International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education 2007, Volume 19, Number 2, 105-116
http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/ ISSN 1812-9129

Opening up Thinking: Reflections on Group Work in a Bilingual Postgraduate Program

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As the number of off-shore content-based courses presented by Western universities increases, the issue as to the suitability of elements of constructivist pedagogy arises. This paper reports on mainland Chinese student views of two different types of collaborative work conducted bilingually within a Master of Education program specializing in Educational Leadership. Despite the fact that the literature is divided on the appropriateness of such activity within Confucian-Heritage contexts, initial student evaluations voted the two group activities as the most valuable of all the course components. This encouraged the team to investigate the phenomenon by gathering both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the value, the organization and the contribution of individuals in each case. The extent and the nature of the generally positive responses are reported in the paper before a discussion reflecting on what the comparison of "think, pair, share" with "team activities" reveals for future courses. The conclusion is drawn that the study underscores confidence that group work can be very effective in such bilingual, content-based courses in China and elsewhere.

Central to this paper is the question of how mature students, participating in China in an off-shore degree of Master in Education degree, specializing in Educational Leadership, reacted to the use of group work as an integral part of the learning environment. During 2003 to 2004 lecturers were faced with the need to determine the appropriate pedagogy for the delivery of an existing course in China. Despite awareness of the particular nature of the student body and the warnings of others with experience in such programs, the lecturers decided that the collaborative learning activities should continue to be included in line with the home-based course.

It was recognized from the start that this decision to embed two types of basic group work in the form of teamwork and think-pair-share could create some discomfort amongst students and criticism from colleagues at the home and partner institutions. However, it was persevered with, because it was thought essential that students should have maximum opportunities to learn new ideas by being able to participate in small group discussion in the first or main language (L1). Such a decision was considered very appropriate for this group of Chinese educational professionals, who possessed, on average, 14 years' experience in both teaching and leadership, as well as at least three years of higher education study. Despite this extensive background in education, English language proficiency levels were known to be uneven. As a result, students were given opportunities to access their L1 not only during collaborative work but also in bilingual lectures delivered with consecutive interpreting by Chinese academics.

From the outset of the program, staff recognized the need to collect and analyze data on the students' perceptions of group work, the apparent effectiveness of this and other teaching and learning strategies, and any modifications that might be needed to improve learning outcomes. This paper reports on a case study of the first cohort of students, including the views of students and the subsequent reflections of the lecturers. In particular, the authors discuss the apparent success of group work in the bilingual context and comment on the impact that this has had on program design and pedagogy.

Literature Review

Group work is a general teaching strategy where students work together in face-to-face interaction without direct teacher supervision to achieve a common goal. It is used to shift students away from passive learning (Killen, 2003).There is a large number of specific strategy applications. Group work has long been used in North American and other Western educational contexts. Dewey's experiential learning included group learning practices. The growth of research about small group learning in the 1970s contributed to adoption in schools. From the 1990s cooperative learning emerged as a more specialized form of group learning. Here the structure and purpose of the teacher is to develop positive interdependence and individual accountability among group members (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The growth of group work in schools and universities is supported by the rise of individual and social constructivism as powerful theories of learning.

The main benefit of group work is that students are actively engaged in learning (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2005). Group work activates the students' prior knowledge (Killen, 2003). Face-to-face interaction enables students to build on the ideas of others and to

construct knowledge (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). They must bring ideas into their own context, learn how to ask questions and interrogate the topic of discussion. An "outside in" learning process develops as ideas are built collaboratively and then internalized. Some students may model the interrogation process. McCaslin & Good (1996) recognize the outcomes of cooperative learning as being active learning, problem solving, student engagement and relationships. However, there are few studies that can establish the most effective strategy applications.

Doubts arise concerning the suitability, in the Chinese context, of the use of group work, whereby groups varying in membership from two to eight students collaborate. This is because both the traditions and current practice of Chinese education conflict with this type of teaching method. Group work is not used frequently, even at tertiary level, because teachers, as knowledge holders and transmitters, are regarded as being the center of the classroom. A dominant role is prescribed for Chinese teachers from the Confucian tradition of education, which states that teaching is composed of transmitting *dao* (Confucian morals), imparting knowledge and resolving doubts. Teachers are expected to be the classroom authority in knowledge and morality, as a result of which students largely depend on teachers for the source of learning material, the correct way of interpreting the material and the right to evaluate the result of students' learning of the material (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Hird, 1995).

