although the group had decided to research preservatives in food and their effects on health, Antonio decided to look for information on salmonella and food poisoning. Lisa, overhearing the conversation, approached the group and asked Antonio if that was not somehow a different topic.

- Antonio: I got something. Food poisoning  
to maintain the food safety here  
and we got the viral food poisoning,  
we got bacteria sa—salmonella .
- Jinhee: Salmonella
- Antonio: what's this camphyol[bacter] and staphylococcus. Those are the  
bacteria=
- Jinhee: [((unintelligible))]
- =Germs

Antonio: The most common that cause food poisoning  
 Lisa: Uh huh  
 Antonio: And there's=  
 Lisa: =okay but remember, that is not an experiment=  
 Jinhee: =yeah unh=  
 =that's research but you have to find an actual experiment.  
 THIS is an experiment  
 Antonio: No we we have an experiment. We're=  
 Lisa: =O::H=  
 Antonio: =gonna explain and then we're going to=  
 Jinhee: =How how what is the=  
 Lisa: =Sure. But is food poisoning related to Supersize Me?  
 I think they're two different things. Right?

Lisa then told Jinhee to explain their topic to Antonio:

Lisa: No what is about, what is, what is this about?  
 Jinhee: [The Supersize Me?]  
 Lisa: [You'd better] tell him what it's about first  
 Jinhee: hhhhhh wake up! ((snaps fingers))  
 Antonio: Yeah So I don't get lost  
 Lisa, Jinhee: (laugh)

Another example occurred when Antonio, who had become engrossed in watching Morgan Spurlock's food preservatives experiment on YouTube, continued to comment, although Jinhee and Emi had moved on to discussion of the task. His exclamation "OHHH" in reaction to the video was met with Jinhee's reply, "Calm down!" In a final example from rehearsal day, Antonio, who had just finished practicing his part of the presentation, unexpectedly found out that he had one more slide to do.

Antonio: I'm done.  
 Jinhee: This.  
 Antonio: Oh me too? This one?  
 Jinhee: Mhm mhm.  
 Antonio: Then that makes four, you said three! (laugh)  
 Jinhee: Yeah, it's specialty for you.  
 Antonio: (laugh) Okay, uh uh...(3.0)

ho! food additives are substances that are added to food to preserve flavor or enhance its taste and appearance. The use of food additives mimic natural flavors?

In each example, Jinhee teased Antonio playfully when he had taken a line of action divergent from her expectations. Teasing and kidding around were common among the three members of this group, and between Antonio and others in the class. It also seemed to be the method Jinhee adopted for dealing with potential conflicts with Antonio. While the two, together with Emi, found ways to integrate smoothly each member's work style and contradictory activities, on the final day of the project, a slightly more tense exchange developed.

On this day, Antonio arrived late for the presentation rehearsal and was unclear about the need to add his citations for the bibliography Jinhee had volunteered to make. Antonio appeared not to know a very basic bit of information--that the group was expected to perform their presentation a second time. Whether he was serious about this is unclear, but Jinhee appeared to take him at face value.

Antonio: What about resources?  
Jinhee: We found some...did you find the citation? The article you gave me?  
Antonio: It was necessary? it was just about a name so... we had to cite it?  
Jinhee: Yeah we needed the bibliography  
Antonio: So we're gonna present this again?  
Jinhee: Monday  
Antonio: One day?  
Jinhee: Monday=  
Antonio: =Monday=  
Jinhee: =At Monday. Monday is our final presentation=  
Antonio: =oh...huhuhhhh=  
Jinhee: =and we need to hand in to her our bibliography.



Antonio: Today?  
 Jinhee: Monday.  
 Antonio: Oh don't worry we're gonna figure it out  
 Jinhee: You need to find out it, okay?

Despite Antonio's assurance in his final turn, Jinhee added a final directive. Later in the same discussion, while looking over Lisa's feedback, Jinhee pointed out that Lisa had mentioned their lack of a bibliography.

Jinhee: And we need bibliography. I told you.  
 Emi: hhh  
 Antonio: I'm sorry [ I'm sorry]  
 Jinhee: [You needed to] find out that.  
 Antonio: I will I will. I'll find it. For Monday right I'll put it there  
 Jinhee: Uh huh  
 Antonio: We have to the references. Is that necessary?  
 Jinhee: References is bibliography.  
 Antonio: (high pitch) Yeah but that's the...that was she said (unintelligible)  
 Jinhee: Yeah uh huh uh huh  
 Antonio: The references  
 Jinhee: Ye:ah  
 Antonio: Okay we're gonna add.

Jinhee continued to tease Antonio, but had become more insistent. Moments later, Jinhee said that she had already done the bibliography herself, and that all she needed was one reference from Antonio's article.

Jinhee: [credible sources] it means because I already made another bibliography=  
 Antonio: [unintelligible] =mhm  
 Jinhee: So: uh we can add just one thing you found the article. Then it's done.  
 Antonio: No we can put the web site on there.  
 First we got the website that I showed you.  
 Instead of cite it we put the bibliography  
 just put the website=  
 Antonio: =mhm=  
 Jinhee: = and the first one we put Wikipedia [unintelligible]  
 Jinhee: [Yeah I already did it]  
 Antonio: Then why did you put it, didn't you put in the presentation slide?  
 Jinhee: Because she said we didn't need that (??)  
 Antonio: Oh she said we didn't need it?

Jinhee: In the **in** the presentation slide no just [handing paper]  
 Antonio: [Just the Paper] or a part okay

Next, Jinhee asked Antonio where he had gotten the article he had used, so that she could include this final source in the bibliography. Antonio was not sure to which article she was referring, so the two had to iron out yet another misunderstanding, with Jinhee concluding, “We need it. Where did you find this .pdf file, okay?” Unfortunately, even when he found the reference, it was incomplete:

Antonio: I got this one.  
 Jinhee: Mhm  
 Antonio: Since we don’t have... oh we can put her name first.  
 Jinhee: There’s no year, ((taps his pen on table)) no article’s name ((taps pen again))  
 Antonio: No article’s name?  
 Jinhee: Mhm  
 Antonio: Who gave the article’s name?  
 Jinhee: Hhh  
 Emi: hhhhhh  
 Antonio: And we gothhh the doctor’s name=  
 Jinhee: =Okay. Where is journal name? Journal title?  
 Antonio: Journal topic? Where nature meets science=  
 Emi: Uh hhhhhh  
 Jinhee: Is that journalhhh?

The group continued to discuss additions to the presentations, with more minor disagreements between Jinhee and Antonio. Again, another disagreement erupted over the bibliography, this time when the teacher brought it up:

Lisa: And you understood about the bibliography?  
 Jinhee: Yes we will make it.  
 Lisa: And you’re doing this part now, is that what you’re doing now?  
 Jinhee: Okay.  
 Lisa: Okay.  
 Antonio: And you too?  
 Jinhee: huh?  
 Antonio: The bibliography? Two  
 Jinhee: I DID

Antonio: NO you didn't! Why you...okay just one  
 Emi: huhhhh  
 Jinhee: hhhh  
 Antonio: It was just one? For this one right? It was the only one, right?  
 It was two video clip and the...Wikipedia.  
 Jinhee: And this article, and Wikipedia definition  
 Antonio: You didn't do for this one  
 Jinhee: Yeah because I didn't know where did you find it.  
 Antonio: Thank you. Now you know.  
 Jinhee: No hhhh  
 Emi: hh (sigh)

Later, Jinhee asked Antonio to open the PPT file, but he admitted having forgotten it.

After more discussion, the group finally finished their work with both parties seeming to have tired of the constant disagreement.

Jinhee: How about change their order?  
 Because we start the experiment video?  
 Antonio: Uh, but you need to define first.  
 Jinhee: Huh?  
 Antonio: You need definition first.  
 Jinhee: Definition first? But the supersize me facts  
 [connect with the] with this video.  
 Antonio: [No first you're gonna.] Okay We're gonna explain the facts  
 and we're gonna define?  
 Jinhee: Mhm. Because each one connects  
 and definition, category, effect, conclusion.  
 Antonio: Okay it could work. It's good for me. You're free. It's all good.  
 Jinhee: Is it okay?  
 Antonio: Yeah for me it's okay. Don't worry.  
 I probably won't say anything,  
 put any more words (unintelligible) facts.  
 Jinhee: Then you start explain and facts  
 I will start definition and categories,  
 and she will effects and conclusion.  
 Antonio: Ooh.  
 Emi: Conclusion ((singing))  
 Antonio: (unintelligible) hh  
 Jinhee: Why?  
 Antonio: I'm good.  
 Jinhee: huhhhhh

Although the two had continued to work together peacefully, Jinhee repeatedly chided Antonio for his lack of preparation during this final session. This was the only time during the five days of work together that the group displayed so much disagreement. Emi stayed out of the disagreements, except for occasionally laughing or expressing short agreements with Jinhee.

### **The Indecisive Group**

This activity matched Yi-Ning, Kaori, and Rami together. Kaori was one of the quieter students in full-class discussions and was only a little more talkative in small groups. Rami, however, engaged actively in both full-class and small group activities. Of the three groups, this one had the most difficulty with the project, and their work was characterized by the greatest amount of individual work, the most teacher involvement, and the least focused interaction between group members. Because of their early difficulty with reaching important decisions, I have named this group, *The Indecisive Group*.

From the beginning of the project, this group had great difficulty with choosing a topic. While the other two groups decided on their topics relatively early on the first preparation day, the Indecisive Group did not find a suitable topic until almost the end of the second preparation session. During the first two days, they spent long periods searching independently, interspersed with short bursts of task-related negotiation and long segments of teacher explanation.

Within the first 10 minutes of prep session 1, the group chose the broad topic “health.” However, narrowing this topic down proved a challenge. Each member had ideas, but every idea was discarded in turn. The group’s work developed the following pattern—searching independently, one member would find an article they thought had some merit, but either he or she or another member of the group would point out its flaws. The main criteria for choosing or rejecting articles appeared to be the article’s provenance, its substance, and its linguistic and conceptual difficulty. For example, Rami found several sources but they contained general information rather than reported research, and Yi-Ning found an article about green tea but thought it contained too much scientific vocabulary. No one argued for the sources they had found, and no single source was acceptable to all three members. Each article was therefore rejected without discussion or set aside for later consideration as a possible alternate.

During the difficult process of selecting a topic, Yi-Ning and Kaori repeatedly sought Lisa’s help. As the two prep sessions wore on, Lisa became more and more involved in their work and their decision making. On the second day, the group settled on a narrow topic that Yi-Ning suggested—emotional eating and stress. Yi-Ning had found an article about this topic and, after a group meeting in which Lisa approved of her choice, the group finally moved forward with planning their presentation.

The group now found themselves behind schedule. They met only once outside of class and, because they were the first group to deliver their presentation on presentation day, spent their practice time setting up and trying to locate their PowerPoint file on the computer while other groups rehearsed. Surprisingly perhaps, the first run-through of

their presentation went smoothly, and on self-evaluation day, they focused on adding detail and refining their slide show for the final performance.

### **The Indecisive Group's Activity System**

The Indecisive Group worked on the same collective objects as the Harmonious Group: their PowerPoint presentation, their performance as individuals and as a team, their knowledge of the presentation content, and their relationships within the group. Like the Harmonious Group, their expected outcomes were a smooth presentation and a good grade. The rules mediating their activity within this for system were like those of the other two groups: class rules and rules for the assignment. An additional rule for their group was the requirement that an interpreter be present to assist in communication between Rami and the group's hearing members. The presence of two interpreters within the group made this community different from those of the other two groups. These two members, unlike the students and teacher, were expected not to have their own roles or identities within the group other than as interpreters.

With regard to division of labor, Yi-Ning seemed to become the group's leader, though this was not discussed or overtly ratified by the group members. She initiated most of the decisions and transitions between work stages, but each member did an equal share of the work. For the final presentation, each member created their own PowerPoint slides, which Rami combined and formatted. Lisa took a greater leadership role in this group than she did with either of the others. I will address this further in the discussion of this group's contradictions.

The Indecisive group used many of the same tools as the Harmonious Group used, and employed them in similar ways. However, there were three important differences: the use of language, the use of space, and the use of the internet. Like the other two groups, the Indecisive Group was composed of three non-native English speakers. However, Rami communicated through interpreters. This influenced the timing of the group's interactions in several ways, which I will describe in the section discussing contradictions. This group did not make use of video in their presentation. Kaori searched using Google scholar, web pages of Japanese universities and the World Health Organization, and Wikipedia. Rami searched using less scholarly pages like Google, Google Image, and AOL Health. In terms of their use of physical space, this group kept less physical proximity than the other two groups, often working with a greater amount of space between one another.

### ***Yi-Ning***

Group presentations were not a new activity for Yi-Ning:

*I don't know...in my country, because I know Americans they work like more individual, but in my country, we work more like group. So every class, teachers all assign us we need to have a final group project. Mhm. Like my French class, or I have took one psychology class is about men and women's behavior....every teacher or professor, they ask us to did one, at least one, group project.*

(Yi-Ning)

For this reason, the project didn't seem particularly novel to her. When it was announced, Yi-Ning expected the project to be a challenge, not because of the content or

task difficulty, but because of the problems involved in getting all the group members together outside of class to work.

During the first two preparation sessions: Yi-Ning appeared to be motivated by the goal *Meeting the assignment requirements* and the motive *Being a good group member*. *Being a good group member* motivated her to do two things: share ideas and share power. Socializing seemed to be of secondary interest to Yi-Ning as she worked with her group. Only rarely did Yi-Ning engage in small talk or joking with her partners, and then only with Kaori. All three members of the group focused on the task from the start.

*Meeting assignment requirements.* Several times in the first preparation session, Yi-Ning sought Lisa's help in clarifying the project requirements. Later, she evaluated each potential source for the presentation according to its suitability in meeting those requirements. In the early stages of the first preparation session, Yi-Ning twice asked Lisa for help with getting started. In the first instance, she asked Lisa for an example of the kind of topic they might choose:

Yi-Ning:	Excuse me!
Lisa:	Yes?
Yi-Ning:	Can you give us some examples 'cause we can't choose a topic.
Lisa:	To well what I recommend to start with because you can choose any topic is think about something that interests one of you and then go on start doing Google searches.

A few minutes later, Yi-Ning called Lisa over to ask for confirmation of her understanding of the directions listed on the assignment handout.

Yi-Ning:	Excuse me!
----------	------------



Lisa: Yes?  
 Yi-Ning: Can I ask you something?  
 Lisa: Sure.  
 Yi-Ning: Because we decided our topic, our topic is about health.  
 Lisa: Great!  
 Kaori: How to be healthy  
 Yi-Ning: And Rami, he find the website it shows different groups  
 like how men, how women, how teenagers,  
 how everybody try to use different way to be healthier.  
 But we a little bit don't understand **what**,  
 We need to explain what is this experiment means?

This lead to a long discussion between Yi-Ning and Lisa on the exact meaning of the handout. Once she had confirmed this information, she and her partners resumed searching for resources.

Throughout the two preparation sessions, Yi-Ning found and shared several articles that her group could use in their presentation. These articles reported on topics like green tea's effects on health, green tea and weight loss, and the link between job promotion and happiness. However, she found none of these suitable for the assignment. Having shared each one, she raised problems with them—one did not seem to be from a scholarly source, another was too short, and a third did not report specific findings. Yi-Ning similarly subjected others' contributions to the same criteria. On several occasions, she reiterated to Rami and Kaori the need to find not just an article or website related to science but an actual report of an experiment, complete with results and data.

