

Enhancing Willingness to Communicate through Team Building: A Marriage of Theory and Practice

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Abstract

Closely related to the well-researched areas of motivation and language-learning anxiety is the area of willingness to communicate (i.e., WTC). Many researchers (e.g., Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2009) have conducted studies concerning the factors surrounding learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate in a second language. The emphasis of such research has been on causes and not on solutions. This paper, through a study of the existing literature, examines the causes of a lack of WTC. It then argues that some well-known techniques and methodologies, by promoting team building, are well suited to enhance WTC. The paper concludes that the traditional warmup activity, the case-study method, cooperative learning techniques, and task-based learning techniques, when implemented with team building in mind, may aid in increasing WTC.

Keywords

willingness to communicate, motivation, communicative competence, affective filter, classroom anxiety, communication apprehension

1. Introduction

As teachers, we have all experienced the phenomenon of having some students who actively participate in group discussions, whole-class discussions, and other types of activities while other students remain silent and surprise us with an occasional comment. Logically, a great deal of research has dealt with questions concerning why some students participate and others do not. Of particular interest to the present discussion are studies related to what has been labeled as *willingness to communicate* or as *WTC* (e.g., MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998; Yashima, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Fushino, 2010).

These studies have allowed for the identification of several factors that may contribute to students' willingness or unwillingness to communicate in a second or foreign language (henceforth referred to simply as the L2). Among frequently cited factors are classroom anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), learner personality (MacIntyre et al., 1998), attitude toward the L2 culture (Yashima, 2002), and overall motivation to learn the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Liu and Jackson (2008) mention that "more

than one third” of the participants in their study of Chinese students suffered from anxiety and were therefore unwilling to participate in class (p. 82). And they provide some suggestions for the EFL teacher: the EFL teacher might enhance willingness to communicate “by facilitating interactive group activities or calling on students in a nonthreatening manner” (p. 82).

In spite of these suggestions concerning how WTC might be enhanced, there remains a certain disconnect between research and application of research: most work related to WTC has focused on causes and has given limited treatment to methods of increasing WTC in the classroom. In other words, methods of increasing WTC have been mentioned largely as an afterthought.

In the undertaking of the present study, three basic research questions were posited:

- 1) What existing teaching techniques and methodologies seem to lend themselves to an enhancement of WTC in the classroom?
- 2) What role does group cohesiveness play in such techniques and methodologies?
- 3) How does the team building that goes into such techniques and methodologies help to promote WTC in the classroom?

2. Procedures and Methodology

In seeking to provide an answer to the research questions given above, the author of this paper has chosen to conduct an analysis of existing teaching techniques and methodologies in terms of the following:

- 1) The degree to which an existing technique or methodology appears to heighten WTC in the classroom.
- 2) The degree to which an existing technique or methodology appears to promote group cohesiveness.

The techniques and methodologies chosen for this analysis (specifically, the traditional warmup activity, the case-study method, cooperative learning techniques, and task-based learning techniques) are some which are frequently employed at Shantou University (Guangdong Province, China). As studies of WTC and of the role of group cohesiveness in L2 learning are closely related to learner motivation, the work of Zoltán Dörnyei on motivation has often been consulted.

3. Working Definition of WTC in Terms of L2 Use in the Classroom

The term willingness to communicate was originally meant for an L1 context and was considered, generally speaking, as a matter of individual personality (MacIntyre et al., 1998). MacIntyre et al. take into account the differences between willingness to communicate in an L1 and willingness to communicate in an L2 and go on to state that “L2 use carries a number of intergroup issues, with social and political implications, that are usually irrelevant to L1 use” (p. 546). Regardless of the differences between WTC in the L1 and in the L2, definitions of WTC in L2 terms have continued to focus on fundamentals. MacIntyre and Doucette (2010), for example, define WTC as “a readiness to speak in the L2 at a particular moment with a specific person” (p. 161). Lahuerta (2014), taking into account

previous work by McCroskey and Baer (1985), makes a very to-the-point statement in saying that WTC “refers to the tendency of an individual to initiate communication when free to do so” (p. 40). And Fushino (2010) points out that “[p]articipation in group activity includes students’ willingness to communicate (WTC) with peers in the target language” (p. 701).

