

"I will not leave (14) children alone in the forest. They would (15) eaten by wild animals." "Don't be a (16) ," said the selfish stepmother. "There isn't enough (17) for four people. If we don't leave (18) children in the forest, we will all (19) of hunger." The father unhappily agreed.

The (20) hungry children could not sleep and were (21) to what their parents had said. Gretel (22) and said to Hansel, "We are going (23) die!" "Be quiet, Gretel," said Hansel. "I (24) find a way to save us." And (25) their parents fell asleep, Hansel went quietly (26) the stairs to the front of the (27) where he filled his pockets with some (28) the small shiny stones that were lying (29) the ground in front of the house. (30) he quietly went back to his room (31) told Gretel not to worry. After a (32) hours they finally fell asleep.

The next (33) they awoke to the voice of their (34) stepmother. "Get up, you lazy children," she (35). "We are going to the forest to (36) wood!" The woman gave Hansel and Gretel (37) piece of bread each and told them, (38) sure not to eat it until dinner (39). "You will not have any more." Hansel's (40) were filled with the small stones, so (41) put the bread under her apron and (42) began to walk. Sometimes Hansel would stop (43) look back at the house, but his (44) said to him, "Hurry up. We are (45) ." At this time, Hansel was throwing the (46) stones on the road.

When they reached (47) middle of the forest, their father told (48), "Pile up some wood. I will make (49) fire so you won't be cold." And (50) they piled up a lot of wood, their father lit a fire and told them to sit by the fire and rest.

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Implementing Group-work in EFL Korean Secondary School Classroom Context: Focusing on Scenarios and Dramas

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The present paper is an attempt to present alternative methods to the so-called "lockstep" mode of instruction widely adopted in Korean EFL classes: the group-work technique. Given many problematic factors in a Korean English class, such as the large class size with a wide range of proficiency levels across the class, implementing the group-work technique seems to be one of the most effective alternatives. This paper will first discuss the pedagogical rationales of group-work approach. Next, it will present a 'recommended' Korean EFL class where the group-work technique is incorporated. The paper will then explore a variety of group-work methods and techniques which are appropriate for, and applicable to the large Korean EFL secondary school classroom context. Among many other methods, this study will more or less focus on the values and strengths of the dramatization or skit technique.

I. Introduction

For some years now, a great deal of research has been conducted on the positive effects of implementing group-work in a large EFL class. The findings strongly suggest that group work, if well designed and properly implemented in class, can solve many problems facing large EFL/ESL classes. In particular, most Korean secondary EFL classes have serious problems such as a large class size and a wide range of proficiency levels across the class. Given many advantages of group-work, which I will further discuss in the subsequent sections, it is recommended that teachers of English in Korea, both Koreans and native speakers of English, consider implementing it in class. The present paper is therefore an

attempt to explore group-work in light of suggesting methods and techniques applicable to the large Korean EFL secondary school classroom context. Among the many group-work approaches or techniques, this paper more or less focuses on the dramatization technique or skit, based on my teaching experiences.

II. Pedagogical Rationales of Group work

Let us begin the discussion by looking at the advantages of group-work. First of all, one of the most noteworthy advantages of group-work lies in the fact that it astonishingly increases the amount of student talk in class. According to one research (Long and Porter 1985), if 30 minutes of class time were allotted to group work in every class, the total amount of individual practice would be increased five times more than in the traditional "lockstep" language class.¹⁾

Second, in addition to quantity, group work can improve the quality of student talk. In traditional language classes such as the typical Korean high school EFL class, in most cases, interaction is initiated by the teacher and the whole class works as a "group interlocutor." In contrast, a class where appropriate group work tasks are incorporated can provide more opportunities for student-initiated interaction, thereby leading to more modified and negotiated interaction between the teacher and students as well as among the students themselves (Doughty and Pica 1986).

Third, group work promotes more embracing and affective classroom ambiance. Within small groups, students may feel less intimidated about speaking in the target language than speaking at the whole class level. It is notable that this lowered anxiety can strongly encourage shy and passive students to participate more actively in group work tasks while being supported by their peers. In fact, I have seen many students who I thought to be extremely shy and reserved behaved quite differently in small groups. With some students, I have seen totally different aspects of their personalities drawn out as if they had been transformed into different persons: initially they hesitated to talk, and, yet overtime, they appeared to have overcome the fear of speaking in the target language (target language), and thus feel comfortable interacting with their peers using the target language as the primary medium.