*Being a good group member.* Sharing ideas and discussing them appeared to be an important part of Yi-Ning's concept of being a good group member. As she said in the post-task interview, the ideal group would be one in which

*For people, of course everybody willing to do or willing to give another people help and really join discussion (Yi-Ning)*

In the group presentation, as in the skit activity, Yi-Ning contributed a number of ideas. In this project, she mentioned both the pros and cons of each article when presenting it, perhaps to give her partners all the information they needed to make a decision. Because the group presentation was an extended, intensive project, it was important that everyone be happy with the topic they ultimately chose. As Yi-Ning later told me,

*If you do want to work as a group, even though you don't like the article very much but you have to agree with that article because it's really hard to work on something you don't agree with.*

(Yi-Ning)

As the two preparation sessions progressed, Yi-Ning gradually emerged as the group's leader. She made the first suggestion for splitting up labor during the search for sources; she usually served as the speaker in the group's interactions with Lisa; and she suggested the topic—stress and eating—that was ultimately accepted for the presentation. Once the topic had been chosen, Yi-Ning became more assertive, setting the meeting time and suggesting how to divide the work. Rami and Kaori agreed to these suggestions and sought confirmation from Yi-Ning on what their next tasks should be. As in the skit activity, Yi-Ning appeared to gain the leader role through her active suggestions but avoided giving directives to her partners. She once again allowed others to make their own suggestions and pursue their own interests. While emerging as the leader of the group, she shared power and continually sought consensus.

Yi-Ning noted in our interview that she was glad to have class time to work on the project, because it allowed everyone time to discuss the work:

*And we don't need to one people...one person divide it, and other people just accept. Everybody have time to express opinion and really join this group.*

(Y-Ning)

### ***Rami and Kaori***

Because I was not able to interview Rami or Kaori, I cannot make confident claims about their motives or goals in this activity. However, their actions during the research sessions suggest that they, like Yi-Ning, spent the majority of their time trying to find and share articles that both met Lisa's requirements and were acceptable to their team mates. Both Kaori and Rami repeatedly expressed concern that the articles finally selected should contain data and come from reliable sources. Both members searched for topics that interested them, but both compromised. Rami appeared particularly flexible. Although he proposed his own ideas, he frequently expressed acceptance or positive reactions to Yi-Ning's suggestions. When there was a disagreement over scheduling their out of class meeting, he yielded to her position. In this way, all the members of the Indecisive Group seemed to be pursuing the same goals, such as fulfilling task requirements and seeking consensus.

### ***The Indecisive Group's Contradictions***

Yi-Ning and her group experienced several contradictions that affected their work and interaction. These involved the use of language and space; the division of labor;

goals and expectations of teacher and student; and differences between current expectations and past experience. These contradictions are represented in Figure 5.

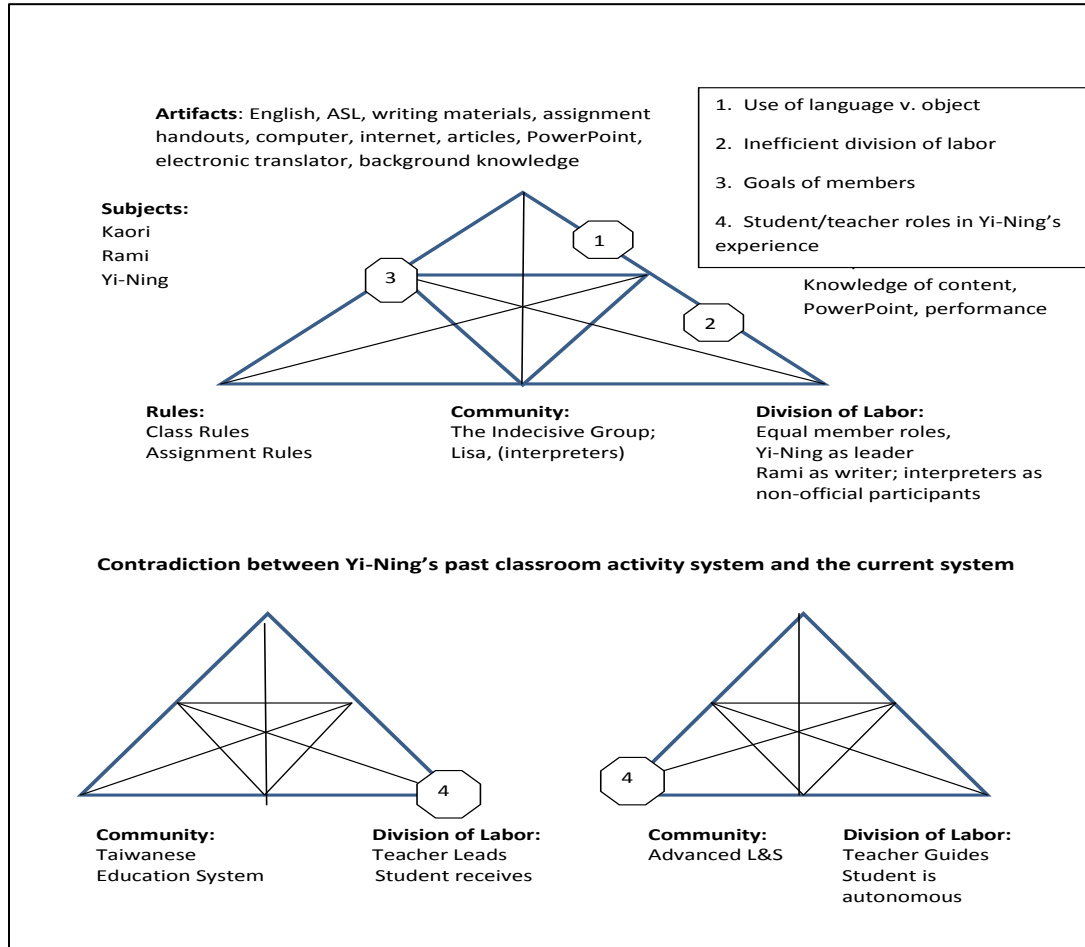


Figure 5: The Indecisive Group Activity System ((Adapted from Engeström, (1987))

One contradiction emerged between the use of language, the assignment rules, and the goals of the community. Although the groups were expected to meet outside of class, Rami was unable to schedule an interpreter for some out-of-class meetings. When this occurred, according to Yi-Ning, the group was unable to communicate well. Yi-Ning said that although she could understand basics, and they were able to get their work done, the communication was not smooth.

The use of space also had some influence on the group's interaction. While working in the three in-class sessions, the group adopted a seating configuration that did not facilitate discussion. Unlike the other groups, who sat very close together in a line with one member able to roll or lean back slightly to form a semicircle, this group sat at 3 lab computers in an L-Shape when working. Not only did this put a slightly greater distance between Kaori and Yi-Ning, but it required Rami to have his back to both of his team mates while using his computer. The seating configuration was again poorly suited to communication on the second day. Yi-Ning brought her own laptop and chose to work at a separate table. The effect of this choice was that the three group members sat in a triangle with Yi-Ning facing away from both her partners. If they wanted to talk about anything together, the members needed to turn around, so that communication required just a bit of extra effort. In addition, when Rami was reading or writing, he had no visual clues to know when something needed his attention. It was necessary to tap on his desk to get his attention, and this was something his partners were not used to doing. If they left it up to the interpreter to give Rami this signal, or forgot that he needed this, they began conversation without him. In this sense, the three members were slightly out of sync with each other. During the first two prep sessions, the majority of the group's time was spent searching individually, so that the use of space was appropriate for the division of labor, as decided based on the current goals of the members. Finding information to share later was the group's primary concern, and conversation was not essential to the task. Their spatial configuration reflected this and, at the same time, further restricted the ease of interaction.

Even when the group was facing each other, turns at talk were often mistimed. With two speakers of English as a second language (who spoke Chinese and Japanese as their first languages) interacting with a speaker of ASL as a second language (whose first languages were Arabic Sign Language and a form of sign language that he used only with intimates) through an interpreter who was both a native speaker of English and a highly-proficient speaker of ASL, the timing of utterances must have required some negotiation. However, the three group members had been studying together for two months, and all parties were aware of the challenges posed for both Rami and themselves in timing of conversation. This contradiction may have provided opportunities for learning for all three members.

A decision that caused more difficulty for the group was the division of labor during the preparation stages. The decision, suggested by Yi-Ning and agreed to by Rami and Kaori, to look separately for articles in order to choose a topic, ensured that the three members were all doing the same task. In seeking consensus on each potential topic and resource, the group could not come to an agreement, and though Yi-Ning emerged as a leader, she did not set deadlines or push the team to find and settle on a topic. The three searched for divergent topics under the broad theme “health” until they settled on green tea. As a result of the distribution of labor and rights within the group, the three ended up all doing the same task—searching independently—for a long period. Yi-Ning told me in the interview that they would have spoken more to each other if they had had an idea to talk about, and that once they had made that decision, they did discuss more. The relatively larger amount of time spent by this group searching individually for

information to discuss, as a *precondition* for discussion, may have limited the amount of time they had to talk about the content. Similarly, it may have left less time for social talk.

By asking for help on numerous occasions, they ceded much of their authority to Lisa, who gradually became more involved in their decision making process as they continued to struggle. Ultimately, Yi-Ning chose “stress and emotional eating,” a topic that she had read about in a previous class, and one that was only tangentially related to many of the searches they had been doing. This was accepted by the group

While the above contradictions did not present serious problems for Yi-Ning, the difference in expectations in teacher-student roles and verbal participation did. One unstated rule of Lisa’s class, inherent in her expectations and teaching beliefs, was that students should be given freedom and in return take initiative. This would allow them to be autonomous and confident in preparation for life after graduation from the program. As she told me at the beginning of the semester, she saw her role in group work as a guide rather than commander, with the responsibility for providing “structure and the resources and the feedback and the planned activities and the environment for them to do what they have to do, but they are the doers” (Lisa, interview). It was therefore necessary to balance her desire to provide assistance with the contradictory need to let groups work out their own solutions.

*They’re in university classes and if they’re not already they will be soon; and they’re not going to get any handholding in their classes, so I’ve got to continue to tell myself to step back and try to make it as authentic as possible so the transition is easier. Because that’s going to be a big jump if I don’t.*

(Lisa)

Acting on these expectations, Lisa she gave the High Engagement Group a lot of freedom in their work and rarely interrupted them. She gave the Harmonious Group freedom as well, but interjected in their research when she felt they needed guidance in choosing appropriate materials and organizing their presentation. Neither of these groups required much explanation of how to actually do group work. In the beginning, Lisa allowed the Indecisive Group the same freedom. This changed, however, as a contradiction emerged between Lisa's attempts to encourage autonomy and Yi-Ning's desire for structure.

Like Jinhee, Yi-Ning found Lisa's instructions for the task to be too broad. "I just feel the range of topics...too big" (Yi-Ning). This posed a contradiction with expectations of teaching that Yi-Ning had developed as a student in Taiwan:

*cultural difference is the problem. Because I feel Kaori, she's Japanese and I'm Chinese, so the teaching style, the education we have through our grow up process will be closer. And like my sister's style, she studied high school here, I can feel is really different from American educational system and our system. Here, usually students have more freedom to decide what they want to do or how they want to complete the project they get from the professor. But in my country, it's more like professor assigns a project. Usually it's not easy to see in general they will assign a couple topics then we can look for what we want to do. But for me, it's too freedom here, so I don't know what I can do or what I'm supposed to do because here they encourage students to be more active, but in my country, we are more...how should I say the opposite?*

(Yi-Ning)

When Yi-Ning asked Lisa for an example topic, Lisa's answers didn't seem to help:

Lisa: Well what I recommend to start with  
because you can choose any topic is think about something  
that interests one of you  
and then go on start doing Google searches.  
Experiments and I don't know...

Yi-Ning: So we should have some project and (inaudible)

Lisa: Yeah. **But** if you don't have any ideas,  
start thinking about another topic.



Do you want it to be on the scientific side,  
do you want it to be in the social science,  
psychology experiments--  
you know first narrow it down  
and think of a particular topic you would like it on.  
Do you have the first sheet I gave you?

Kaori:

Yeah

Lisa:

Okay. That first sheet gives you ideas.  
Do you want it on health, beauty products,  
animals, you know, what will be the topic.  
So maybe just start choosing something now  
that might interest all of you  
and then search on the internet.  
Start doing some searches  
and I think you'll find something  
that might resonate, that might attract you.  
But start broad and then get more specific.  
Does that make sense?

Rather than providing Yi-Ning with more examples in addition to the three she had given on the handout, Lisa attempted to guide her to a position where she could do it herself by telling her how to find a topic. However, Yi-Ning expected the teacher to provide her with more firm guidance: "I wish she can tell me exactly what I'm supposed to do, not let me decide what I'm going to do."

Still unsure of what was expected of her, she sought Lisa's help again later to confirm her understanding of the task directions printed on the handout. This led to a long discussion of the task—Yi-Ning asked several questions about what Lisa meant by the bullet points, "who" "what" "when" "where" and "why" in the handout, and Lisa responded with detailed explanations. Later, as the group was searching, Lisa finally gave them an example of an experiment on fast food. The group took to the idea, but Lisa attempted to steer them away from using this exact topic, because another group had

already chosen it. She had given them an idea, expecting them to use it as a model only and to come up with their own original idea:

- Yi-Ning: can we focus on fast food?  
because there are a lot of experiments  
about fast food=  
Lisa: =probably=  
Yi-Ning: =and he's (unintelligible) (laugh)  
Lisa: (laugh)  
Rami: oh that's a good idea.  
Lisa: or you could find=  
Rami: =that would be an easy one  
Lisa: yeah that would be an easy one.  
they were actually doing fast food over here hhh.  
but [you could]  
Rami: [yeah but what kind]  
Lisa: that's true. you could do a different brand.  
you could do something on healthy food.  
you could find a way fast food [is good for your health.]  
Rami: [(unintelligible)] pizza.  
Lisa: Sure, look and see what they have for pizza. why not.  
Rami: Americans love pizza.  
Yi-Ning: chips  
Lisa: As long as it's not the exact same, that's fine.

Yi-Ning then decided to look for organic food, but without a strong consensus of support for the topic, each member went back to searching for articles separately.

This conflict between Lisa's activity and Yi-Ning's represents several contradictions: a contradiction between goals of two members of the same system, and a contradiction between both the rules and divisions of labor for two different systems—Yi Ning's past educational activity systems and the current class system. Yi-Ning's expectations for the student-teacher relationship, in which the teacher provides the student with ideas and examples, was influenced by her participation in the Taiwanese

educational system. Lisa's expectations of the teacher-student relationship, in which the teacher provides just enough guidance for the student to show her own initiative and creativity, was influenced through her past participation in the American school system and socialization into its values. The expectations of each for the other may also be influenced by their past experiences with American teachers and Asian students, respectively.

On the second prep day, Lisa's expectations of student autonomy and initiative, and her desire to instill these values in her students, again clashed with Yi-Ning's expectations. Having searched at home for articles about their topic, "green tea and health," all three members reported back to each other that they had been unable to find any reputable experiments with data. Kaori called to Lisa to ask if Yi-Ning's article was suitable, and Lisa discussed the need to find an article that was scholarly but not necessarily very scholarly. As she began to leave, Lisa remembered to ask the group for a progress report:

Lisa:	I was going to ask you guys a question when I was over here that I asked the other groups
Yi-Ning:	Mhm?
Lisa:	Have you guys divided up your responsibilities too within the group?
Yi-Ning:	What? [Please say]
Lisa:	[I'm asking] each group two questions you know what is the topic or if they found an experiment and then have you divided up the responsibilities [yet] in your group
Yi-Ning:	[Not yet]=
Lisa:	=okay
Yi-Ning:	we are not sure of the topic yet
Lisa:	well you might want to divide up the responsibilities

to start doing that now.  
Yi-Ning: Mm. Okay

There was a pause of between four and five seconds, and Lisa repeated her request, but Yi-Ning and Kaori appeared confused about what Lisa was asking them to do.