From the students' perspective, group work as a learning strategy may not be as efficient or as effective as memorization, one of the most popular learning strategies for Chinese students (Ma, 1997). Most teachers and students regard memorization as a short cut to learning for the various examinations, which are often factually based. On the other hand memorization does not necessarily equate to rote learning, where the focus is on regurgitation rather than combining memory work with understanding. As far as most Chinese students are concerned, memorization is a means of internalizing the learning material (Biggs, 1996; Lee, 1996; Leng, 2003).

Despite these considerable constraints on collaborative learning style, two major arguments are advanced in the literature for the use of collaborative learning. The first of these is that the effectiveness of group work in assisting understanding, promoting exploratory talk and questioning and developing higher-order thinking in a variety of programs at tertiary level, is now generally accepted (Litecky, 1992). Chaffee describes active learning, involving interactive teaching, student-led discussions and stimulating projects as lying "at the heart of effective, lasting education" (Chaffee, 1992, p.31).

In his survey of the major influences on the development of this type of approach, Slavin (1990, pp.14–16) discerned two quite separate theories of cognitive development supporting this argument. The first, emerging from the work of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky, speaks of the encouragement and assistance provided within the interactive context, while the second relies on the theory of cognitive restructuring or elaboration put forward by psychologists (Wittrock, 1980, p. 397). This process, also termed cognitive rehearsal, is described by Yager, Johnson and Johnson (1985, p. 65) as the ability of all in the group to "orally explain, summarize and elaborate the material being learned". However, over and beyond the cognitive area, attention has also been given to the societal value of cooperative learning. David Jacques, for example, has argued that the high level of cooperation possible in small groups helps students develop essential social and emotional skills, which are so necessary in the modern context. He suggests that the enhancement of student ability "to handle interpersonal problems rather than to avoid them and to do so constructively and creatively" (Jacques, 1991, p. 21) is yet a further part of the overall cognitive benefit.

The second argument in favor of group work, conducted bilingually as in this case, is that those who are less proficient in the language of instruction, benefit from recourse to their L1, when being required to process unfamiliar oral or written text. In using their major language to understand new concepts and/or establish links with existing knowledge in their bilingual groups, students access their content schema (Carrell, 1983) in the major language and thus enhance not only cognition but also overall satisfaction.

Evidence for the value of continuing access to two languages has been provided by recent research amongst international graduate students in the United States. Japanese and Chinese college students, resident in the United States translate into their L1 most of the time (Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001). Other studies, this time with local American students studying French, showed that preparation for later writing in the L2, involving thinking and drafting in L1 rather than in L2, led to better results (Brook, 1996). Kern (1994) also found that the same type of students used translation constantly, even though they were told specifically that this was not acceptable.

All these studies support the claim that access to the major language in cross-cultural situations is both natural and beneficial. However, this should be viewed as particularly so in this situation, where the students would require any new cognitions to be used largely in the first language environment. The literature, therefore, supports the efficacy of group work conducted in a bilingual mode. This study can be

viewed as breaking new ground in that it describes student reaction to a course, which is distinguished by the fact that it is content rather than language-based. Furthermore it is conducted in China where collaborative learning styles are not the norm. As these principles may increasingly need to be applied in coming years, the study could be said to have significance over and beyond the area of education. It now remains for the students to speak for themselves on the matter of their gains in such a learning situation.

Background to the Study

Negotiations for the delivery of the Master of Educational Leadership between the Zhejiang Education Authority, in China, and Edith Cowan University (ECU), in Australia, were completed in 2002, with the first of a succession of cohorts beginning the course in the following year. As with the home-based course, the teaching of the four units was spread over two years, and involved students in the study of print materials and attendance at a six-day semi-residential program with 35 hours of lectures and workshop activities, including the completion of one of the assessment tasks. Small group learning, a key learning activity for each teaching day, was introduced to complement the other key learning strategy – the sequence of PowerPoint face-to-face lectures delivered in English with the help of consecutive interpreting.

The nature of the group work, which was deliberately restricted to two types in order to enhance acceptance and familiarity, consisted of pair and teamwork with each having its distinct purpose. The think-pair-share learning strategy was mainly used to break up lecture delivery and provide brief "spaces" for adjacent class members to deconstruct, assess and reflect on knowledge directly after it was introduced.