The fourth advantage is that group work can serve as a conduit toward individualized instruction. Students have idiosyncratic cognitive styles, age, attitudes, personal interests and learning paces, beyond different linguistic proficiency levels. Sadly enough, in large EFL

classes, most of those individual differences tend to be ignored. However, appropriate group work techniques can to a greater and smaller extent solve such problems. For instance, by presenting different tasks modified according to the levels of the students, even a large size class containing a wide range of levels, such as most Korean EFL ones, can turn out to be a successful language class (For further discussions and suggestions, see Ur 1996).

Lastly and the most importantly, group-work promotes learner responsibility and autonomy (Brown 1994). The learner, particularly in a large class, may easily remain hidden from the teacher's attention during a whole class activity. However, if assigned a specific role in a group, the learner would become engaged more consciously in the given task and feel more responsible for learning. In a group of four, for example, each learner can be assigned a role such as a facilitator, a monitor, a secretary, or a dictionary keeper. In such a group structure, every student, regardless of their proficiency level, can contribute to the group-work task and thus experience positive feelings. Moreover, it is assumed that a very inactive learner will gradually participate more actively in given tasks in overtime.

1. A Class Observation

Let us take a quick look at a first-year English class in a Korean middle school and get a brief picture of one lesson where group-work is implemented mainly through the dramatization or scenario technique. The class is composed of 48 girls, aged twelve to thirteen; and the teacher is a Korean female who has had several years of teaching experience.

It is in mid July, toward the end of the spring semester and it is right before the class starts. Most students are fairly excited about the upcoming summer vacation, because it is going to be their first one since they became middle school students. Yet, there seems to be another particular reason for the students to feel that way: today they are going to perform the dramas whose script they themselves wrote up, and which they have been working on for the past couple of weeks in groups of twelve. In the classroom, all the desks and chairs are piled up in the back in order to make a big enough performance stage in the front. Some students are busy posting or taping pictures describing the setting of the drama on the board and walls around the room; others are doing their final rehearsal. A few seconds later, the bell rings and the teacher comes in saying hello. After a quick roll-call, they start the

performance. The teacher goes to the back of the room and sits among the students. And while the students are performing, she watches them attentively, taking notes for the debriefing session after the performance.

Much to the teacher's delight, the day's performance turns out to be quite a success. The four different groups performed four different dramas such as *Cinderella*, *Princess Snow-white*, *Peter Pan*, and *Heung-bu and Nol-bu*, a Korean folklore, respectively. Significantly, every student has participated and played at least one role in the performance, and all of them have done an excellent job. Not only the teacher but also the students are amazed at their own work, especially with their English. Given that up to date most of the students have studied English only for a couple of months, this is a more or less remarkable achievement. Also, it is particularly notable that the drama scripts or scenarios were written by the students themselves. During the initial preparatory period, they needed the teacher's help, and yet most of the work, particularly the adapted parts, was done by the students. Indeed, the day's excellent performances clearly reveal the great potential of students. Thus, it seems that the students deserve to feel proud of themselves with their "wonderful jobs."

After the performance, the class has a short debriefing session about the performance. The students talk about what they think went well or badly in a sort of self-reflective way, and the teacher gives out the groups some rewards such as chocolate bars or candy. Everybody looks happy and satisfied. Finally, the bell rings and the teacher leaves.

2. A Brief Review of Current Korean EFL Classroom Context in Terms of How Group-Work is implemented

As far as I know, the class we have just observed is not a typical English class in Korean context. Despite the fact that the importance and value of group-work has been widely known to most English teachers in Korea, it is rarely incorporated into actual lesson procedures; and, if ever, it is not used much longer than 5 minutes out of 45 or 50 minutes of class time. Such being the case, most secondary level English classes in Korea cannot help falling into the category of the typical lockstep mode of instruction, without providing students with opportunities to speak in the target language.

Despite admitting the strengths and advantages of group-work activities, many English

teachers tend to avoid implementing group-work for several reasons. One of the reasons can be that some teachers prefer a teacher-fronted lesson, mainly because it feels safer to monitor and control the class than to give the students 'too much' freedom by letting them work noisily in groups. Put another way, they still want to remain the 'absolute' authority in the class. Others seem to lack sufficient expertise in group-work methods, despite their awareness of the need to implement the technique, which results in their own frustration that they cannot come up with the activities appropriate for their students. In addition to those mentioned above, a variety of other factors seem to come into play in this phenomenon where many Korean English teachers follow the traditional teacher-centered classroom management rather than advocating the student-centered principles (For further discussions on the reasons and excuses for avoiding group work, see Brown 1994).