Lisa: (4.5) divide up the responsibilities for this particular activity as well  
not just for the presentation itself  
but for the preparation of the presentation.  
Kaori(?): huh?  
Yi-Ning: okay.  
Kaori: (4.0) so:  
Yi-Ning: Mm?  
Kaori: Who  
Yi-Ning: Hhh (I'm not understand)

Lisa went on to explain that the group did not seem to be making progress because of a lack of communication:

Lisa: Okay so you guys these two groups  
they've already picked their experiment  
they've already divided up their  
they're.. already working together  
and what I see from your group is  
you're all working separately you're[not working together]  
Yi-Ning: [yeah because] we don't  
have idea.  
Lisa: well **talk** about it.  
Get an idea from talking to each other, talking about it.  
Or have one person research the topic  
while the other person is thinking about the intro or something.  
And you know I mean work together.  
I think that's part of the reason  
that you don't have the idea is because you're all off like this.  
Yi-Ning: mmm  
Lisa: Okay? This is a **group** project

Lisa here voiced a belief that verbal communication was integral for teamwork. Sitting down and discussing what to do and coming up with ideas were the key to doing a group project, and the group's lack of talk and their physical distance from each other are both signs and causes of dysfunction, in her view. Yi-Ning, however, did not see how Lisa's idea could work:

- Kaori: (2.5) oka:y so  
Yi-Ning: fwyew h. ((heavy outbreath))  
I don't... we don't have topic. How should we  
have like one person think about our intro:  
Lisa: Okay well there's things you can do  
if you don't have a topic  
you can sit down together and brainstorm  
like you have a word right? Green tea,  
if you=  
Yi-Ning: =but=  
=[are interested in sticking with green tea maybe  
brainstorm]

Without a topic, Yi-Ning could not see how the group could be expected to derive one through talk. As she later told me,

*usually Lisa she said a lot of time we don't communicate with each other. We don't talk to our team member. But that didn't mean we don't want to talk; we just want to find something. And then after we really find something then we have something we can talk to each other. But before we find something, there is nothing we can talk.*

(Yi-Ning)

A second contradiction emerged in the next section of the same exchange. Yi-Ning had become worried that the literature she had found on green tea contained a lot of unknown vocabulary that she could not pronounce. Lisa, trying to encourage Yi-Ning, and perhaps expecting her to find a way around such an obstacle, suggested the problem was not insurmountable:

Yi-Ning: [But but mm] a lot of experiment of green tea  
they have too many like chemical names orhh

Lisa: (pitch rise) that's okay you don't have to  
Lots of those chemical names  
have uh abbreviations=

Yi-Ning: =yeah=

Lisa: =like BHT or=

Yi-Ning: =but like if they ask us  
we should know how should  
we should know how to response=

Lisa: =u:h=

Yi-Ning: =[how can we]

Lisa: [you can you can]  
write it on the board  
you don't have to pronounce every single...  
believe me I'm sure all the other groups  
can't pronounce every single [Yi-Ning: mmm] word  
if they're dealing with additives or chemicals  
I don't ex-- I can't pronounce all those words.  
I don't expect you to.=

Yi-Ning: =Mm kay=

The segment above indicates a contradiction between Lisa's goals for the presentation and Yi-Ning's. As an ESL student in a language class, Yi-Ning was concerned about pronunciation. She also wanted to be able to pronounce the content of her presentation correctly, because she would be speaking in front of the class. She did not want to be unable to pronounce the material she was presenting. As she later told me in an interview, she wanted to be professional any time she gave a presentation. She added that in a content class, she thought she would not be able to get away with not knowing how to pronounce words. Therefore, she practiced her pronunciation of the scientific words for their presentation, even though she knew perfection was not

necessary. Lisa went on to suggest several tips for approaching the scientific vocabulary, including dictionaries that provide audio pronunciations, paraphrasing and simplifying, and leaving out unnecessary vocabulary and concentrating only on those that were integral. All of these strategies could be used to make the presentation both manageable for the presenter and understandable for the audience. Still, there appeared to be a contradiction inherent in the assignment itself—Yi-Ning was expected to give a good presentation on academic content, and yet the teacher's expectations of her performance appeared to be adjusted downward because it was not a content class. On the other hand, although it was a language class, the language itself was not assessed as much as the organization, delivery, and content. When I asked Yi-Ning if she believed Lisa was more concerned with the process of working on the presentation or the actual product, she felt that Lisa's primary concern had been the process of working together on the task:

*I think the process. Because after we finish the language program, we're going to go to academic class. And it's supposed to be, everybody's going to have a group project or even group presentation, so I think she think the process is more important than the result. Because how we deal with other students or foreign students.*

(Yi-Ning,  
Interview)

Next, Lisa again encouraged the team to talk to each other:

- Lisa: =But I mean work together, communicate.  
Or you could assign one person to check out experiments  
for that topic one pick [a few more topics each of you start looking  
for a different topic]
- Yi-Ning: [You mean search three different topics]
- Lisa: .hh Until you find the right experiment. I...  
but I mean work together instead of...  
I don't see a lot of communication here right now.
- Yi-Ning: Mh[uhuhhuh] (laugh)

Lisa: [And that's] gonna slow you down=  
Yi-Ning: =Oh okay.

Lisa's expectation that the group should be able to communicate effectively with each other was incompatible with Yi-Ning's way of doing things. Yi-Ning felt that what the teacher wanted was for the students to do something they were not prepared for: "to be creative or active, like an active learner. But it's not easy." As a result of the group's difficulty in resolving the contradiction in expectations of these two members, this group spent a much larger proportion of their time discussing the task itself, often in teacher-student interaction, than did the others.

### **The High-Engagement Group**

The third group was composed of Marisol, Aki, and Hyeon-Sook. This group was remarkable among the three in its combination of personalities—Marisol was both the youngest and most talkative member of the class. Hyeon-Sook, by contrast, was the class' oldest and least talkative member. Marisol, at 18, had for years been immersed in daily academic life; Hyeon-Sook had graduated from university over a decade earlier and had been in the workforce ever since. At 23 years of age and a prospective graduate student, Aki was more mature than Marisol and more used to classroom life than Hyeon-Sook. She later told me that she felt dual affiliations within the group: she identified with Hyeon-Sook because of their common East Asian background, but felt closer to Marisol because of their similar ages. This group, so diverse in experience and background, worked efficiently together. Its members also engaged in the most personal talk and had



both the most exuberant moments of laughter and the most frequent moments of tense disagreement. Because of this intensity of interaction and collaboration, I have named this group *The High-Engagement Group*.

The High-Engagement Group quickly made several important decisions in the first prep session. Within 15 minutes, as other groups were still wrestling with the assignment instructions or trying to find a topic, this group had decided on a narrow topic (Chocolate's effects on health), divided up and distributed the work, and set a time and place to meet for their planning session. Their initial decision-making was so rapid that, just halfway through the 45-minute session, Hyeon-Sook called out cheerfully to Lisa, "We're finished!", a proclamation that caused Jinhee and Emi to wheel around in their seats with expressions of disbelief.

Despite their early rapid progress, the High-Engagement Group would become bogged down in discussions of organization in the second session and tension would arise between Marisol and Hyeon-Sook. I will describe these tensions in my discussion of the group's contradictions in a later section. The division of labor in the group similarly caused difficulties for their presentation rehearsal, which ran more than five minutes over time. However, the group ultimately produced a smooth presentation and in the meantime engaged in large amounts of collaboration and on- and off-task talk.

### **The High-Engagement Group's Activity System**

The High Engagement Group pursued the same goals and had the same expected outcome in the assignment as their classmates—increased knowledge of the content and a

successful presentation. Like the other groups, this team followed class and assignment rules as they worked. They also mediated their activity through the use of similar tools, though Aki used more academic search engines than anyone else had, and Marisol used Facebook more than anyone in other groups. Within the class community, Hyeon-Sook and Marisol were relatively familiar with each other, having shared several classes together and with a number of their classmates. Aki was a relative newcomer and had yet to develop relationships with either of her teammates. The labor was divided evenly, with each member taking responsibility for one section of the presentation; in addition, Aki volunteered to make the PowerPoint. There was no ordained leader within the group, in which Marisol and Aki shared the greatest influence. The group worked mostly autonomously and rarely requested help from Lisa, who largely left them alone.

### ***Marisol***

Marisol was talkative throughout every stage of the project. She was the most active member in both social and task-related talk. In social talk, Marisol made jokes and shared personal stories at each session. In task-related talk, not only did she make numerous suggestions for approaching the task and creating the presentation as a whole, but she also gave feedback to each of her teammates about their contributions. Although she spoke far more than either of her teammates, and influenced several important decisions, she was not overtly recognized as the group leader by her partners, and she told me in an interview that she did not want to be a leader or to boss others around:

*...I don't really like being the leader and, like, giving orders to everyone. That's not me.*

(Marisol)

Nevertheless, Marisol's personality and her active conversation style and approach to group work gave her a great influence over many aspects of the group's work and interactions. She led the group by taking the lead in most interactions with Lisa, suggesting a time and place for meeting, and suggesting a way to divide the work. In this case, Marisol devised a fun method of dividing up the work fairly. First, she tore a sheet of paper into three parts, and asked her partners to draw lots. Hyeon-Sook drew the conclusion, but, worried that this was the most difficult of the three sections, appealed for a trade. Aki agreed to trade lots with her, taking the conclusion and leaving Hyeon-Sook with the introduction. Everyone was satisfied with this agreement. Marisol's surprising way of turning this decision into a game, and the way each member of the group responded to it in turn created quite a bit of laughter. Marisol then made this decision concrete with a matter-of-fact summary of the tasks:

Marisol: Now, you are gonna start with the history of chocolate.  
You're gonna introduce the healthy and health effects.

Hyeon-Sook: Last sentence I introduce...

Marisol: You introduce and you say a little bit.  
Don't say all the information.

Aki: Okayhhh.

Marisol: And your work is to find the history of chocolate.

Hyeon-Sook: Hm. Yes. Mhm.

Marisol: That's your task for Friday. And then **you**,  
you're gonna look for this.

This excerpt exemplifies Marisol's direct speaking style. In her interactions with her partners throughout the two and a half weeks of the project, Marisol's style of

speaking could be very direct. In discussing the task, she made several strong statements of need and of opinion; e.g., “We have to divide the information,” “you and I need to be more like...narrow more,” and “we have to do by numbers.”

In another case, she has definite suggestions for how to divide the presentation:

Marisol: It is gonna be easier. Because if we start (inaudible)  
in the introduction,  
they’re gonna get lost. Here it’s easier.  
Here and...maybe one of us  
can say the introduction. And giving the (inaudible)  
with the first part, the body. And then someone else explains  
more and more and more and then the other one  
is like going and presenting and concluding. It’ll be better.

In addition, Marisol made more statements with “you should,” as well as direct commands, than do her partners. She also sometimes directly contradicted the opinions of others. In this excerpt, she disagreed with Hyeon-Sook about the number of minutes needed for the question and answer session at the end of the presentation:

Hyeon-Sook: One minute, maybe conclusion. We can use 15.  
Marisol: I don’t think because we make questions  
Hyeon-Sook: one minute questions  
Marisol: let’s leave two minutes questions  
Hyeon-Sook: (laugh)

Even when speaking with Lisa, Marisol could be blunt: In the following excerpt, Lisa is explaining to the group that they should just summarize the results of the experiment rather than going into detail, when Marisol speaks from the heart:

Lisa: But if you take the main [Hyeon-Sook: mhm] results  
And explain it in a simplified way [Hyeon-Sook, Aki, Marisol:  
mhm]  
You know=

Marisol: =yeah, I think that's boring for the people=  
 Lisa: =yeah it's gonna be boring=  
 Marisol: =It's like, no one cares.

Though direct in her opinions and criticism, Marisol was just as free with her praise. She gave many positive evaluations of her partners' work throughout the project. She made positive comments on the ideas of others; i.e., "I like that. The history of chocolate," "emotion. I like that...emotions," "I like the focus on emotions," "Yeah, I like it" and "Ah, yeah, we should do it!" She also commented on the content that others had found in their searches: "I like it...I like that information." During the self-evaluation, she offered positive feedback on Aki's performance "I like that part"; and on Hyeon-Sook's—

Marisol: I like...I like your presentation. Yeah  
 Hyeon-Sook: Thank you. (laughs)  
 Marisol: Like, you were fine and "yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah"  
 and explain everything and understandable  
 and I think that was perfect.

In her interview with me, Marisol praised Hyeon-Sook's presentation and both her partners' working style. During class, while working with her partners, she similarly made positive evaluations about classmates who were not members of the group. For example, while waiting to give their presentation on Day 3, she said she liked the way Rami expressed himself, and after watching their recorded presentation, she praised the way Kaori posed questions to the group. Expressing her opinions and feelings directly, whether positive or negative, appeared to be a part of Marisol's personality.

Marisol seemed to want to make group work in class fun and lively. In interview, she said that she had liked doing the skit because it had given her the opportunity to make others laugh, which she enjoyed made her feel relaxed. She had seen a difference between the young members of her skit group, Rami and Kaori, and the older members of her current team:

*we are young and we can make fun of everything and no one is gonna get offended or something, so I think that's great, but otherwise working with Hyeon-Sook and Aki is more serious and...different. And...I think I like more that way because I focus more and I get like, more prepared and everything. Yeah.*

(Marisol)

In her view, an ideal teammate for group work would combine the two approaches, diligence and humor:

*The person should be, like, focused and available to work...and not that serious—the person should have, like, a humor, so it won't be that tense and that intense.*

(Marisol)

Besides wanting to make a pleasant atmosphere, Marisol also felt responsible to the group. She said during her post-project interview that she liked to work in a group because “with people, I feel more responsibility....if you work in a group you have to do it, because if you don't, you're gonna leave a bad representation of you with your partners.” She later said that her goal for working in the computer lab was “to find as much information as I can to share with my partners and, like, to accumulate everything and divide the tasks.” She added that the responsibility to work and communicate with the group continued outside of class—“And then it is our, like, assignment to do more—like our researches or PowerPoints or whatever we do, we have to inform the others.”

Taken together with her frequent suggestions and feedback and her offers to help Hyeon-

Sook and Aki with their work, this sense of obligation to the group and desire to leave a good impression on her partners suggests that *Being a Good Group Member* motivated Marisol in much of her work and interaction.

Building relationships with partners and having fun in group work appeared consistent with Marisol's behavior in other class activities. She often enjoyed playing or joking with classmates, especially Emi, Kaori, and Rami. Marisol's positivity, combined with her chatting and sharing personal stories throughout the preparation and self-evaluation stages, suggest that *Having Fun*, *Relationship Building*, and *Being a Good Group Member* motivated much of her activity during the group project.

### ***Hyeon-Sook***

Hyeon-Sook's primary activities changed over the course of the project. In the early stages, she pursued task-directed goals such as completing the presentation and learning more about the topic. She was also motivated by a social motive, *Having Fun*. In later stages, she focused on conscious goals like giving a cohesive presentation and completing the task on time.

Throughout the two prep days, Hyeon-Sook researched the history of chocolate and began working on her presentation slides. Several goals emerged during this part of the project. One of Hyeon-Sook's conscious goals for the presentation planning was to limit her speaking role. When the time came for the group to choose lots for the part of the presentation that they would each present, Hyeon-Sook drew the conclusion slip. However, noting that "conclusion is difficult. And you have to discussion about the

question, and summarize, and..." she asked Aki to exchange sections with her. As she explained in an interview, she wanted to get the easiest speaking role.

*I chose the introduction part because I think it's maybe not difficult. Yeah, so...my English is not good—not better than others—so I choose that part, so...and I make more easier style introduction.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

A second goal for Hyeon-Sook was finishing the task early. With other work to do, Hyeon-Sook wanted to maximize her production during class time and use her time at home for other things. As she told me in interview,

*So I think, 'I have to use this time because I'm busy, so...however I have to complete this time the finding resource, so I'm really busy and...just I found two sources. And if I have time, I want more. But it's okay.'*

(Hyeon-Sook)

By the start of the second prep session, Hyeon-Sook had found enough information to create a timeline and sketch of her script. She had also put these on PowerPoint slides, which she brought to class. This degree of productivity and preparation surprised her partners, who were not nearly as advanced in their progress. It also caused Hyeon-Sook some dismay. Because Hyeon-Sook was presenting the introduction, she needed to be able to state briefly what Marisol and Aki were going to discuss in their sections. Without this information, she was unable to complete her work and found herself in a holding pattern.