Team learning, however, was quite different. In self-selected groups of seven to ten students, students collaborated on a set task over a much longer period (or even periods), after which they made presentations of group outcomes. Two types of teamwork were used. Firstly, there were tasks undertaken by the team after which students immediately made a presentation within the same session on the theme under discussion. These tasks are part of the sequence of learning for the session. For example, different teams might be asked to take different sections of a reading, analyze the content and compare this with the local situation. Overall, such an activity might last for 30 to 90 minutes, The second type saw the teams collaborating for two to three separate sessions on an assignment task and then making an assessed presentation to the class. Assessment was thus an important aspect of this latter type, while this was not the case with the less extensive team tasks, nor with the think-pair-share activity.

Lecturers returned from their initial teaching experiences with some misgivings about the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes and were thus very keen to see the results of the first course evaluation. This first questionnaire, designed to elicit response in either Chinese or English, was administered to the 36 students in the first cohort after one unit with each lecturer (see Table 1). Their replies, 90 % of which were in Chinese, rated the usefulness of the different parts of the course on a scale from 1 (Not at all useful) to 4 (Very useful).

Although the table indicates that all aspects of the course were regarded positively, the highest support was reserved for the two group work activities, think-pair-share and teamwork. These results were not only unusual by their very nature, but also by the degree to which they varied from the next most popular strategies. Think-pair-share was shown to be significantly more useful than teamwork and the latter in turn was ranked significantly higher than the study guide (0.05 level of significance by paired sample t-test). This overall trend was confirmed by findings from an open-ended question, which asked students to identify what they liked most about the teaching program. However, this time the favorite was teamwork with 47% support, individual sections of the course 19%, case studies teaching 17% and think-pair-share 14%.

As a result of these unexpectedly positive results in relation to group work, further investigation was undertaken. It is the findings of this further investigation that are the main focus of this paper. A second questionnaire, administered at the end of the third of four units taught by ECU, was designed specifically to elicit information about why the two collaborative strategies had proved acceptable to the students and what sorts of activities were typical of each. Responses to the first questionnaire informed the design of the second one. In particular, the questionnaire format was altered to obtain rankings in place of ratings in an attempt to avoid the normally complimentary nature of the latter. Responses to open-ended questions in the first questionnaire informed the design of some of the questions in the second questionnaire, providing alternatives from which the

TABLE 1
Value of Course Components

Course Components	M	SD
Think-Pair-Share	3.81	0.40
Team Activities	3.63	0.49
Study Guide	3.31	0.47
Readings	3.23	0.40
Individual Assignments	3.22	0.55
PowerPoint Presentations	3.19	0.40
Exam Questions	3.03	0.41

students could choose. At the same time opinions were sought to allow for crosschecking of quantitative and qualitative data. Findings from this second questionnaire form the basis of the remainder of this case study, which gives the views of the Chinese cohort.

Results

Findings concerning the two types of group work, teamwork and think-pair-share are provided. In particular we discuss the perceived value of each activity as indicated by rankings, as well as opinions from open-ended questions about organization, effectiveness and suggestions for improvement. Examples of team tasks include:

1. Prepare a concept map of leadership based on the lecture materials and prior knowledge.
2. Read a particular section of the English reading and prepare a summary of it for the class. Different sections are allocated to each team.
3. Investigate the "school improvement process" and incorporate understandings for a 15-minute presentation to the class using PowerPoint or a wall chart.

Value of Teamwork

Students were asked to rank nine statements concerning the value of teamwork. Table 2 shows the responses and the mean rankings of these.

Analysis of student opinion given in response to the open-ended questions (see appendix) provides backing for these rankings. The majority of comments support the deepening of understanding of the unit and the opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from others. However as the next most evident attribution of value was the effect of teamwork in opening up new ideas and providing inspiration, it could be said that the qualitative section allowed for less pedestrian response than the rankings. This was because it produced signs of appreciation that group members were able, in this way, to not only deepen understanding, but also to add to it. Only one group member took a contrary view to these in commenting that teamwork was a waste of time.

Teamwork spaces were useful for:

- "Pooling the wisdom of the masses and obtaining benefit from others."
- "Exchanging views, learning from each other, intensifying collaboration, rearranging the resources, inspiring each other, and opening up thinking."

Students also applied ideas to their own situations by:

- "Exchanging ideas by relating to our own working experiences; put forward my own view by integrating my own area and my own working unit."
- "Relating to our own experience, we can understand the unit better."