In recent times, however, more and more English teachers in Korea feel the necessity to establish a student-centered classroom ambiance, whereby promoting more individualized education. How then can we realize this goal in the actual classroom? What could be the effective and feasible suggestions for this purpose? The following list of suggestions might be able to provide some implications for those questions.

III. Suggested Group Work Tasks and Techniques

1. Adapting the textbook through Scenarios or Dramatizations

Let us turn to the class we observed earlier as an example case where group-work techniques are implemented. The class may not be an ideal one for the classroom context of other countries. Also, some might argue that it is not as successful as it seems or even not at all feasible in the Korean classroom context. Yet, being the teacher who taught the class described above, I strongly believe that it is one of the most effective ways for enhancing the students' overall communicative competence and for dealing with the problem of the large class size.

While working at a secondary school level in Korea, I have experimented with many methods and techniques based on a variety of teaching and learning principles. Among them, for me, using the drama/skit technique worked best with respect to dealing with the typical Korean EFL class, given the conditions and restraints imposed on teaching English at a secondary-level in Korea. One of the restraints is that school teachers must use one of the eight textbooks published by those government-authorized companies without violating the

rigid regulations. But those textbooks provide few group-work activity sections. Hence, it is extremely challenging for a teacher to plan a lesson that provides the students with interesting group-work activities yet simultaneously does not break out of the regulations pressuring the teacher. In this regard, scenarios or dramas seem to be even more effective and useful. Thus, now let us look at their positive aspects by going over some of the major techniques and procedures which are usually adopted in the class described above.

Most English textbooks used at secondary schools contain a couple of short "speaking" sections. After completing working on the brief speaking sections presented in the textbook, the teacher develops a moderately long scenario that contains the specific learning points of the lesson or unit. She then presents it to the class and then the students practice the dialogue with the help of the teacher. The next step is to divide the class into several groups and have them make up a scenario, based on the teacher's model. Even though the task is more or less controlled, a great deal of freedom of choice should be given to the students; in this class, it is strongly recommended that the students activate and exercise their creativity to the fullest.

The role of the teacher in this class is somewhat different from that of a traditional class. She serves as the information resource and advisor for the students, helping the students compose a scenario (or any kind of other tasks). In this respect, accessibility of the teacher should be underscored: most of the time, the teacher in this class is highly approachable, so that the students can get the needed help from her readily, even outside the classroom when necessary. At this point, another important point should be made: when the linguistic level of the students is not advanced enough for an intelligible communication in English, as is the case with the above class (a beginner's class), the students' native language can be used for the purpose of clarifying the meaning.

After the rehearsing session on their own outside the class, the students act out the short dramas they have been working on in front of the supportive and enthusiastic audience. This performance session is then followed by the debriefing session. In this session, self-reflective comments are usually elicited from the students. Then the teacher gives positive feedback, such as compliments, on the performance with some sort of rewards. Depending on the situation, the teacher can opt to point out the major or notable errors and mistakes found in the performances. As the last step, the teacher collects the written scripts of the scenarios; most of the time, she returns them in the following class, after correcting where necessary, along with an overall evaluation and comments.

As shown so far, the scenario or skit technique engages the students in a variety of

procedures which promote the interaction between the students. In addition, the technique makes an effective use of the textbook as a starting-point for the whole procedure, while integrating the four skills. Thus, it appears that how to make a good adaptation of the textbook depends to a large extent on the teacher. Even with a textbook that is full of non-engaging and uni-dimensional activities, the teacher can develop and initiate a highly interactive communicative language class.

The major principle that underlies the scenario technique is to lead the students to generate and create discourse in the target language through interacting with their peers in groups (Di Pietro 1987). Significantly, this technique enables the students to personalize a certain function in the target language such as asking for directions, shopping and requesting. When students first encounter such strategies or functions presented in a short conversation in the textbook, they can hardly find it to be meaningful. Yet, if the students generate a somewhat personalized or at least adapted version of the topic, while collaborating with peers, the specific function starts to take on meanings and more likely becomes internalized into the learner. Furthermore, the acting-out procedure renders a great deal of fun to the participants and thus relieves the fear and stress of speaking in the target language in public. Also, it is notable that if the students continue to be engaged in this kind of activities, sooner or later, they will become more competent in undertaking the tasks, and thus later on more expanded or complicated higher-level tasks can be introduced rather 'smoothly.'