*"At first, we have to research about my part, so it's good. And second time is, I already almost finished but other members didn't start, so second class is just I'm waiting for others. And at that time, I use...read others' researches so I can understand something, other group members."*

*"....sometimes, we have to same step but others not start. At first time, we are same step and second class we are some different step. So at that time, "Ah, I can*



*use different way this time.” Yeah. The second class is searching. I want others members have to some progress so we have to talk about...but they didn’t”*

(Hyeon-Sook)

### *Social Activity*

On the first prep day, Hyeon-Sook seemed to be in a playful mood, joking with Aki on several occasions and laughing often as they discussed and researched their topic. In the following excerpt, Hyeon-Sook emerges from her reading on the history of chocolate to call Aki’s attention to the magnitude of her work:

Hyeon-Sook: (inaudible) 2000 BC Amazon (laugh)

Aki: (laugh)

Hyeon-Sook: history of chocolate (laugh) 2000 BC Amazon

Marisol: Oh my god

Aki: She should go back to 2000hhh (laugh)

Hyeon-Sook: It’s kind of boring so...different thing (laughing)

On the second day, she and Marisol had some disagreements and tension over the organization of the PowerPoint, which I will address later in my discussion of contradictions. The 45-minute session was marked by alternating conflict and resolution, task discussion, and off-task play. As the project advanced into the rehearsal and self-evaluation stages, Hyeon-Sook, like her partners, became more focused on the task, and especially on her own individual work. With this change came a decrease in her social talk.

## *Aki*

Aki did not expect to benefit much from the group presentation project. Although she enjoyed working on the skit with Yi-Ning and Jinhee, she preferred making presentations alone. Her response when Lisa announced another group project was, “Oh, again?”

Like Hyeon-Sook, Aki pursued two types of activities—social and task-related—throughout the project. These different activities alternated in salience and at times overlapped during each class. Aki participated in decision making in each session and worked independently searching for and reading research.

Aki made numerous suggestions throughout the work sessions of the project. Although Marisol was the most talkative member and most assertive in her opinions, Aki contributed important ideas and initiated as many new work stages as Marisol. The most important idea that Aki contributed was the presentation’s topic itself—chocolate. Aki suggested the broad topic “chocolate,” which the group immediately liked. She describes the genesis of the idea:

*...before I have read some articles on chocolate. Maybe it was on BBC news or other news online and I’m interested in chocolate. I love chocolate. I eat it every day, so I needed to find out the good reason to eat chocolate every day for me....friends also talk to me about how chocolate is good for your health or mind, so that’s why I was really interested in chocolate. (Aki, Interview)*

The idea took off quickly. Hyeon-Sook then suggested including “the history of chocolate or origin or chocolate,” and Marisol suggested looking into the effects of chocolate consumption on health, both physical and emotional.

Aki's choice of topic would have important consequences for the group. The topic turned out to be one that all three quickly found not only acceptable, but interesting. This generated several kinds of talk over the course of the planning sessions: personal comments (Aki notes that she loves chocolate, Marisol says she prefers milk chocolate to dark chocolate) and stories about chocolate (the best chocolate comes from Venezuela), joking about chocolate (chocolate addiction, chocolate as an aphrodisiac), discussion of new vocabulary related to chocolate (meaning and pronunciation of *palatable* and *aphrodisiac*), and sharing of information they found interesting from their research even when discussion of content was not needed. (For example, Hyeon-Sook commented to Aki that the 2000 year history of chocolate was long and boring; On Day 2, Hyeon-Sook shared with Marisol the fact that it is body temperature that melts chocolate). This may have served to help the group bond socially as well as providing a great deal of L2 interaction and even linguistic related episodes (Swain and Lapkin, 1995) or metatalk.

Aki also made numerous suggestions about narrowing the topic, dividing the task, meeting times, and materials for the PowerPoint, most of which were accepted by the group. In fact, during post-project interviews, Marisol said that it was Aki's idea to divide the presentation by choosing lots at random but Aki told me it had been Marisol's idea.

#### *Learning about the topic*

Aki's desire to find a link between health and chocolate motivated her second activity: learning more about the topic. Aki spent much of her time researching the topic at home between the first two rehearsal days and discovered an article reporting research conducted with the Kuna people, suggesting a link between the Kuna people's intake of

pure cocoa and a lower risk of certain diseases. She'd spent some time reading the article and was able to summarize it for Lisa at the beginning of the second session. She then devoted most of the second session to reading the article more carefully and finding additional information. According to Hyeon-Sook, Aki had still not completely prepared her part when they met following the third day. However, by the time the group rehearsed their presentation for the class, Aki had developed a good familiarity with the content and was able to answer questions at length, drawing on the article for her responses. Being able to read actual research on chocolate was the first thing Aki mentioned when asked how the project had been useful: "One thing is that we can look at the actual articles, scientific research the chocolate for our presentation." (Aki)

In this excerpt, Aki asked Marisol about the information she had found about chocolate's effect on mood.

Marisol:	(5.0) It says that chocolate...
	I mean the amount of chocolate
	has the potential to improve negative mood=
Aki:	=mhm=
Marisol:	= immediately=
Aki:	
	=mhm=
Marisol:	=and that this effect depends on palatability,
	on how good chocolate it is=
Aki:	Ah:: okay=
Marisol:	=So it depends.
	If it is very dark chocolate=
Aki:	=mhm=
	=maybe=
Aki:	=mhm=
Marisol:	=it won't be that
good.	

Aki: mhm  
 Marisol: I don't like dark chocolate.  
 I like milk chocolate.  
 Aki: mhm. So: hhh Yeah me too. Ah. Hm. I'm curious wh—like why,  
 which...which ingredient of chocolate  
 makes people [healthy  
 Marisol: [I think it is the cocoa.  
 Aki: The cocoa?  
 Marisol: I think so.  
 Aki: I...it says coc- uh, chocolate in—includes, like, flavenoids,  
 flavenoids and other chemical—  
 not chemical, but other=  
 Marisol: =components=  
 Aki: =umhm. Components.  
 So if you can find it, that's really good.

The two classmates seemed thoroughly engaged in this exchange, with back channeling, overlap, and completed utterances. During stimulated recall, I asked her about this moment and she replied,

Aki: ...I wanted to know why, what kind of...why the chocolate, what kind of  
 ingredients or what kind of things in chocolate make people feel better.  
 JWH: For the presentation purposes or for your own interest?  
 Aki: Uh, own interest, yes. (laugh)

Because she spent most of her time engaged in the task, I propose that her activity within the group system for much of the planning stages were directed towards the goals of *Meeting Task Requirements* and *Learning About the Topic*. Social activities also played a prominent role in Aki's group work, however. These secondary activities were motivated by *Building Relationships*, *Having Fun*, and *Being a Good Group Member*.

Throughout the project, Aki made frequent positive evaluations of and displays of interest in her partners' ideas. She also helped her partners on several occasions by

looking up information they needed or by providing assistance with grammar and vocabulary. For example, when the group encountered the unknown word *palatable* in their discussion of Marisol's article, Aki checked the definition of the word online and provided it. On rehearsal day, Hyeon-Sook asked Aki several questions about vocabulary and grammar for the wording of her slides. Although she was preparing her own material for the upcoming rehearsal, Aki answered each of her questions. These actions of helping, collaborating, and agreeing to others' suggestions and requests indicates that being a good group member was a motivation for Aki's group work behavior.

Aki frequently laughed at her partners' jokes and responded with her own jokes. She did not usually initiate these exchanges, but appeared to enjoy them and to participate when they arose. Her joking and participating in chatting and personal information sharing indicate that *Having Fun* and *Relationship Building* were secondary motives for Aki in this project.

#### *Improving her performance*

For much of the rehearsal and self-evaluation periods, Aki's interaction with her group mates was limited to responding to their questions. She initiated very few exchanges. During these two stages, she was focused on preparing for the rehearsal, analyzing Lisa's feedback, and evaluating her own performance. Her social motives and desire to learn more about chocolate were no longer salient. Now the immediate goals of giving a good presentation and improving her English came into prominence.

For the final presentation, Aki focused on organizing her section, speaking clearly, and talking without reading from the screen. Lisa had specifically noted in her

feedback that Aki read from the screen too often and was not pronouncing the /th/ phoneme clearly. Aki paid close attention to this feedback on her pronunciation:

*...this chance made me realize, 'oh, I really need to work on my pronunciation. Even though I think my pronunciation might be understandable, but to...make it better. I still have to work on it, yeah.*

(Aki)

## *The High-Engagement Group's Contradictions*

The High-Engagement Group's contradictions are represented in Figure 6.

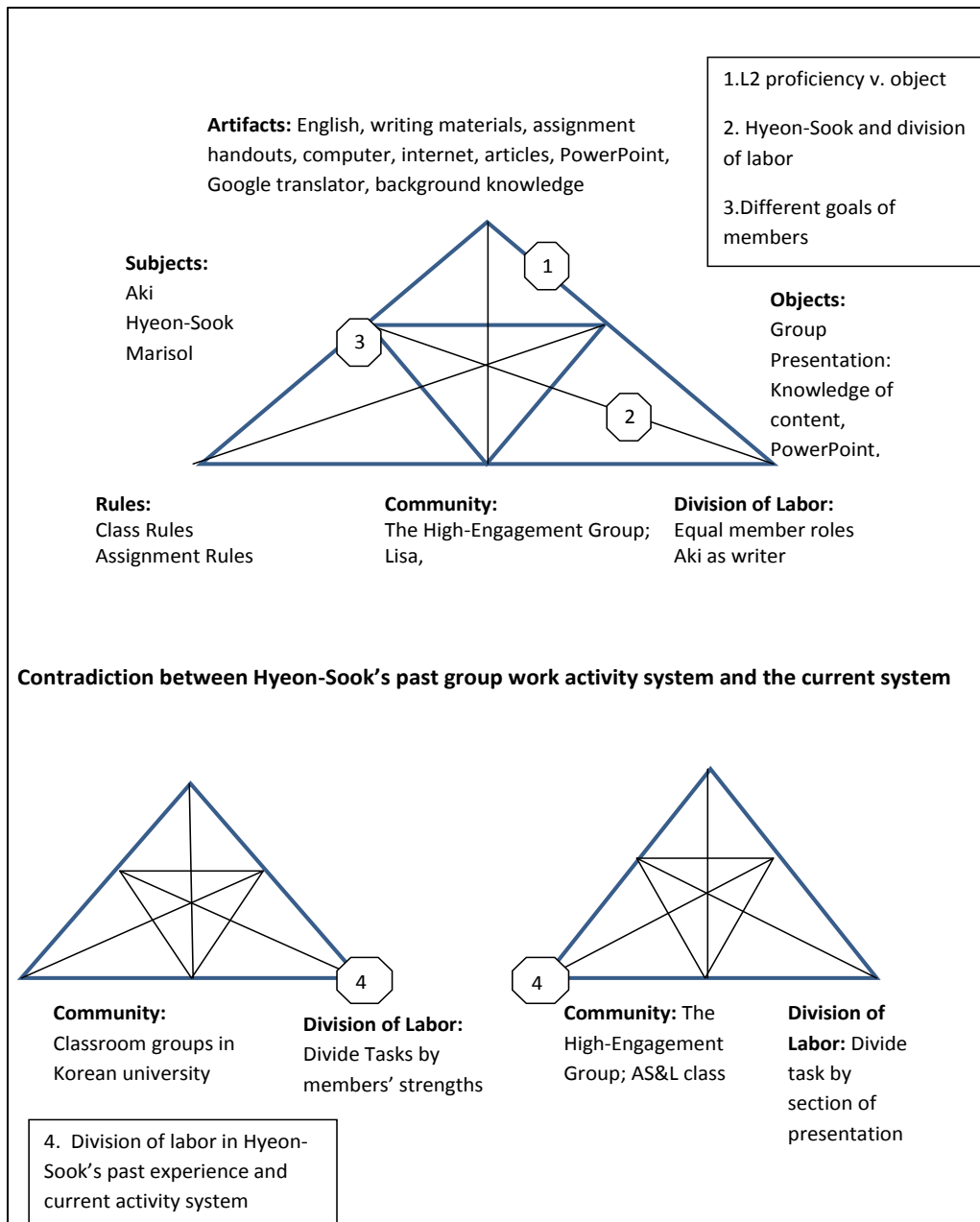


Figure 6: The High –Engagement Group's Activity System (Adapted from Engeström (1987))



Several contradictions occurred within the High-Engagement Group's activity system, involving artifact use and the division of labor. One contradiction arose in the varied English proficiency brought to the group by each member. Marisol said in her interview that she occasionally had difficulty understanding Hyeon-Sook:

*Sometimes I have, like, problems understanding Hyeon-Sook 'cause, like, sometimes she has, like, lack of words or she doesn't know how to express very well. And sometimes I get what she wants to say, but sometimes I really don't get it.*

(Marisol)

Another instance of this occurred in Marisol's L1-influenced use of the word *diapositive* to refer to PowerPoint slides, which confused both her partners. Although these contradictions in language use may have caused temporary misunderstanding, they provided the group with several opportunities for negotiation of meaning and the discussion of language. For example, on the day of the presentation, as the group prepared for their rehearsal, Hyeon-Sook receives advice from Marisol:

Marisol: Mhm. That's great [yes] let me read the...  
'cause...I need a pencil, can I use yours?  
Here it should be "mood", instead of "mind."

Hyeon-Sook: mhm

Marisol: "peoples' mood", instead of "mind".

Hyeon-Sook: Yes. So. You say chocolate has some effect=

Marisol: =Yeah=

Hyeon-Sook: =the reduce=

Marisol: =Effect, not impacts.

Hyeon-Sook: Yeah reduce the heart disease and [canc-

Marisol: Ah [That's] Aki's point,  
yeah

Hyeon-Sook: Yeah, so you have to say that [one]=

Marisol: [Yeah like]

Hyeon-Sook: =Like one sentence

Marisol: Okay. Chocolate's impact on human health  
can be summarized=  
Hyeon-Sook: =mhm=  
Marisol: =in...Oh (18.0) "In" or "on"?  
Hyeon-Sook: "On."=  
Marisol: ="On." she said "on"

Later, Hyeon-Sook sought Aki's opinion about the wording of her slides, and she and Aki worked out both pronunciation and vocabulary:

Aki: Yeah when you get Flavenoids?...flavenoids (changing  
pronunciation)  
Hyeon-Sook: Flav- in chocolate. Flavenol of chocolate.  
Aki: In cocoa=  
Hyeon-Sook: =Cocona=  
Aki: =mhm=  
Hyeon-Sook: =cacao?  
Aki: cocoa  
Hyeon-Sook: cocoa cacao (laughs)  
Aki: mhm  
Hyeon-Sook: yeah so I have to say about this,  
mm chocolate impact...impact or effect?  
Impact is right?  
  
Aki: Yeah, impact. Impact.  
Hyeon-Sook: Yeah, so I have to say chocolate and it's just...  
how...how about "chocolate impacts on human health", is it?  
Aki: ah yeah. That's good, uh huh.  
Hyeon-Sook: it's good?  
Aki: yeah

The two talked a few seconds more about the organization of Hyeon-Sook's part, and were then joined by Marisol. After two minutes of silence, Hyeon-Sook again asked for confirmation of a language point from Aki:

Hyeon-Sook: ((almost whisper)) Aki, this part I will talk about like this:

“How chocolate spread out all of the world.”

Is it correct sentence or not?

Aki: Yeah=

Hyeon-Sook: =correct sentence?

Aki: “how chocolate spread over the world” yeah

Marisol: Hm?