These expressions of pride suggest teams function as a space for the construction of a professional identity in the classroom. Traces of this belief can be found in the following:

- "It can ignite the sense of honor of the team."
- "Teamwork cultivates a collaborative spirit."

Pacing and timing emerged as concerns in response to an item about improving effectiveness.

- "Teachers should control the time of the team activity."
- "Reasonable time allocation."

TABLE 2
Ranking of Value of Different Aspects of Teamwork

Statement	Mean ranking
Making sense of the course work	2.8
Working together to answer the question which was asked	3.3
Listening to the views of other members of your team	4.0
Translating the English	4.2
Exchanging ideas about leadership	4.8
Exchanging work experiences	5.3
Getting a chance to understand the readings	5.5
Negotiating the organization of the team work (roles, work allocation…)	6.6
Getting to know the other team members	7.7

TABLE 3
Percentage of Students Ranking Particular Team Work Activities as One of Their Three Most Usual Roles

Group Roles	%
Expressing your own opinion	91
Listening to the discussion	68
Asking questions to develop your own understanding	56
Keeping the group focused on the task	18
Presenting the group's work in the class	15
Answering questions for others	12
Leading the group	12
Translating the English for others	12
Summing up, bringing the discussion together	9
Mediating between group members	9
Explaining the course work to others	6

Students also believed that teamwork was not always as efficient as it might be because the focus shifted from the prescribed topic. Recommendations were that teams should

- "Ignore anything irrelevant to the unit."
- "Identify the main question; exchange must be about the main subject; keep the group's work focused on the task."

Suggestions were also made about the nature of the work being undertaken and that the lecturer should give sufficient specification for the task, making absolutely clear

- "The theme of the discussion."
- "The requirement of the task objectives and the time limit."

A third of the group favored a stronger emphasis on the inclusion of typical cases drawn from Australia and elsewhere.

Organization of Teamwork

Answers to the several open-ended questions (see appendix) in this section drew very positive comments. The majority of students expressed satisfaction with team composition in terms of number (76%) and its advantages such as diversity of group membership in terms of age, gender, experience and position (78%). A typical comment, offered by a team member, was that, "People with different ages and different genders have different experiences, so these help with understanding the question."

Despite the fact that students opted to form their own groups, it appears that caution still needed to be exercised about the impact of power and status differences in relation to discouraging participation by some participants. While the instructional staff was aware of this issue, they were not in a position to monitor the effects because of the language barrier (neither spoke Mandarin). Only a small number of students raised the issue and then only obliquely.

- "The speakers should not be limited to a small number. Everybody should be given an opportunity to speak up."
- "Group dynamics should bring into play everyone's initiative, and then everyone can participate actively."

A question on how the group managed differing views evoked comment indicative of both public and private responses. The most common of the overt responses mentioned was to persevere with further discussion and negotiation, while others were content to describe the situation as involving the mere exchange of ideas. The other strand evident was that group members would resort to private reflection on the different points of view expressed.

Contribution of Team Members

Aspects relating to the contribution of individual members within their team were also canvassed in order to gain an indication about how each student viewed these group learning strategies. In the first place, students were asked to rank the roles they took in the group from "most usual" to "least usual", and to mark with an (x) those roles that were not applicable to them. The table below shows the percentage of students assuming the various roles, when those roles had been ranked in their top three most usual roles.

In interpreting these data we cautiously use the frequency with which an activity is highly ranked as an indicator of its relative importance to that individual.

TABLE 4
Percentage of Students Ranking Activities as One of Their Top Three Choices During Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share Activities	%
Making sense of the course work	88
Translating the English	45
Exchanging ideas about leadership	45
Exchanging work experiences	39
Asking questions about the course work	36
Answering the question which was asked	24
Getting a chance to read the Chinese version the study guide	12
Getting to know the other person	3
Getting a break from listening to the lecturer talking	0

This interpretation takes into account the observed behavior of the students during the teamwork, data from earlier surveys, and the self-reported disinterest in taking time out (see Table 4 and related discussion).

It is evident that the most important aspect for group members is *expressing your own opinion*, *listening to the discussion*, and *asking questions to develop understanding*. By contrast, *answering questions for others* was rated as a much lower priority. Consistent with this, the three highest ranked teamwork activities had at least 97% of students participating in this activity.