2. Other recommended group work techniques

1) Pair work techniques

First of all, a distinction should be made between pair-work and group-work. Although pair-work is a kind of group-work, some tasks are more appropriate when done in pairs than in groups of more than two students. Tasks that are more fit for pair-work are short in terms of length, and they are linguistically simple and somewhat controlled in terms of the structure of the task (Brown 1994, p. 178). The following are the list of the tasks that are commonly used for pair work, particularly in a large class.

(1) Checking homework

In case of a large class, a teacher cannot always check up the homework. It is particularly

the case with a group of young mischievous students: they may be too demanding and wild for one teacher to handle. For this reason, a constant checking of the day's assignments can be effective in terms of disciplining the students. Yet, since one teacher cannot check every student's homework in every class, it might be necessary for the teacher to come up with some alternative devices. For instance, occasionally the teacher can have the students check each other's assignments in pairs, as the teacher's agent. If combined with other methods such as an on-the-spot check-up, this technique can work well, being one of the most effective ways to deal with large classes.

(2) Practicing dialogues with a partner

When practicing a dialogue, after a teacher vs. the whole-class practicing, it is desirable (and already widely done) to have each pair work on it, so that the students may have more time to practice it by means of more modified interaction.

(3) Simple question and answer exercises

At the beginning of a lesson, the teacher may feel inclined to teach the students a simple expression as the day's tip, using a short question and answer exercise, even though it was not planned ahead. For instance, "When's your birthday?" or "What are you going to do tomorrow?" In fact, any kind of typical formulas will do for this purpose. In such cases, after the teacher's demonstration, followed by a brief explanation, the students can practice the expression in pairs by using a question-and-answer method.

(4) Reading comprehension checkup

After a reading activity, when there is not much class time left or the task requires a quick comprehension checkup through written questions, it can be highly effective to have individual students read and answer the questions and then have each pair quickly compare each other's answers quickly before discussing them at the class level.

(5) Preparing students for a larger group activity

Occasionally, a certain group activity needs to be rehearsed by the students in pairs before

the students are divided into larger groups. For example, when the students are told to interview some people with various occupations, it is much more convenient and effective to make the students practice the expressions or linguistic patterns fully by rehearsing the interviewing procedure in pairs, rather than putting them into larger groups without enough preparation.

2) Group work techniques

The following are some of the most widely used and highly recommended group work tasks that seem to be applicable to most Korean EFL classes. The scenario or drama technique is excluded here, since it was more or less extensively dealt with in the earlier parts of the paper.

(1) Information gap

One of the most effective challenges is the information gap. In fact, the term covers a variety of techniques in the sense that it can be applied to many kinds of tasks where learners are supposed to seek information they do not have but which others supposedly have. Further, this technique can be flexibly adapted according to the level of students.

For instance, even with a group of beginners, this technique can be found feasible. I had the students talk in groups of four about their favorite foods, colors, seasons, etc. I then had them make a grid and fill it in with all the information about the group members. This can be a kind of interview task, and yet it also seems to contain one of the typical features of information gap.

(2) Games

The introduction of games can be a highly useful and also enjoyable technique. Many resource books and textbooks provide a tremendous variety of games. Yet, prior to selecting the material, important factors such as the class size and level of the students should be considered, because some games suggested by those textbooks available in the market may not be applicable to the Korean EFL classroom context.

One of the games I have found useful in my own class is a kind of guessing game. I used it in order to teach present progressive action verbs. I prepared paper slips on which

progressive participle verb forms were written and then put them in envelopes. After grouping the class into fives, I then had the students in turn take out one slip per turn and describe the action of the verb by using gestures. Meanwhile, the rest of group members guess the verb by asking questions such as "Are you washing the dishes?" If correct, the student says "Yes, I am"; if not, the student says "No, I'm not." The students are given three chances to guess. If they cannot come up with the correct answer, the students say, "I (We) give up! What are you doing?" Then the student would say, "I'm washing my clothes." This might seem to be too easy and simplistic a type of game. However, my students seemed to find it quite enjoyable. Also, it is notable that they retained the knowledge for a long duration of time.