Hyeon-Sook: I’m not sure m(h)y (short laugh) uh sentence  
is correct or not so I ask about it.

(as she writes) How chocolate spread out...

Both Hyeon-Sook and Aki paid particular attention to language form throughout the semester. Hyeon-Sook, in particular, noted in her interview that group work gave an opportunity for learning language from others:

*Group activity is more chance to talking or thinking and I can learn from others’ speaking. Through others’ speaking, I can learn ‘Ah, this...Ah, I have to use this sentence or this word’s okay. Yeah.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

The attention to language form that made up an important part of the current learning goals and style of Aki and Hyeon-Sook, paired with Marisol’s active speaking and advanced performance, may have contributed to an environment that promoted noticing and discussing language form. This approach to group work, together with differences in proficiency among the three, may in part account for the greater amount of cooperative talk about language that occurs in the High Engagement Group.

These differences in artifact use both benefitted and hindered the work efficiency of the group. Two contradictions involving the group’s division of labor had a greater influence on their work and interaction of the group. The first contradiction arose

between the division of labor and the goals of two group members when the group divided their work equally but did not assign a leader.

When the group first began to discuss narrowing their topic, all three members agreed that the connection between chocolate and health interested them. From there, two ideas began to emerge: the influence of chocolate on physical health and the influence of chocolate on emotional health. When the division of labor was decided, and each member was given free reign over one section of the presentation, Aki was given responsibility for the conclusion and Marisol for the main body. However, both Marisol and Aki decided that they wanted to present a study. With each person in charge of their own section, both members went forward with their plans and presented two different studies. As a result, the presentation rehearsal eclipsed the 15 minute limit by five minutes. Much of this extra time came during Aki's section. Marisol later recalled that she had had doubts about whether they could talk about two studies in the allotted time, but that she was persuaded after a group discussion:

*At the beginning, I wasn't sure about doing it because Aki was taking too much time with her...with her part, and I was like, "Maybe this is gonna take too long and everyone is gonna get bored." And I didn't want that. And there was a moment that I told Aki and Hyeon-Sook that and said that I wasn't sure about doing it. And Hyeon-Sook said that maybe it was a, like a great idea to do it, because everybody's interested about chocolate and they all, like, maybe wanted to see what are the effects on health and people's mind as well. So I was like, thinking, and Aki convinced me. So I did it.*

(Marisol)

The group focused in the self-evaluation stage on shortening their sections. Lisa recommended that they either cut their presentation to only one experiment or shorten both sections. Marisol suggested that they both "narrow a little bit" to avoid confusing

their audience. To address these concerns, they reduced Aki's part for the final run-through.

A contradiction between the division of labor, the community, and an individual's goals involved Hyeon-Sook. With each person working on a different section, the work proceeded unevenly. On the second day, while Marisol searched for articles, Aki had already found and familiarized herself with a research study. Hyeon-Sook was ahead of them both, having already drafted her section of the presentation. However, Hyeon-Sook needed information from each of her partners about their studies in order to mention them in her introduction. Therefore, she had little to do during the second planning stage and instead tried to familiarize herself with their content directly:

*Sometimes, we have to same step but others not start. At first time, we are same step, and second class, we are some different step. So at that time, "Ah, I can use different way this time.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

When the group met again on the following day, Aki and Marisol still trailed in their progress. After some discussion, Hyeon-Sook asked again for the information she needed to add to her introduction and was finally able to complete her part. This lag in preparation appeared to be a problem for Hyeon-Sook because it curtailed the group's ability to discuss their plans. As she said in her interview, "I want other members have to some progress, so we have to talk about...but they didn't." Since the first prep day, Hyeon-Sook had repeatedly asked for the other members' conclusions in order to complete her task but had to wait for it. Because preparation was important for Hyeon-

Sook when she had to speak in front of class, the inability to finish her part may have been an additional cause of stress.

In addition to this lack of coordination in work timing, there was a second contradiction between the community, division of labor, and Hyeon-Sook's goals. Hyeon-Sook was concerned that because of the way the work was divided into three autonomous units with two separate studies, the final presentation would seem disjointed. She wanted to make minor changes to each person's part in order to make a more cohesive whole. She recalled, "I think our presentation is really different, really separated. So, if I make...I want to make one presentation but we are three part presentation." However, as a member of a group where each member had authority over her own part, Hyeon-Sook was reluctant to suggest the changes:

*I wonder about that because I started, so I have to introduce my part and others' part and the strongly...structure, yeah. So I want to make some different style, like I make my part and I want to change something Aki's part and Marisol's part but I cannot talking about that. Because that is theirs. So, if I can, I want to little bit change or want to change. I didn't.*

(Hyeon-Sook)

Although Hyeon-Sook was reluctant to suggest changes in others' parts, Marisol frequently suggested changes in hers. Hyeon-Sook defended her work and her authority over her own section, but yielded to Marisol's continued opposition. Both parties were willing to compromise, but in different ways and to different ends.

Finally, the division of labor contradicted Hyeon-Sook's goals in a third way. Lacking confidence in her English speaking ability, Hyeon-Sook wanted to minimize her speaking role in front of the class. The division of labor the group chose required that

each member present a portion of the PowerPoint. Although this contradiction may have caused Hyeon-Sook some anxiety, it ultimately gave her an opportunity to practice public speaking.

A final contradiction that caused some tension in the group emerged when Marisol's goals conflicted with the agreed-upon division of labor, thereby encroaching on Hyeon-Sook's standing within the group. Hyeon-Sook asked her partners for a brief description of their two parts of the presentation so that she could add them to her introduction. Marisol then suggested to Hyeon-Sook that her introduction include more detailed description of the two experiments than Hyeon-Sook had envisioned. Hyeon-Sook's plan to keep her introduction short was now threatened by Marisol's new idea.

- Marisol: Okay. I think that what you have to say  
in the introduction, besides this information is...=  
Hyeon-Sook: =Maybe  
did your topic sentence and M's topic sentence  
I need. Then=  
Marisol: =oh yeah=  
Hyeon-Sook: =I will make some introduction  
why we want to say and what [were  
Marisol: [And] who made it  
I mean who made the=  
Hyeon-Sook: =uh some specific [is uh]  
Marisol: [Yeah] specific  
basic information so people can be like "oh, okay"=  
Aki: =follow our  
presentation=  
Marisol: =Yeah  
You should start saying, "we are gonna explain  
and discuss about an experiment made of chocolate"  
Like, "the effect of chocolate"=  
Hyeon-Sook: =mhm=  
Marisol: =on mood states of people.=  
Hyeon-Sook: =mm  
Marisol: This experiment was made by" uh, who's this people?

“by these guys=

Hyeon-Sook: =mhm=  
Marisol: =from somewhere=  
Hyeon-Sook: =mhm=  
Marisol: =and someone and”=  
Hyeon-Sook: =mmm=  
Marisol: =you know what I mean?  
Hyeon-Sook: Yes but=  
Aki: =O:r=  
Hyeon-Sook: = it’s some.. **[long:]**  
Marisol:: [Just reference] just reference  
and it’ll be reference,  
it won’t take more than three lines. or two.  
Hyeon-Sook: I think I just uh It’s a good idea but ((sharp inbreath))  
you have to say about this=  
Marisol: =yeah sure sure=  
Hyeon-Sook: =Yeah, so I want  
some small or short [introduction about that about that.]  
Marisol: [mhm yeah just show you can use that]

This exchange shows a large amount of overlap as the two tried unsuccessfully to time their attempts to take the floor. As Hyeon-Sook attempted to explain the reason for her opinion (“I want some small or short introduction”) she was interrupted three times. Marisol did not appear to realize that Hyeon-Sook’s utterance “some specific is” may have been intended as a disagreement. All of Hyeon-Sook’s attempts to hold the floor failed. In the end, she was able to voice her opinion in her politely worded final utterance. In the end, this utterance, too, was overlapped and evidently misunderstood by Marisol, who appeared to think the two were in agreement. Aki, who had tried to propose an alternative, now supported Hyeon-Sook.

Aki: I think you only need to mention, like,  
mm Aki is going to [talk about]  
Marisol: [mhm]  
Aki: =the relation between



[the chocolate] and health=

Hyeon-Sook: [Yes, like that]  
Aki: =and Marisol is going to talk about the=  
Hyeon-Sook: = yes, yes=  
Aki: = mental  
Hyeon-Sook: Yes.  
Marisol: mhm  
Hyeon-Sook: Like that.  
Marisol: Yeah.  
Hyeon-Sook: Yeah.

The three appeared to agree on a shorter introduction, but Marisol went on politely to praise Hyeon-Sook's idea and explain her rationale for adding to the introduction—a desire to avoid the appearance of plagiarism. With more overlap, Hyeon-Sook again tried to fend off alterations to her responsibility.

Marisol: Your idea is pretty good  
but we have to give just a little small reference,  
like “this was an experiment  
made by Michael Mat and Joachim Mueller  
from the department of psychology in Germany.”  
Aki: uh hhhh [and then you start]  
Hyeon-Sook: [is this] Is it necessary for me?  
Aki: It...it's=  
Marisol: =It's to guide the audience,  
I [mean] it's reference [it's credit to give credit to people]=  
Hyeon-Sook: [Is it] [((long inbreath)) mm:]  
Aki: [Or::]  
Marisol: 'cause we... it is like we stole the idea

Hyeon-Sook then went on to show her partners the PowerPoint slides she had already made and explained how she would present them. Marisol directly criticized this work, saying, “I think it's like too much” and Hyeon-Sook yielded, saying she would cut it down if necessary. Marisol simultaneously wanted to cut out some of Hyeon-Sook's

information and add a reference to the experiment's author. She then returned to this thought with a sudden, excited announcement:

- Marisol:       =I got an idea!  
                  When you start like saying this  
                  “our group, Aki and Marisol and I,  
                  will present about chocolate”  
                  and then you say,  
                  “this was an experiment made by bah blah blah blah”  
                  and then just start with your question.  
                  Just [to add reference that's it]
- Hyeon-Sook:     [Unnnnnnnnn ((long falling intonation))]  
                  If you want, I will. Yes.
- Marisol:        Oh (1.5) It's not like “**I want**” but I think it is necessary.  
                  That's it.
- Hyeon-Sook:    uh:::
- Marisol:        Not an obligation.

Hyeon-Sook appeared to yield unwillingly to Marisol's continued resistance. The soft tone of her “If you want, I will. Yes” seemed to have caught Marisol off guard—she sat back quickly in her chair, paused, and with a faltering voice, said “Oh.” She then attempted to smooth the situation and remove the threat to Hyeon-Sook's position in the group. This was followed by another suggestion by Aki, a suggestion that would lengthen the introduction even further. Marisol tried to give a further explanation for her opinion.

- Aki:            I think after you finish your introduction [Hyeon-Sook: Mhm]  
                  you mention like who whose research...
- Marisol:        Yeah because we need [Hyeon-Sook: mmm (falling intonation)] to  
                  give credit=
- Aki:            =After you finish everything
- Hyeon-Sook:    Yes [then]
- Aki:            [Aki is going to]=
- Hyeon-Sook:    =Ah yours? I have to introduce yours,  
                  eh, like this last part=

Aki: =mmm=  
 Hyeon-Sook: and then I will I have to about your research  
 and who and what=  
 Aki: =Just uh How about just “who”,  
 to give credit [Just who]  
 Marisol: [Yeah because] the guys  
 I mean the class is gonna be like,  
 “where did they take this information from”=  
 Hyeon-Sook: =mhm=  
 Marisol: =You know, It’s just to give reference.

Finally, Hyeon-Sook yielded to group demands.

Hyeon-Sook: oh okay. I will. Then you will make a sentence  
 [your yours and **AND**] **AND** mm give some information  
 about the=  
 Marisol: [**Yeah** Something small not big]  
 Aki: =yeah sure=  
 Marisol: =you can say it, like,  
 between these lines.  
 I think it will fit perfect there=  
 Hyeon-Sook: =And It’s  
 it’s just the first time writing=  
 Marisol: =mhm=  
 =about that=  
 Marisol: =first draft=  
 Hyeon-Sook: =so I will.

Although she yielded, Hyeon-Sook was determined not to lose the floor again. Marisol, who appeared to assure her that the reference would be small and then put a positive spin on it by saying it would be “perfect,” nevertheless took the floor from Hyeon-Sook again. In the end, Hyeon-Sook had conceded and received nothing in return. Her work would need to be revised and her plan to keep her introduction short was now threatened. In addition, although the group appeared to have found a temporary resolution, Marisol reopened the door for conflict later by appealing to the teacher for a

solution. She asked Lisa whether they needed to put a reference in at the beginning, and appeared to put the responsibility for the confusion on Hyeon-Sook's shoulders, saying, "I was I was telling her but she was like "I don't know." Lisa, however, settled the matter with a judgment in Hyeon-Sook's favor, proposing that the best place for the reference was at the beginning of Marisol's part, not in the introduction. The group then engaged in several discussions about chocolate, including a joking exchange about chocolate's role as an aphrodisiac. Collaboration and laughter were again the salient characteristic of their interaction. Several minutes after the above disagreement, Marisol finally conceded to Hyeon-Sook, albeit in an indirect way:

Marisol:	Now I'm thinking	
	that she doesn't need to say the reference=	
Aki:		=oh yeah=
Marisol:	=that we can introduce it=	
Hyeon-Sook:	=mhm=	
Aki:	=Yeah, in the beginning of=	
Marisol:		=when you start,
	you can say that we took information	
	from two...experiments,	
	and we are gonna explain.	
	And then you explain that one and I explain this one.	

The contradiction between Marisol's goal (providing a reference to avoid plagiarism) and Hyeon-Sook's (keep the introduction short) manifested itself in a disruption of the division of labor. Tasks had already been divided, with each member assuming responsibility and being granted implicit rights to autonomy over their own section of the presentation. By suddenly attempting to introduce new information into Hyeon-Sook's section, Marisol was adding responsibilities and labor onto Hyeon-Sook and encroaching

on her rights. This was not the first time that Marisol had done this—earlier, she had suggested that Hyeon-Sook modify her slide by adding more pictures to her timeline of the history of chocolate. When Hyeon-Sook protested that this was difficult, Marisol offered to do it for her, thereby both adding more work and taking over Hyeon-Sook's creative prerogatives. In each case, Hyeon-Sook yielded.

Several contradictions emerged for Hyeon-Sook between her past activity system and the one she now found herself participating in. She had participated in group presentations several times as a student in Korea. This participation had given her a particular expectation of how work would be divided amongst group members. In her past experience, members were given responsibility for one particular aspect of the production of the presentation. One member might do the research, another, the organization; a third, the speaking. These tasks might be distributed according to the strengths of each individual, but in at least one case, Hyeon-Sook had been given a task she felt uncomfortable with—public speaking. When her team assigned each member the responsibility of researching, writing, and presenting one third of the presentation, Hyeon-Sook was surprised. This was a new experience for her. Had the group divided the task according to strength, Hyeon-Sook would not have chosen a prominent speaking role.

Aki also had a negative expectation at the beginning of the group presentation. She recalled how she'd felt when Lisa announced the project:

*I didn't feel like any good thing. Rather than doing a presentation in a group, I like to do it by myself, so that's why I didn't feel like any good way....I didn't expect this opportunity to become, turn out to be a good way. (Aki)*

Aki's preference for the creative and executive freedom of individual work was at odds with Lisa's rules for this presentation. In both of the above cases, the group members had to subjugate their preferences for work division style and individual work to meet the demands of the current activity system. Both Aki and Hyeon-Sook gained opportunities for learning through these contradictions.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS: INFLUENCE OF CONTRADICTIONS**

In this section, I discuss the findings for Research Question 4: How do contradictions within and between activity systems influence the interactions of ESL students in group projects? I begin by presenting the influences of each type of contradiction and conclude with a section summary.