In addition, two activities had bimodal distributions, each with identifiable groups of students at the opposite ends of the participation spectrum: at one end, the activity was a priority, at the other end were a group who did not participate in the activity. These were *leading the group* and *translating English for others.* The data are interpreted as confirming that these were specialized responsibilities of a small number of students. In each of these activities, 14% of those participating ranked the activity in their top two, whilst 41% ranked it in their bottom two roles, and at least 30% of students, did not participate at all in the activity. It is also interesting to note that there was a correlation of 0.6 between students' responses to these items, suggesting that English capacity was a factor in determining the leadership roles in the groups.

When the focus moved to comment on other members of the group, responses were more varied. Students were asked to "Describe the characteristics of the people who contribute most to the group discussion". According to the answers, those who contributed most to the group possessed not only certain intellectual characteristics in terms of their wide experience, their special insights and understandings, organizing ability or English language skill, but also appealing personal qualities such as enthusiasm, seriousness of approach, humor, courage and helpfulness to others.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-pair-share activities were used by the lecturers within the PowerPoint presentations as a means of ensuring engagement and further development of understandings. Normally occupying around fifteen minutes of class time, these were created when the lecturer assigned a short discussion topic, such as the following examples:

- What do you understand by the concept of "parallel leadership"? To what extent does this form of leadership exist in Chinese schools?
- What symbols would you use for school leadership in China (a compass, a book, an ear)? How could you apply these in your schools?

Value of Think-Pair-Share

When students were asked to rank nine items according to how they best described what actually happened in the pairs, 88% of the students ranked making sense of the course work in their top three choices (Table 4). The next two most frequent activities were translating the English and exchanging ideas about leadership. Over half the students ranked getting a break from listening to the lecture talking as their lowest choice and an additional 20% ranked this as not applicable.

As with the ratings for teamwork, there was strong agreement as to the most important aspect of think-pair-share work, and lower levels of agreement for other activities. Comments of a qualitative nature related to think-pair-share were also gathered for triangulation on this central question. As found in the ranking section, the most frequent comments about value relate to making sense of the course with the exchange of ideas and experience being very similarly rated. Translations of typical responses in the rest of this section illustrate the sorts of ways students obtained help from think-pair-share.

Specifically, the think-pair-share strategy created opportunities to assess the meaning of key knowledge or issues at the time of exposition.

- "Think-pair-share created opportunities in lectures for students to deconstruct, and assess the meaning of key knowledge or issues at the time of exposition."
- "A proper use of think-pair-share facilitates students understanding the content of learning, and also promoting interpersonal relationships."

Some students recognized the potential of think-pair-share for the construction of new knowledge using cooperative learning and reflection.

- "By helping each other and learning from each other, we can be inspired to open up thinking and can make progress together."
- "By pair work, I can learn what I haven't thought of."

Often the most intense and most animated sharing related to workplace application of thinking about the content of the unit.

- "It's a very good way for students to share the different ideas and experiences, so as to broaden their insight."
- "Because we have different experiences and different professional majors, we have different views on the unit, on its conclusion and on its background materials in the unit. Pair work enables our exchange and exploration of these [opinions]."

Despite the efforts of the interpreter, a constant challenge for most students was keeping up with unfamiliar English language words and expressions in the PowerPoint slides and lecturer talk.

- "It's helpful when we encounter some difficult content or concepts and the language barriers."
- "Because we have different English proficiency levels, pair work enables us to consult and make enquires."

For some students, think-pair-share was also an opportunity to develop a professional relationship.

- "It facilitates the understanding of the unit and facilitates understanding my partner."
- "A proper use of pair work facilitates student understanding of the content of learning, and also the promotion of interpersonal relationships."

Organization of Think-Pair-Share

In relation to suggestions about the improvement of pair work effectiveness, one-third of the students needed greater clarification of the question or topic set for discussion, and one quarter felt that greater guidance concerning and control of timing should be available. A somewhat smaller group was concerned about how the pairings were determined. However, within the advice about how the groupings could be improved, no consensus emerged. A few made the suggestion that in the future results from the activities should be collected and discussed during lectures.

Comparison of the Value of Think-Pair-Share and Teamwork

Comparable data to that which was reported in Table 4 for think-pair-share work were collected for teamwork. Six of the nine items were held common to the two sets of questions, as shown in Table 5. A study of these six items provides additional insight into the way in which the think-pair-share and teamwork functioned. There was considerable commonality between the two sets of data, as revealed, in particular, by the three most commonly chosen activities.