(3) Story-telling

This is an excellent way to elicit the students' creativity and spontaneity while incorporating four skills. I used this method, when I taught a fable presented in the textbook. After a brief reading activity, I grouped the students into fours and then had them retell the fable on their own without referring to the text. I encouraged them to tell the story in a very dramatic and emphatic way using the nonverbal aspects of the language, such as gestures and facial expressions. Here, the teachers' modeling or demonstration is highly recommended.

(4) Role-play

This technique goes well with the dramatization technique. Yet, the slight difference lies in the fact that unlike in a dramatization, in a role-play, the teacher can assign the students a specific role such as an employee versus employer or a famous basketball player and a fan.

(5) Problem-solving and/or Decision-making

This task can be particularly effective at a more or less advanced level for the purpose of enhancing the learner's communicative competence using highly sophisticated vocabulary and communicative strategies. On the one hand, the task can be a challenge to most Korean students in the sense that they are not accustomed to the tasks that require their creative thinking ability. On the other hand, given Korean students are not used to in-class discussions or debates, it seems to be even more worthwhile to incorporate problem-solving and/or

decision-making tasks into the lesson.

(6) Jig-saw

Jig-saw can be a great method which can provide students with an opportunity to experience the importance and strength of collaboration and cooperation. Personally, when I first experienced a jig saw task as an EFL student, I found it to be quite challenging but enjoyable. The so-called "strip story" is one of the most popular jig-saw techniques that can be used in a large class. The teacher takes out an interesting story from a storybook and cuts it into several parts based on cohesion. Then, she divides the class into groups of four or five and distributes one strip to each student. The students read the randomly distributed strips and put them into the correct order based on the context and cohesive ties between events. Finally, they read off the restructured story or retell it on their own in groups.

The value of the jig-saw technique appears to become greater when used for converting a reading task into a speaking one. In a jig-saw activity, the teacher tells the students to read different sections of the text for awhile and then to talk about their own part in groups. Speaking from my experience, when working on a reading task presented using the jig-saw technique, students rarely get bored of doing a reading activity, unlike the case with most Korean high school English classes. In spite of the challenges stemming from the complexity of the procedures, the students find it a lot of fun to put different parts of a text into the whole. They seem to enjoy the task even more because of the information gap between the group members. In this regard, it is also important to note that jig-saw activities lead the students to learn how to cooperate and collaborate with other members of the group.

IV. Conclusion

Despite many efforts that have been made in order to offer better English classes, most Korean EFL classes still seem to follow the traditional language class methodologies, e.g., the lockstep mode. Admitting the problems such as a large class size and a wide range of proficiency levels within a class, there should still be alternatives to the traditional methods and techniques. In this respect, implementing group-work tasks that are appropriate for, and applicable to Korean classroom context seems to be a strategy that should be tried. Among the many group-work methods and techniques, I have found implementing scenarios or dramas most effective, given the classroom conditions in Korea. Adopting scenarios and

dramas, based on the text book as the starting-point, reduces the restraints imposed on the teacher to use only the government-authorized textbooks.

The key principle that lies at the heart of this approach is to motivate the students by getting them to generate their own discourse in the target language. The task usually consists of three sequences: composing a scenario, performing it, and debriefing about the performance (Pietro 1987). In my experiences, students find such tasks highly amusing and enjoyable, especially when they are performing the dramas. Notably, the tasks provide students with opportunities to interact with each other, pooling and applying their creativity to a great extent. In addition, the debriefing session can provide a valuable opportunity for the students to reflect on their performance and thereby to promote more independent learning. In addition to scenarios, other group-work techniques are also suggested along with several pair-work tasks and techniques. Those are information gap, games, story-telling, role-play, jig saw, and problem-solving or decision-making. Each technique has the strengths and values of their own and has proven to be feasible in the Korean EFL classroom context.

In sum, it is assumed and hoped that those group-work methods and techniques discussed in the present paper can provide many valuable implications and suggestions for those who are teaching English in Korea and looking for the effective ways to deal with the problems typical of the Korean secondary-level English class.

<Notes>

- 1) This term means a mode of instruction in which the teacher sets the same instructional pace and content for every student, regardless of individual differences in levels or interests, by usually lecturing or explaining grammatical points. (For further discussions, see Long and Porter 1985)
- 2) Before I came to the United States to seek a master's degree in TESL, I worked in Yongbong middle school in Kwangju, Korea, for three years.

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