Contradictions within and between activity systems affected the participation and interaction of the groups in the Advanced Listening and Speaking class in several ways. Contradictions necessitated the creation of new immediate goals and new activities. These activities were often instantiated as creative forms of talk, such as negotiation, complaining, teasing, joking, and language related episodes (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). Whether the interaction was marked by cooperation or conflict, opportunities for language use were created. Other contradictions limited the amount or types of interactions students had by encouraging independent work. In this way, opportunities for spoken language use were constrained. A summary of the types of contradictions and their influence on group work can be found in Table 6 on the following page.

Table 6: Influences of Contradictions

Type of Contradiction	Influence on interaction	Influence on participation
Physical artifact v. goal	simple contradictions: complaints larger contradictions: new activity (chatting, web surfing, working on something else)	Simple contradiction: Simple resolution/accept contradiction
Symbolic artifact v. goal (a) Insufficient L2 proficiency (b) expectation of failure based on evaluation of symbolic artifact: insufficient L2 proficiency, background knowledge	Creative solution: Negotiation, focus on form, joking, accept and move on (b) Ask/volunteer for lesser role	New goal: Role avoidance
Rule vs. goals	Negotiate, ask for explanations, complain, discuss with group	Accept rule or find a solution
Division of labor v. goals (a) Someone not doing their part (b) Someone wants diminished role (c) Inefficient distribution of labor (Leader seeks consensus, failure to specialize, assignment of tasks too late)	(a) New activity: Complaining, teasing, conflict (b) Negotiation  (c) Less discussion of content; more discussion of task; less overall discussion; more teacher talk	Attempt to change role (become more or less assertive)  (c) Redundant work, indecisiveness, increased participation by teacher
Clashing goals or motives	Conflict, disengagement	Dominance of concerned members; disengagement
prior vs. current activity system (expected role of teacher and student, expectation of labor distribution, expectation of academic speaking tasks)	Negotiation, conflict	New goal: get current system into alignment with old system

### Contradictions involving artifacts

The groups experienced a number of situations in which the artifacts they had at their disposal were unsuited to the accomplishment of their expected individual or group outcomes. Contradictions involving physical artifacts rarely caused the students more



than temporary difficulty and were quickly and easily resolved. For example, as Aki and Yi-Ning worked to construct their skit dialog, Yi-Ning complained that her homework, which she needed to complete the task, had not been returned by Lisa yet. In addition, the idioms they could use were spread over several handouts, causing them to have to flip back and forth between several sheets as they worked. In addition, the slowness of his internet connection caused Antonio to complain aloud. Although these contradictions caused a loss of time, they were only momentary problems. A contradiction between a physical tool and a group goal that created a more substantial loss of time occurred on self-evaluation day. When Lisa found that the video files that she wanted the students to be able to watch had not uploaded properly to the online course management system, the Indecisive and High-Engagement groups both had to wait for several minutes while she found a solution. This necessitated the formation of new temporary goals and a change in activities: some worked on their PowerPoint slides, others checked their email or surfed the internet. The High-Engagement group took some of the time to chat about the topic of an upcoming class discussion, contrasting drug use patterns in their countries and in the United States.

Contradictions involving symbolic artifacts were more frequent and more challenging for the students. The most common challenge emerged from tensions between the students' background knowledge or L2 proficiency and the objects of their activity. When the object of a student's activity was knowledge of the presentation content, gained through the use of books, websites, and mediated by accumulated background knowledge and English proficiency, students in the class frequently met

instances in which their tools were insufficient for realizing their outcome (increased understanding). When this occurred, they made use of additional tools such as electronic translators or Google Translator. In addition, they relied on each other for scaffolding. In the process, the activity in which they were engaged led to the creation of a new activity, negotiation of meaning, in which the focus was no longer on content knowledge but on linguistic form. This could, in turn, lead to language play or joking. One example of this occurred in the High-Engagement group. In this excerpt, as Marisol explained some content related to her presentation topic (chocolate's effects on emotion), she had an idea for which she lacked vocabulary. This led to an attempt to find the meaning of the word using Google Translate and then to an extended round of joking:

Aki : (9.0) Ah..here. chocolate contains like this  
which is the same hormone in the brain,  
tri...(unintelligible)  
you fall in love... falling in love=  
Marisol: =Because it is...  
what's the word? Let me look it up.

As Marisol began to search for the word on Google Translate, the group members proceeded to translate the word into each of their first language to share the joke together.

Marisol: [Aphrodisiac]  
Aki: aphro—  
Marisol: aphrodisiac  
Hyeon-Sook: Aphro::disai—disea—=  
Marisol: =hold on.=  
Hyeon-Sook: =ah=  
Marisol: =Korean Korean Korean  
Hyeon-Sook: Korean=

Marisol: =where is the K?  
 Aki: oh h-i-j-k here.  
 Hyeon-Sook: yeah here ((seeing definition)) OHhh hhh!  
 Marisol: And then Japanese  
 Aki: hhWhat's that? (laughing)  
 Hyeon-Sook: Huh huh huhhhh  
 Aki: UH huh huh ((seeing definition??))  
 Hyeon-Sook: hhh  
 Aki: I I (unintelligible) this word in  
 Marisol: It is. Real, for real.  
 Aki: Yeah  
 Marisol: It is.

Hyeon-Sook then added a joke that escalated the laughter:

Hyeon-Sook: (laugh) OH ho:: I need. hhh  
 Marisol: AHAHAHAHAHAHA  
 Aki: HHH hahahahaha  
 Marisol: Well well! ((more laughter))  
 I don't knowhh...lalalalala...((singing))  
 Hyeon-Sook: Yeah you don't know!  
 ((everybody laughing very loudly))

Aki then continued the play with her own contribution:

Aki: Hyeon-Sook will be  
 Hyeon-Sook: hahaha  
 Marisol: Lalalala  
 ((all laughing))  
 Aki: You will present this one? Talk about this?  
 Hyeon-Sook: Oh ho ho  
 Marisol: Just to make fun.  
 Hyeon-Sook: yeah

In this case, the contradiction arising between the group goal of increasing their knowledge of the presentation content and the artifacts available for their use engendered three new collaborative activities: attempting to work out the pronunciation of the word

(a focus on linguistic form), attempting to learn the meaning of new vocabulary through the use of a dictionary, and joking. The division of labor in these activities mirrored that of their central activity system, in which the objects were the knowledge, planning and performance of the presentation, with Marisol taking the lead. Here, however the work was even more collaborative because the turns are distributed evenly and each member contributing.

When the immediate object of the group was comprehension of one another, the contradiction between L2 proficiency and the goal of comprehension could necessitate successful or unsuccessful negotiation. For example, Marisol and Aki, successfully negotiated the meaning of the word “diapositive,” and Jinhee and Emi negotiated the meaning of “bread.” In addition, Marisol reported that, although she sometimes did not understand Hyeon-Sook’s English, Hyeon-Sook had gotten her meaning across through drawing or gesture. Further, Yi-Ning said that the Indecisive Group had experienced difficulties in communication when Rami was unable to schedule an interpreter to attend their out-of-class meeting. She and Rami were able to understand each other by writing things down or the use of a few ASL signs (Okay, good) and non-sign gestures.

In these cases, contradictions necessitated the creative use of language or other artifacts. These activities could not always successfully resolve the problems with understanding, and this could lead to acceptance of misunderstanding by one or all parties in the interaction. For example, Marisol admitted that there were times when she simply could not get what Hyeon-Sook was trying to say to her. Likewise, Yi-Ning also said that there were points at which full understanding or expression was not possible between

Rami and the hearing members of the group. Yi-Ning's concern that the articles she had found contained too many words that were too difficult both to pronounce and to explain led her to discard those articles rather than continuing to study them. Hyeon-Sook, too, unable to use the required idioms and say her lines without adequate practice time, accepted that she would not be able to perform as well as she'd like.

*...others quickly quickly make answer and moved the next steps but I didn't. I cannot, so it's difficult, and she gave short time. In my case, others are good but I need more time...*

(Hyeon-Sook)

Whereas for the group presentation she felt she needed to put in more effort, the skit was different. She said,

*it's group presentation, so I have to do best, but idiom or skit is sometimes I give up. 'I don't know,' just, 'yeah, okay.' Like that (laugh).*

(Hyeon-Sook)

A final instance in which a contradiction between a member's goal and her English ability led to a new activity emerged from Aki's first group presentation rehearsal. In her feedback to Aki about her performance, Lisa noted that Aki's pronunciation of the /ð/ phoneme was not correct. Aki then began to engage in a new activity, directed towards a goal that she had not previously held—improving her pronunciation. She mostly pursued this activity at home, not with her team mates, and continued to work towards that goal even after the final performance had passed. This activity included a sub-activity, searching for English pronunciation websites, which produced an artifact that she could then use for general pronunciation practice.

Although contradictions based on L2 proficiency often resulted in creative solutions through artifact use, self-evaluations of one's ability could result in a goal of

avoiding certain roles, with a resulting effect on the division of labor. Developed through past experience of participating in “exogenous activity systems,” the expectation that their language proficiency or background knowledge would not be sufficient for the task influenced Jinhee and Hyeon-Sook to seek certain tasks and avoid others. Hyeon-Sook, lacking confidence in her English proficiency and worried that it could affect her team’s grade, attempted to avoid a large speaking role in both the idiom skit and the presentation. In both cases, she found herself assigned a large public speaking role by the group and responded by appealing for a redistribution of labor. This appeal was not accepted in the Happy Family Group. Antonio insisted that Hyeon-Sook keep the “daughter” role they had already developed, and Kaori remained silent. In the High-Engagement Group, by contrast, Hyeon-Sook asked for a change in the distribution of tasks immediately as it was assigned. She was allowed to change parts, even though this entailed a change in everyone’s task.

Like Hyeon-Sook, Jinhee felt embarrassed by what she perceived as a lack of knowledge needed for the assignment:

*it’s a speaking class so I never think about presentation topic will be science or some other things, just think about some culture thing because we are all from different culture. So I felt embarrassed.*

(Jinhee)

However, the distribution of labor mitigated this lack of knowledge. As Antonio and Emi began searching for resources, Jinhee took the leader role, allowing her to organize and coordinate rather than analyze scientific studies:

*At first because of topic is about science; I am not familiar with the science or math, that part, so feel some nervous. But because our group divided each*

*person's part so Antonio have charge for the search some experiment, and Emi found some video in YouTube, and I make some PowerPoint and then combine their opinions and their jobs. So finally, it was good.*

(Jinhee)

### **Contradictions Involving Rules**

Contradictions between individual or group goals and community rules spurred different responses, depending on whether the rule originated from among the group's student members or from Lisa, who, although a member of each system and of the class system as a whole, nevertheless represented an authority rather than a peer. When a goal contradicted a rule that originated among student peers, the students negotiated a solution. Rami's requirement that an interpreter be present whenever possible necessitated negotiation of the meeting time. This policy for the group emerged internally, being a need of one of the members, and would not likely have been rejected. However, other rules, imposed on the group by their teacher, also contradicted group goals. These contradictions led to three different types of interactions: asking Lisa for clarification, discussion within the group, and complaints.

One rule for the group presentation, namely, the directive to choose a topic from the broad theme "science," caused several students some confusion and formed a temporary obstacle to their ability to research their presentation. Antonio and Yi-Ning addressed this problem by asking Lisa for further explanation of the directions.

Jinhee complained to her partners and asked if they understood their directions. Jinhee and Marisol both complained about the short time frame for the presentation:

Lisa: Well that's your first run. The better, more feedback  
The better prepared you are for your first one  
The better you will do for your second, right?  
Jinhee: ((to someone in her group)) But we don't have time to (unintelligible)

Marisol complained directly to Lisa:

Hyeon-Sook: Wednesday you have to present your first one, yeah.  
Marisol: We can meet Friday.  
  
(?): (unintelligible)  
Hyeon-Sook: Friday is late.  
Lisa: Yeah, Friday is too late.  
Marisol: No this, this Friday.  
Lisa: [Yeah you have your first run.]  
Hyeon-Sook: [Today is Monday.]  
Marisol: HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?! We have...(heavy outbreath)

The short time frame allotted for the assignment caused a conflict with the homework she had to do to fulfill her responsibilities in her other ESL course activity systems.

Lisa set two rules for the assignments that reflected larger class rules enacting her belief in the importance of group communication and cooperative learning. These were (1) that the assignment had to be done as a group of three; and (2) To ensure that groups stayed in the L2, each group should be composed of students with different L1s. In addition, although she allowed students to choose their own groups for the skit activity, Lisa wanted students to work with new partners for the group presentation. She therefore grouped the students herself in advance. These two rules caused the students some discomfort. Some felt disappointed that they had to work in a group at all, like Aki. Her preference for freedom to make decisions about all aspects of a task was thwarted by this rule. The other focal participants all said that having to work in groups with people they



did not know well makes it more difficult to speak up when they did not agree with another member. Jinhee added that she preferred working with friends because they could understand each other more easily. This rule was non-negotiable and perhaps understood by each student as a basic part of ESL courses. Therefore, each member accepted the rule and compromised with their partners even though this constrained the degree to which they could voice their opinions and realize their own ideas in the final product.

### **Contradictions Involving the Division of Labor**

Although contradictions involving rules and artifacts caused students anxiety or inconvenience, they did not cause conflict or serious disruptions in the group's work. Contradictions arising around the division of labor, however, put a greater strain on the group's work and social interaction. These division of labor contradictions centered around four problems: lack of coordination (contradiction between division of labor and communal goal); inefficient distribution of tasks (contradiction between distribution of labor and communal goal); a member wishing to revise an assigned role (contradiction between division of labor and individual goal); and someone not doing his or her part on time (contradiction between division of labor and both the communal goal and rules mandating equal distribution of work). In the first two cases, the contradictions led to lost time and less talk. In the third, the result was a negotiation and either acceptance of one's goal or frustration of one's goal via the denial of a request. In the fourth, a conflict arose between group members.

The Indecisive Group's attempts to seek consensus and their redundant distribution of tasks led to a loss of valuable time as they searched for, found, and rejected numerous articles. Without a leader to bring the group to a decision, the group did not find a satisfactory article until the second day of the project, curtailing their total time for planning their task. As a result, both their total amount of talk and the type of talk in which they engaged were affected. They spent more time talking about the task and less time discussing content during class time than the other two groups. Lisa, sensing that the group needed help, gradually took over a leader role. This, however, ensured that the great majority of talk remained directed from Yi-Ning to Lisa or Lisa to the group.

In the skit project, the 10,000 shoes group also lost time by inefficient distribution of tasks. By giving Jinhee, who had not been able to take a role in the skit planning, the role of writer just the day before the skit was to be performed, they lost the ability to practice until seeing the script just before class. Jinhee, who had no idea that the skit would actually be performed, may have felt that there was no need to share the script until then, because no rehearsal would be needed. This did not lead to any conflict between group members. However, on rehearsal day, the group was busy memorizing their lines and had no time to discuss other points about the performance. When Aki mentioned things they needed to keep in mind about the performance, she received only minimal responses.

Despite asking twice, Hyeon-Sook was denied her attempt to minimize her speaking role in the skit group task. Antonio may not have correctly interpreted Hyeon-

Sook's goal or the strength of her desire to reduce her speaking responsibilities. After all, the group had been joking and kidding nearly continuously since the beginning of their planning. At any rate, the group did not allow her request. Her negotiation with Aki over the distribution of roles in the group presentation, however, was successful. Hyeon-Sook was allowed to take responsibility for the introduction while her partners researched and presented the experiments. By seeking the easier task, however, Hyeon-Sook may have inadvertently contributed to a later contradiction in the High-Engagement Group's division of labor.