Making sense of the course work was the most important function of this work, with 88% and 76% of students, respectively, ranking these in the top three most important functions of the activity. Likewise, translating the English was ranked in the top three by 45% and 50% respectively. The main difference related to *working together to answer the question set.* This was ranked as a high priority by 24% in think-pair-share, but by 65% in teamwork. One explanation for this is that teamwork was assessed, whereas think-pair-share work was not.

Discussion

The findings from this early evaluation of the use of group work in a western style Master's course have provided useful data as a basis for reflection. At this stage, however, there is a need to confine the discussion to the opening of issues rather than the reaching of conclusions. As a consequence, the discussion of issues is more reflective than conclusive in nature incorporating many different elements of the reflective practice system suggested by Bain, Ballantyne, Mills & Lester (2002).

The evidence put forward in the paper suggests that the two collaborative activities, think-pair-share and teamwork, are fulfilling the hopes of the lecturers who

TABLE 5
Comparison of Top Three Activities for Pair Work and Teamwork

Activities	Pair work	Rank pair	Team work	Rank team
Making sense of the course work	88%	1	76%	1
Translating the English	45%	2=	50%	3
Exchanging ideas about leadership	45%	2=	21%	
Exchanging work experiences	39%		26%	
Answering (working together to answer) the question which was asked	24%		65%	2
Getting to know the other person (team members)	3%		0%	
Asking questions about the course work	36%			
Getting a chance to read the Chinese version of the study guide	12%			
Getting a break from listening to the lecturer talking	0%			
Listening to the views of other members of your team			35%	
Getting a chance to understand the readings			18%	
Negotiating the organization of the team work (roles, work allocation…)			9%	

decided to include them as an integral part of the program. The activities helped make the course applicable to the local context, increased student accessibility to course meanings and provided opportunities to resolve problems of interpretation and relevance.

Some concern exists about the possibility that think-pair-share activities may be too challenging for the cohort. The lack of relevant data on individual student proficiency in English prevents any cross checking between language level and response, but it may be that students who are reasonably proficient see translation as being less important than for those for whom English is a problem. An alternative and opposing interpretation includes the possibility that those who take on the responsibility are more aware of how important translation is and therefore give it, and themselves, more significance. In an overall sense this may be reading too much into the fact that a greater need for translation is shown for think-pair-share, since student suggestions about changing pair composition did not evoke any consistency about change that could be interpreted as having a direct impact on the provision of more language support.

From this analysis of variation in relation to responses to the two collaborative activities has come the opportunity to reflect on a number of key matters that can help guide future developments of the program. The most obvious of these matters is to persevere with the current form of teamwork, realizing that the more extensive and practical sharing available in the teamwork situation means that it is a potentially richer space for learning about leadership than think-pair-share. Partly also, the close connection between teamwork and assessment might be considered decisive in maintaining the commitment of students, who are struggling with new content at the same time as handling linguistic and cross-cultural challenges in all parts of the course.

Teamwork effects also extend beyond the 35-hour intensive teaching program. It was observed that by the end of the course many of the teams had become *guanxi* groups with such ties becoming an enduring outcome. Wang defines *guanxi* as "cultivating, developing and maintaining personal relationships on the basis of the continuing exchange of favors. Friendship and empathy between the two parties are of secondary importance, though they are useful in reinforcing the relationships." (Wang, 2004, p.81) . Subsequent visits have confirmed that this is, indeed, the case and that lasting connections have been made through the study programs, although this effect seems to have spread among the cohort, rather than being limited to the particular teams.

It is also evident that think-pair-share has advantages, which may not as yet have been fully capitalized upon. Besides its primary value in terms of conceptual consolidation, think-pair-share is seen as a useful circuit breaker, particularly in this bilingual lecturing context. The lecturers have continued to experiment with different uses of this strategy. Already students in the next cohort were able to see some changes in relation to feedback, the subject of some student suggestions. Following oral presentations of think-pair-share outcomes from volunteer pairs, views were collated and displayed on the whiteboard. In the much larger groups, which will be the norm in

forthcoming cohorts, this may be continued as a more practical innovation rather than any attempts at formal assessment. For the future too, think-pair-share efficacy could arguably be improved by way of determining and utilizing two or three different categories of task and then observing/collecting data about student use of strategies and responses to the same. Since analysis of task differentiation may well provide information on the language variable, a bonus would be that our present limited understanding of how students are coping with language transfer could be enhanced.