Aki and Marisol lagged behind Hyeon-Sook in their progress while working on the group presentation. This may have been because Aki and Marisol had the task of finding and reading journal articles on the link between chocolate and health. By contrast, Hyeon-Sook's part was more straightforward—finding information about the history of chocolate, which could be done more quickly. Hyeon-Sook made quick progress, brought drafts of her work to class on the second planning day, and was frustrated by having to wait for her partners to catch up. The contradiction that emerged between her goal of finishing quickly and the High Engagement Group's division of labor did not cause immediate conflict. Instead, Hyeon-Sook developed a new goal to keep busy and productive. She decided to inform herself about each partner's content by reading their research. Her goal had now become improving her topic knowledge. This allowed her to learn more about the topic and engage in discussions of the content that gave her more opportunities for socializing and language development.

A division of labor and goal contradiction that did cause conflict emerged when Antonio failed to accomplish a number of tasks on self-evaluation day. As described in Chapter 5, Antonio forgot to send Jinhee a reference and forgot to bring the PowerPoint file. Jinhee, who had been playfully teasing Antonio each time that his work style seemed to threaten Jinhee's desire for predictability and preparation, as well as what she considered the efficiency of the group in reaching its communal goal, continued to goad him as he protested in reply.

A final contradiction in the division of labor occurred when Marisol's goal of avoiding what she considered plagiarism by providing references in the introduction of the High-Engagement Group's presentation violated Hyeon-Sook's prerogative over the section. This created conflict as Marisol repeatedly attempted to create work for Hyeon-Sook and Hyeon-Sook repeatedly declined. The conflict was finally resolved when Hyeon-Sook yielded, the group changed the subject and joked about other topics, and Marisol finally made a concession to Hyeon-Sook.

### **Contradictions between individuals' goals or motives:**

Some contradictions between individuals' motives or goals promoted disengagement, as in the cases of Emi and Yi-Ning, who attempted to initiate chatting with their goal-focused partners. Others promoted conflict. The above conflict between Jinhee and Antonio occurred when Antonio's motive of having fun while working clashed with Jinhee's task-related goals. This, and the conflict between Marisol and Hyeon-Sook stated above, manifested themselves in disruptions in the division of labor.

Yi-Ning and Lisa had different goals for their interaction in the planning stages of the group presentation, based on their expectations of the division of labor. Most individual goal conflicts, then, were related to the division of tasks, expectations of role, and focus on task vs. off-task behavior.

### **Contradictions between activity systems:**

Contradictions between activity systems caused students to feel surprise, worry, and frustration. These contradictions had more emotional impact because they involved a breach of expectations. For example, Jinhee felt surprised when she learned that they would be performing a skit in an academic class. She had performed skits before in English classes, but never in formal academic contexts. The object of a skit in her past activity systems had been simple enjoyment. She had thus formed the expectation that a skit was just for playing, not for serious study. This may be reflected in her goals for the task, which were entirely geared toward the performance and not the learning of idioms. When the group presentation was announced, she felt more satisfied.

Hyeon-Sook also felt anxious when she encountered a mismatch between expectation and local reality. She had hoped that the roles for the group presentation would be divided by individual talents rather than by section of the performance. This former method was her expectation based on participation in group work activity systems as an undergraduate in Korea, and she felt it was the norm in her culture. With no alternative, she accepted this new method of labor division. Nevertheless, her expectation, combined with her worry about her English proficiency, influenced her

decision to try to revise the division of tasks by asking to change her part so as to reduce her speaking role.

The contradiction between activity systems for Yi-Ning was much more jarring than either Hyeon-Sook's or Jinhee's. Her expectations about the roles of teacher and student, built through years of participation in classrooms in Taiwan, were deeply held. She told me in her initial interview that she wanted more equal distribution of power between teacher and student than had been the norm in her classrooms in Taiwan, in that teachers should listen to the opinions of students so that each can learn from the other. Still, she expected Lisa to be more authoritative, like a Taiwanese teacher, and provide less freedom of action and decision. Her interaction with Lisa during the two planning sessions was marked by a struggle for power that reflects these two positions.

#### **Chapter 4-6 Summary**

In Chapters 4 through 6, I described the expectations, goals, and motives of a class of ESL students as they worked on two group tasks. I also attempted to construct the activity system for each group as they collaborated on their assignments. Finally, I described the source and nature of numerous contradictions which occurred within these systems. In the following Chapter, I summarize and discuss the findings in relation to existing literature.

## **CHAPTER 7:. DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to explore the interaction among learners' existing expectations about group work in the ESL classroom, their goals for particular tasks, and the local context in which they pursued situated activity. In addition, I examined the nature of contradictions in ESL group work activity systems and the ways in which contradictions could manifest themselves in students' interactions. My inquiry was guided by the lens of activity theory in addressing the following questions: (1) What expectations, goals, and motives do ESL students have for participation in collaborative group projects? (2) How are students' expectations, goals, and motives for group work reflected in their participation and interaction in a group project? (3) What kinds of contradictions arise within the activity systems of groups working on group projects in an ESL class? (4) How do contradictions that arise between and within activity systems influence students' participation and interaction in group projects? In this chapter, I summarize and discuss the findings in relation to the existing literature. Next, I discuss the limitations of this study. Finally, I offer practical implications and recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

The students in the Advanced Listening and Speaking class brought with them varied expectations for both group work as a whole and the particular tasks in which they engaged during the semester. The participants in this study seemed not only to have

expectations about the potential for success, enjoyment, or usefulness of group work, but also about particular points in the activity system of a group. For the division of labor, for example, some of the expectations voiced were as follows: group members should be active, speak up, and contribute ideas for the benefit of the group; be thorough, prompt, and available; they should be focused and organized; good group members do not boss each other around but compromise and accept others' ideas. A failure to do these things could result in leaving a bad impression (Marisol) or letting the group down (Hyeon-Sook). Other expectations for the division of labor were that group members would socialize eventually and would not always have to focus on the task at hand (Aki), and that group work would be distributed to each member according to his or her strength (Hyeon-Sook). Finally, Yi-Ning had expectations for the duties of teachers and students and the power relations between them.

The students also had expectations related to communities. Group work was easier with friends than with strangers because it was easier to speak up with friends and understand each other (Yi-Ning, Hyeon-Sook, and Jinhee). As a result, Jinhee preferred to self-select her group members when group activities arose so that she could work with friends. Yi-Ning, by contrast, disliked having to choose between friends when groups were formed, and so she preferred to have the teacher make the decision. Finally, Hyeon-Sook and Aki said that working with other Asian students could be a source of comfort because they were more similar. Marisol, however, felt that a good group is formed of different, complimentary personalities but similar viewpoints.



In terms of objects, the participants voiced different opinions about the usefulness of the group tasks. Some felt that group work was suited to socializing or learning about culture but not for academic purposes (Jinhee) or creating a truly professional presentation (Hyeon-Sook). Jinhee enjoyed the presentation task because it seemed like serious study but found the skit to be non-academic and “a little bit weird.” Hyeon-Sook did not enjoy either activity but found the presentation both more useful and more enjoyable because she had more time to prepare her work. Yi-Ning, by contrast, found the skit useful for learning idioms but the presentation to be “just a group work” of the type she had done many times in Taiwan. Aki voiced a similar opinion, feeling that the skit had been fun and useful. The participants also had expectations connected with the suitability of particular artifacts for group work. Hyeon-Sook worried that her English proficiency would be insufficient for group work, and Jinhee felt that working in English could be inefficient.

In addition to having diverse expectations about group work, the students had diverse goals. They pursued officially-sanctioned, task-related group goals like making PowerPoint slides, giving a fun performance, and managing their presentation time. They also pursued individual task-related goals like finishing the work early, learning about content, improving pronunciation, and becoming familiar with other members’ research. Goals could vary in the length of time needed to fulfill them and could be temporary and changing. Students also had social goals like sharing personal information with partners, making partners laugh, and repairing conflict. Subconscious motives directed at building

relationships, maintaining one's status in the group, or having a good time also influenced students' activity.

Goals and motives were reflected in students' interactions and participation as they pursued such activities as trying to lead, finish early, negotiate decisions, have fun, or build relationships. These goals and motives occasionally brought students into disagreements or conflicts when contradictions emerged between individuals or between one individual and the group.

Numerous contradictions emerged within the group activity systems as the students worked on the two group assignments. Some contradictions involved class rules or the use of artifacts but most centered around the division of labor. Some contradictions arose between the division of labor and another point in the system, and others manifested themselves in the division of labor after beginning elsewhere. These contradictions influenced group interactions in several ways. Some contradictions encouraged students to work collaboratively and create inventive solutions, thus encouraging negotiation. This resulted in more, and often creative, talk. Other contradictions affected participation by promoting independent work or conflict, thereby limiting opportunities for talk or encouraging disengagement. Finally, contradictions emerged between the practices of students' previous group work activity systems and those of their current classroom system.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### ***Dynamism of the Activity System***

The small group activity systems in which these students participated should not be seen as isolated, static entities, but as dynamic and transformative. Third generation activity theory has conceptualized activity systems as interconnected, dynamic, and situated within ever-greater systems. The participants in each of the groups in this study were simultaneously active in multiple neighboring activity systems. For example, Aki and Yi-Ning were enrolled in academic classes at the university, and Hyeon-Sook was the mother in her family. Engeström (2001) has reimagined the concept of the activity system to include networks of systems connected by common objects. In the current study, the immediate objects and goals of group activity for the small groups, though constantly shifting, centered around common shared objects such as a language class presentation, L2 proficiency, and understanding (both individual and shared) of assignment-related knowledge. Some of these objects are shared with the activity systems from students' past language classes, linking the two systems. These systems occasionally came into contradiction for the students of the Advanced Listening and Speaking class.

Some scholars of third-generation activity theory (Engeström, et. al, 1995; Venkat & Adler, 2008) have employed the concept of “boundary” and “boundary crossing” to describe change and adaptation through resolution of the contradictions between activity systems. Venkat and Adler (2001) reported that, in a study of innovation in mathematics practice between schools, the ability of individuals to cross boundaries was influenced by both perceptions and broader institutional or structural factors. The participants in my

study similarly experienced tensions between their experience and expectations on the one hand and the norms of their current environment on the other. Yi-Ning, most especially, perceived a conflict between her past and present classroom power structures as she worked on the group presentation assignment. Her desire for direction from Lisa (the teacher) and her resistance to the idea that group problems, such as a lack of ideas, could be talked through proved a challenge. Despite being the creative and organizing force behind the group activity in both the 10,000 Shoes and Indecisive Groups, Yi-Ning found herself in the position of having to explain her group's lack of progress, which Lisa had interpreted as a failure to communicate. Yi-Ning and Lisa both eventually compromised—Yi-Ning unilaterally choosing an article, and Lisa gradually taking over more responsibility in the group. This represented some movement towards the center, but the gap between the two members' positions and Yi-Ning's unequal status in the relationship did not allow her to make changes on her own terms.

Aki experienced a similar “boundary” between her English language class experiences in Japan and those of the ESL classes she had studied attended in the United States. The expectation in ESL classes that students speak up in discussion or group work when not prompted by the teacher was initially difficult for Aki. These two students, Yi-Ning and Aki, faced struggles commonly reported in the foreign and second language literature. The difference in participation structure of language classes is well documented, as is the difficulty that students may have in reconciling those differences and adapting to American academic participation patterns. However, the accumulated experiences that the two students had of participation structures in a variety of contexts—

non-language classes in Taiwan and Japan, different types of language classes in Taiwan and Japan that employed different instructional methodologies in different ways, ESL classes abroad, and academic classes in the US—suggest that the boundaries of ESL students’ classroom participation practices, though influenced by culture, are highly nuanced and flexible.

### *Activity, Expectations, and Goals in ESL*

This study offers insight into the complex, contingent, and rapidly-changing nature of ESL students’ goals and expectations for group work. It adds to the literature a description of the interplay between extant perceptions and the mechanisms of change within a small group in action. Because an activity system is never static but always changing, parts of a system can be transformed into other components or transferred into new systems. Thorne (2003) has argued that “context-contingent behavioral norms” (p. 39) can be considered semiotic tools. Elsewhere, he has listed accumulated experience as an artifact, suggesting that expectations for how groups and individuals within them should function in classrooms should also be considered a sort of tool. Seen thus, an expectation becomes a mediating tool we can use to structure our world, with understanding as the object and meaning-making as the activity. This process can be seen in several cases in this study. In Jinhee’s case, negative experiences had reinforced her expectations about working with students who did not share her attention to thorough preparation. These experiences became an expectation, a tool with which Jinhee structured her cognition about group work. Once combined with other perceptions

formed about Antonio from her previous experiences with him, she was able to make a prediction about what the processes and outcomes of work within The Harmonious Group would be like. From the start, then, her goals had to include a newly-formed component, monitoring Antonio, that would not have been needed in a different group.

Similarly, Yi-Ning's expectation of teacher-student labor division came into profound contradiction with classroom practice. In Lisa's case, the expectation that students should be autonomous was formed through participation in an educational system and an ESL teacher community. Through internalization of artifacts (ideologies about learning, participation, and communication), she built an expectation of what students should do in an ESL class. This could, in turn, be externalized in the form of a classroom rule requiring students to take responsibility for their own learning. It could also emerge as an instructional goal. In another case, Hyeon-Sook's expectation (an artifact) that her language ability (itself an artifact) would be unsuited to the task of delivering a presentation led her to pursue a goal, speaking avoidance, that was at odds with the assignment. When her goal came into contradiction with the division of labor, she developed a new goal—a redistribution of work.

The transformation of different components of activity systems into new components of other systems has been demonstrated by Ekeblad (1998). Ekeblad (1998) has described "nested" activity systems connected by the relationship between outcome and tool in complex systems. Each system had subjects and communities that overlapped with those of other systems. The outcome produced by each system became available as a mediating artifact in the next. In addition to being dynamic and interconnected

horizontally, activity systems are commonly seen as vertically connected. Similarly, in the current study, the small groups of three students, engaged in the specific activities of producing a skit or presentation, were situated within the classroom activity system, in which the community activity focused on objects such as language proficiency, preparation for participation in American university classrooms, course grades, and knowledge of cultures. This was, in turn, situated within a university community with knowledge creation, socialization into various fields and social groups, and preparation for career and social participation as its primary activities. My analysis did not allow me to investigate the “cascade” (Ekeblad, 1998, p. 12) relationship of outcome and tool reported by Ekeblad, and how this might affect students’ work in the classroom and university activity systems. However, the outcomes of the activities pursued by the members of each group, whether linguistic (for example, the learning of idioms and lexis) material (the presentation, skit, or assignment grade), or connected to increased topic knowledge, gain or loss of face or status, or a strengthened or weakened relationship, may be available as tools for the students to employ in the classroom as a whole. The objects listed above for the ESL class activity system, transformed into outcomes by activity, would in turn be made available as semiotic tools for the students to use in the university and academia in general as they proceed along their paths of learning and growth.

### ***Attitudes and Expectations about Group Work***

This study adds to the literature a more detailed picture of the complexity of ESL students' expectations for group work. The participants in this study had varying levels of familiarity with language class group work, but all had had experience with group projects in their academic histories. These experiences had led them to create expectations about group work in general. Three of the focal participants in this study (Jinhee, Aki, and Hyeon-Sook) voiced a general preference for individual work over group work. For Jinhee and Aki, group work abridged creative control and the ability to make all important decisions oneself. In addition, Jinhee felt that group work created the potential for unforeseen events that were beyond her control. Hyeon-Sook found group work to be anxiety-provoking as it required her to speak English. However, like the participants in the study conducted by Li and Campbell (2008), the students in my study found group work useful for sharing new ideas, chatting, and learning about culture. These findings support the literature on students' beliefs about group work. Other researchers, for example, Roskams (1999), have reported that students found group work fun but questioned its usefulness for their learning. In the current study, the nature and purpose of the task was important for students in determining the usefulness of a group assignment.

The participants in my study had developed expectations not of group work in general, but about specific aspects of working in groups. Specific aspects of the two group tasks also evoked immediate expectations from the participants. Both Aki and Yi-Ning expected that the skit would be fun and helpful, but Jinhee found it to be simply



play. Hyeon-Sook, who wanted to learn but worried about speaking, found both tasks useful but not fun. For her, any group activity provoked anxiety. Jinhee found both activities to be fun but enjoyed the presentation project more because it was more useful for her learning.

The local context surrounding a particular group activity, then, may have an important influence on the expectation for a particular task. At the end of the semester, three participants in this study reported that their enjoyment of group work had increased since the semester began, largely as a result of becoming more comfortable with their classmates. As other activity theory studies have indicated, the dynamic character of activity systems constantly creates shifts in goals and motives (Jin, 2007; Lantolf & Genung, 2002). Expectations can also change through positive experiences of group work.

### ***Role of culture***

The participants in this study had formed varying expectations about group work in general and about the particular tasks with which they were faced. In my interviews with the students, I found that each had expectations based on their experiences in the educational system in which she had previously studied. Three participants directly mentioned culture in their discussion of their classroom experiences in the United States and home country. Both Yi-Ning and Aki thought that students in their respective countries were passive and not used to speaking their minds in class. Hyeon-Sook and Jinhee did not mention culture as directly, but commented on what they felt were typical

practices for forming classroom work groups and distributing tasks in Korean universities. All of these expectations were based in the division of labor in work groups in their previous activity systems and influenced the way the students went about their work during the skit and group presentation.

### ***Differences in Activity Within and Across tasks***

The groups working on their projects in this study approached their work in different ways despite working on the same task. This is in keeping with the findings of other activity theory studies of classroom tasks (e.g., Belz, 2002; Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Haneda, 2007; Storch, 2004) Also in keeping with this literature (e.g., Jin, 2007), the same students pursued different activities when engaged in similar tasks at different points in an instructional term. The three groups working on their group project, for example, exhibited very different patterns of interaction: the high degree of collaboration in the High-Engagement Group; the coordination of the Harmonious group and the playful atmosphere that allowed a non-threatening expression of disagreement; and the indecisiveness and lack of coordination in the Indecisive Group, in which an attempt to preserve consensus may have affected the efficiency of the team.

Individuals, too, showed variation in their approaches to group work over time. Jinhee, caught off-guard by the skit assignment, entered into an already formed group that had well-formed plans for their script. She saw her role as coordinating their work, polishing it, and preparing it for the final presentation. During the group presentation project, she took up a similar role, but from the start exerted a level of control that she

had not had in her skit group. Yi-Ning, so active and creative in the skit planning, became focused and serious in the presentation project. Hyeon-Sook was consistent in her approach to the two assignments, trying to have fun and contribute to a light atmosphere, but then pursuing a hidden goal of avoiding a speaking role. Aki consistently followed learning goals throughout the two projects, allowing more talkative partners to lead.

### *Influence of Contradictions*

Engeström's concept of contradictions as inherent in activity systems and a valuable force for change has been a pillar of third generation activity theory research. This study revealed the potential of contradictions within activity systems to encourage or discourage interaction in ESL collaborative small-group tasks. The students of the Advanced Listening and Speaking class experienced both minor and serious contradictions within their small group activity systems. When the tools at their disposal for carrying out their activity were not sufficient for them to meet their goals, students developed new immediate goals in which the problems arising became new objects for their action. When this object was the comprehension of language from a written text or from the utterances of another group member, the result was often negotiation or a language-related episode (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Both forms of talk have been proposed as promoting language acquisition (Gass & Varonis, 1989; Nakahama, Tyler, & Van Lier, 2001; Pica, et al. 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; Varonis & Gass, 1985). However, inefficient distribution of labor also created situations in which individuals pursued the same goal separately without coordination. Without a clear direction or

leader, the Indecisive Group could not accomplish the goal of finding materials, which was a precondition for discussion. If discussion is a key expectation for students and teachers in classes aimed at improving listening, interaction, and academic discussion participation skills, this situation would appear to fail expectations.

Not surprisingly, most contradictions in the groups arose around the division of labor. These were often related to attempts at avoiding work or unwanted encroachments on one's prerogatives. Contradictions involving the division of labor often offered opportunities for increased language use as students negotiated task distribution. This negotiation could lead to cooperation, conflict, and resolution. Research on group work has identified inequitable division of work and the practice of group assessment as two factors influencing students' dislike of group work (Li & Campbell, 2008). The current study lends some support to this finding, in that the focal participants mentioned active participation, contribution of ideas, and diligence as important qualities of good group partners. However, the participants in my study approached the problem of work division and group assessment in different ways. Yi-Ning felt that group assessment was normal and that each member had the chance and obligation to speak up if they were not happy with the product of their work. Hyeon-Sook worried both about the unequal participation of others and about how her own ability to participate could harm the group's chances of success. In the skit activity, her apprehension about Kaori's lack of contribution may have been due not so much to a feeling of unfairness but to the zero sum nature of the skit activity: when one member spoke less, another had to speak more. Jinhee, although clearly worried about Antonio's work, took active steps to ensure equal participation and

efficient work. Yi-Ning's apparent lack of concern about group assessment may have been based on the nature of the ESL class. She later told me that she had not felt any need to argue with her presentation group members over small flaws in the final product of their work because she had not been worried about the grade. Had the group been working in a class in which every point counted towards her grade point average, she would have been more likely to worry about details.

### ***Activity Theory as a Lens for ESL group work***

Activity theory allowed for a useful description of the work and interactions of students in this study, as well as the local conditions within which they were situated. It allowed an analysis of the ways in which expectations, goals, and interaction were linked and shaped through activity. While activity theory has proven useful in the current study both as a lens for analyzing group work in the ESL classroom and as a foundation for practical change within the curriculum, it also has weaknesses. My analysis of student group work in this classroom study was complicated by two factors: the distinction made in activity theory between conscious goals and subconscious motives, and the dynamic and sometimes amorphous nature of the activity system and its components, both internal and external.

A distinction is frequently made in activity theory between goals, which are seen as conscious, and motives, which are usually unconscious for the subject (Leont'ev, 1978). However, the goals of the members of the class were continuously changing. Immediate goals were abandoned or forgotten as quickly as they were taken up; goals

that were shared by two members of the group may not have been taken up by the third; the goal of the teacher sometimes conflicted with those of the students. Likewise, motives in group work that are aimed at objects like one's status in the group or relationship with another member can become conscious goals: when group work becomes boring, having fun may become a goal; when disagreements arise, repairing conflict may become a goal. The essential position of needs in activity and the distinction between conscious individual goals and unconscious group motives continue to complicate the analysis of activity and risk undervaluing agency and creativity.

In addition to drawbacks stemming from activity theory's emphasis on needs, goals, and motivations, a second difficulty activity theory posed for this analysis is in its conception of characteristics of the system as distinct. The analysis of these data indicated that the vertices of the activity system can be difficult to disentangle. For example, within the activity systems of the Advanced Listening and Speaking Class, the division of labor and the mediating artifacts cannot be completely separated from the community rules, since these rules often govern the way tools are used or work distributed. The triangular model encourages one to conceptualize them as distinct, when they are often overlapping. Barab, Evans, and Baek (2004) have argued that the conventional, two-dimensional triangular representation of activity systems encourages a limited conception of systems and their components as static entities. The components of an activity system should rather, in their view, be seen as "reciprocally defining and transacting" (p. 209) rather than fixed and merely interacting. They warn against a "compartmentalization" of the activity system into "independent ontological entities,

essences, or realities.” (209) While the triangular, two-dimensional representation of activity systems cannot satisfactorily capture the true nature of the system, a graphical representation of such an infinitely complex web of systems would be difficult to produce and remains to be proposed.

A final area in which the activity system models (Engeström, 1987, 1999, 2001) were somewhat mismatched with the systems I observed in the Advanced Listening and Speaking Class was in its often ambiguous delineation of system boundaries. The boundaries between activity systems, the multiplicity of different activities that may be going on within even a group of three students make activity theory at times unwieldy as an explanatory tool. For example, consider the case in which Emi, seemingly disengaged from the task at hand, drew something on Antonio’s knee. For several minutes at the end of this class, the two sat next to each other, oscillating their swiveling chairs in what appeared to be a lazy, choreographed way, as Jinhee continued working. In another instance, Kaori braided Marisol’s hair in the middle of a whole-class interaction as the teacher lectured. In these two cases, two members are participating in a sequence of meaningful, motivated, object-oriented actions quite separate from the explicit goal of the group. These activities, having different objects from that of Jinhee or the class as a whole, respectively, can be envisioned as occurring within the same system (Harmonious Group and whole class) or another, overlapping or nested system. Flirting has its own unwritten rules and division of labor, grounded in cultural practices of different groups, separate from those of the Harmonious Group’s other activities. Similarly, hair braiding, an unsanctioned activity within the classroom as a whole, has its own rules and division

of labor, making it a tiny system within the classroom system. It similarly connects with larger, culturally- and historically-fashioned activity pursued across time and space. The amorphous nature of the activity system is both limiting and liberating. Difficult to delineate, systems become insufficiently determined and difficult to apply to the small classroom setting. How many activities are there? How many systems? In its ability to link seemingly infinitely complex systems on micro- and macro-levels, activity theory provides an extremely powerful framework for describing and creatively re-imagining ESL students' classroom work and play in ways that transcend the limitations imposed by categories like "behavior," "task," and "background."

### **Limitations of the study**

A number of limitations should be considered when evaluating the findings of this study. First, data collection was hampered by several factors. Because each group of students planned some of their work during out-of-class meetings, I was not able to record interactions or get a full picture of what they did at every stage of their work. In addition, video and audio recordings were occasionally hampered by technical problems or planned in consideration of environmental constraints. For example, the configuration of workstations and size of the computer lab did not allow me to record each student's face and web surfing as they planned their group presentations. Difficult angles also made filming of all focal participants impossible for some interactions. A full record of every moment and aspect of students' interaction during the two tasks would have been



ideal for a study of moment-to-moment changes in activity but would have entailed an unacceptable level of intrusion into the lives of the participants.

Further, the dual nature of this study (investigating both students' perceptions of current classroom practices and their past experiences) required a substantial investment of interview time from both investigator and participant to create a truly rich picture. Students' busy lives, class schedules, and in some cases, reliance on public transportation, necessitated that interviews be kept short and may have discouraged some students from scheduling an interview at all. The short period of time many students had between classes and the 9 pm ending time further constrained data collection possibilities. Finally, students' language proficiency was a limitation. Although students were able to express themselves and conduct their work in English, their ability to convey their opinions and experiences fluently during the interview varied. A first-language interview would have been ideal to allow for faster and more detailed responses.

This study revealed numerous contradictions within and between the activity systems of the students and their teacher. However, the small number of each type of contradiction I found and the small number of focal participants limit the applicability of the findings. With regard to the diversity of focal participants, each student had a unique learning history and a unique response to their classroom environment. The four women drew on a great diversity of experience, but they also shared experiences and practices through the interconnections between Korean, Taiwanese, and Japanese cultures. Three of them were also of a similar age and level of educational attainment. This should be kept in mind when considering the application of these findings to other contexts. Finally,

the context itself is a limitation to the applicability of the findings. Although students in a university English for Academic Purposes class have diverse goals for learning and group work, their goals may differ from those of students in other kinds of ESL classes.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study offer a number of practical implications for ESL educators. The great diversity of background found among these four participants highlights the importance of understanding our students' histories and seeing each as a unique, agentic individual participating in different activity systems. It is important to recognize that international students, ESL students at the university level, have diverse educational experiences, especially with regard to language learning. Aki had studied several languages and Yi-Ning had been a French major. They, along with Jinhee, had begun learning English at a very early age, and had educators in their families. When they arrived in ESL classes in the United States, they may have been seen solely as English learners, grouped together by a common learner identity. However, the language learning interest, dedication, and success that had brought them to the ESL classroom should identify them as experts. Keeping this in mind, teachers should make efforts to treat students as experts by valuing their accumulated expertise and actively using it in their classes.

Activity theory has great potential for use in task and curriculum planning for ESL teachers. By understanding the structure of activity systems, the locations of potential contradictions, and the constantly shifting nature of goals and activities,

teachers can better plan group work. Engeström's (2001) model provides a useful tool for understanding activity systems and for categorizing and predicting the areas in which group work may break down in specific tasks. It can be transformed into plans and rubrics for evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative tasks both before they are installed in the syllabus and after they have been employed in class. Students can also use such rubrics to evaluate the work of their group and provide feedback to their instructor.

The findings of this study with regard to contradictions and their influence on participation and interaction suggest that teachers should pay more attention to their task setting in group work. Contradictions can be a source of learning opportunities and conflict. As such, contradictions are an important part of any group work task. Teachers should not seek to over plan tasks, but should become aware through experience of the kinds of contradictions that can promote negotiation and be alert to help groups through possible conflicts. In addition, groups may lose valuable time by adopting unprofitable work strategies, so special care should be taken by teachers to prepare students in advance for dividing labor. Finally, the contradiction Yi-Ning and Lisa experienced regarding division of labor expectations indicates the importance of helping prepare students for types of activities that may be unfamiliar to them and scaffolding their move towards autonomy and adaptation to American classroom norms.

### **Recommendations for Research**

This study investigated the influences of past activity systems on participation in present classroom activities. However, I was not able to learn enough about students'

concurrent network of activity systems outside the class. Many ESL students are at once studying in ESL classrooms and also pursuing mainstream academic coursework. The relationship between practices, goals, and expectations in these two environments requires further study.

Second, deaf students like Rami may have different goals in ESL classes than many of their classmates. Certain skills, for example, pronunciation, listening to lectures and taking notes and producing English grammatical forms in speech, taught in classes may not serve the goals of deaf learners, while others that hearing students or teachers have never considered may be of greater importance. The goals and expectations of deaf learners and their experiences of working in groups with hearing ESL learners is a future avenue of exploration.

This study did not uncover contradictions within particular points of an activity system, as described by Engeström (1987). This type of contradiction occurs when the use value of a point in the system clashes with its exchange value. This type of contradiction could occur when an ESL student pursues English study solely for its instrumental value rather than for its use in communicating or learning about another culture.

Finally, the contradictory goals that EAP teachers must negotiate in promoting proficiency but at the same time preparing for integration into university classrooms can cause challenges for their students. In addition, the contradictions between a focus on process and a focus on product, and between promoting autonomy and resilience on the

one hand and scaffolding students' learning on the other provide a field for further inquiry.

## Appendix: Assignment Handouts

### Idiom Skit Assignment Instruction Handout:

#### Idiom Skit

In small groups, you will plan a skit (maximum 3 minutes) based on a dialogue using any of the idioms we studied on Monday, 9/20. You may use any of the idioms studied, or additional favorite idioms in your skit, but be sure to include at least 5 idioms introduced Monday.

While planning your skit, please be sure to:

- a) Assign everyone a speaking role.
- b) Check the writing for grammar or context errors. The skit should be entertaining and make sense. The meaning of the idiom should make sense within the context of the skit.
- c) Rehearse the skit outside of class.

We will perform the skit on Monday, Sept. 27. Your skits will also be videotaped and we will review them as a class.

A group evaluation will be provided, and you will also evaluate yourselves.

## Group Presentation Assignment Instructions Handout:

Group Presentation #2, Chapter 5 prep, "Science"

In small groups of 3, work together to:

1. Choose a topic (health, animals, beauty products, etc.)
2. Research and find an interesting experiment done on your topic.
3. Divide presentation responsibilities among group evenly. How equal division of responsibilities is implemented is up to each group.

As a group you must:

1. Research the experiment thoroughly, answering the questions
  - a. What?
  - b. Who?
  - c. When?
  - d. Where?
  - e. Why?
2. Put your findings into a 15 minute presentation (5 minutes allowed for questions) to share with the class. Use visual aids.

Your group presentations will be based on the following criteria:

1. Content
2. Resources
3. Organization
4. Presentation Aids
5. Delivery

Please see attached rubric for guidelines on preparing presentation.

Your groups will present next Wednesday. You will be given some time in class on Monday to research, but please meet with your groups outside of class to prepare.

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