This last comment highlights language as currently the major issue of concern to the presenters. Although the consolidation of learning has been shown to be assisted by the operation of group work, data concerning the pivotal role of English in the course is still elusive. Lecturers constantly gain impressions from interactions with the interpreters, observations in class and assignment marking, but a further step is needed and that is to gain hard data. The introduction of some form of informal testing would be a valuable development. More could, perhaps, be gained from future questionnaires, which could be planned to discover in differing contexts how successfully students are making the transfer from one language to another and what more could be done to assist in this. It may also be that supplementation could be provided by individual case studies of the two forms of group work.

Conclusion

The reports given in this paper reveal a ready acceptance of both teamwork and think-pair-share by the Master's degree students in this off-shore Master of Educational Leadership course, despite the fact that the mature students might have had little experience with these in earlier formal study courses. Students evidently valued using both Mandarin and English to pool their wisdom, but whether or not this translates into formally assessed work is yet to be determined. Group work achieved the former gain by providing opportunities for the students to deepen their understandings, untangle any problems, share their experiences and extend their networks in the educational field.

Overall, it can be claimed that the findings enable the authors to move out of tentativeness to the assurance that both they and others can utilize group work as a component part of bilingual, content-based off-shore courses in countries such as China.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to express their debt to the Chinese students who provided the data for this paper as well as to Dr Geoffrey Coyne who peer reviewed an earlier draft of the paper.

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Appendix
Sample Questions from the Second Questionnaire
Sample Questions on Teamwork

In what ways does team work help you study the course? 您认为在哪些方面团队活动可以帮助您学习本课程？			
What is your main contribution to the productivity of the team? 您对团队活动的主要贡献是什么？			
Do you think you would apply group discussion to your teaching / leadership practice? 您认为您会在教学/领导实践中使用团队大组讨论的方式吗？	Yes 会	No不 会	Not applicable不符合实际情况
Reasons for your choice请说明您选择的理由			
Would you like to see group discussion used by other ECU lecturers 您是否希望ECU其它教师用团队讨论来为你们授课？	Yes 是	No不 是	Not sure 不确定
Reasons for your choice请说明您选择的理由			
Was it the first time that you experienced team discussion in your study? 在您的学习经历中，您是第一次体验团队讨论活动吗？	Yes 是	No不是	
If Yes, why do you think it was not used before by Chinese lecturers? 如果是，请您说明为什么此方法以前没有被中国教师采用呢？			
By any chance could the group work be wasting the class time? 团队活动方式是否偶尔也会浪费课堂时间吗？	Yes 会	No不 会	Sometimes有时
Suggest ways to improve the **efficiency** of team discussion 请就如何提高团队讨论活动的效率提出建议。			
Suggest ways to improve the **effectiveness** of team discussion 请就如何提高团队讨论活动的效果提出建议。			
Do you like having a teamwork activity as part one of your assignments? 您是否愿意将一次团队活动评估结果作为一项考试成绩？	Yes 愿意	No 不愿意	Not sure 不确定
Why is this so? 为什么如此？			

Sample questions about pair work

In what ways does pair work help you study the course? 您认为在哪些方面，双人组活动可以帮助您学习本课程？			
What did you and your partner usually do in the pair work? 在双人组活动中，您和您的搭档经常做些什么？			
Do you think you would apply pair discussion to your teaching / leadership practice? 您认为您会在教学和领导实践中使用双人组活动吗？	Yes 会	No 不会	Not applicable 不符合实际情况

Reasons for your choice请说明您选择的理由:			
Was it the first time that you experienced pair discussion in your study? 在您的学习经历中,您是第一次体验双人组讨论活动吗？		Yes 是	No 不是
If Yes, why do you think it was not used before by Chinese teachers? 如果是，请您说一下为什么此方法以前没有被中国教师采用呢？			
By any chance could the pair work be wasting the class time? 双人组活动偶尔也会浪费课堂时间吗？	Yes 会	No不 会	Sometimes有 时会
Suggest ways to improve the **efficiency** of pair discussion 请就如何提高双人讨论组活动效率提出建议.			
Suggest ways to improve the **effectiveness** of pair discussion 请就如何提高双人组活动效果提出建议.			