For the sake of the arguments presented in this paper, let us use the following as a working definition of WTC in terms of L2 use in the classroom: WTC refers to the readiness of the student to voice his/her opinions and agreements/disagreements in group discussions and/or in whole-class discussions in the L2; it also refers to the student’s readiness to engage in small talk with classmates and/or with the teacher in the L2.

This definition, though far from perfect, should serve the needs of the following discussion.

4. Literature Review: Causes of Unwillingness to Communicate

Although their comments are not specifically directed toward the issue of WTC, Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B. and Cope (1986) have given useful and oft-cited insights into what may lead students to become engaged or not to become engaged in activities in their foreign language classrooms. Their study identifies three major types of student anxiety: (1) *communication apprehension*, (2) *test anxiety*, (3) *fear of negative evaluation*. The term communication apprehension more or less explains itself. Essentially, it has to do with an individual’s shyness or unwillingness to speak to other individuals or in front of a group. As Horwitz et al. note, “[p]eople who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in a foreign language class where they have little control of the communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored” (p. 127). The stress of being “constantly monitored” sheds light on the other two factors that Horwitz et al. discuss. While it is true that “[p]erformance evaluation is an ongoing feature of most foreign language classes” (p. 127), we must also take into account the reality of a language class: students tend to feel that they are tested every time they speak even if no formal evaluation is at stake. Hence, test anxiety is almost always a factor. And the fear of negative evaluation—whether from the teacher or from classmates—also arises every time a student speaks.

Following Horwitz et al. (1986), quite a few researchers have dealt with the matter of foreign language classroom anxiety (e.g., Kitano, 2001; Yashima, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008; LaHuerta, 2014). And with such studies, the connections between anxiety and WTC become even more apparent. Kitano (2001), seeking to find a quantifiable connection between anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, studied 212 students of Japanese in two universities in the United States. According to his research, “the tendency was that the higher an individual’s fear of negative evaluation, the higher his or her anxiety level in the classroom” (p. 553). Kitano went on to investigate the relationship between anxiety and perceived ability to speak the language, with the curious result that only the male students’ perceived ability revealed a significant correlation with classroom anxiety. He noted, however, that

consistently low scores among elementary students of Japanese in a Self-Rating Can-Do Scale “made it very difficult for the correlation of the entire sample to be significant” (p. 556).

While Kitano’s study does not specifically focus on WTC, it does lead to some hypotheses related to WTC. One may suppose that an individual who suffers from classroom anxiety due to his/her fear of negative evaluation will tend to be less likely to speak out in a classroom setting. This supposition appears to hold true in Yashima’s 2002 study of 389 Japanese students enrolled in English classes in Osaka. Yashima (2002) found that a low level of anxiety coupled with a high level of perceived communicative competence predicted a high level of WTC. And LaHuerta (2014), in her study of 195 Spanish students of English in Oviedo, also noted a significant correlation between perceived communicative competence and WTC.

MacIntyre and Doucette (2010), using the theory of action control, studied 238 learners of French as an L2 in an analysis of the interrelationship among language anxiety, perceived communicative competence, and WTC. They suggested that L2 learners, like everyone else, may be positioned along an *action-state continuum*, with those falling closer to the *action side* being relatively quick to initiate action and those falling closer to the *state side* being relatively slow. In terms of WTC, this theory would seem to fit quite well—as WTC itself “has been described as the final step to the initiation of communication” (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010, p. 168). In the authors’ path analysis, they made use of three variables: *hesitation*, *preoccupation*, and *volatility*. Hesitation was defined as “the inability to translate actions into decision”; preoccupation was defined as “the extent to which intrusive and enduring thoughts cause a person to initiate or change behavior”; and volatility was defined as “an inability to stay focused on a topic” (p. 163).

In MacIntyre and Doucette’s study, a tendency toward hesitation proved to be strongly correlated with a high level of language anxiety, a low level of perceived communicative competence, and unwillingness to communicate. A tendency toward volatility was strongly related to a low level of perceived communicative competence and an unwillingness to communicate but not to anxiety. And preoccupation was associated with a high level of perceived communicative competence. While the conclusions concerning preoccupation were unexpected, those related to hesitation and volatility would seem to support common assumptions about WTC. Logically, a learner who suffers from high anxiety and from low perceived communicative competence will be less likely than others to make the decision to initiate communication and will thus be less willing to communicate. Likewise, it makes sense to suppose that a learner with a low level of perceived communicative competence will be more likely than others to abandon communicative tasks, a practice that will “lead to a lower WTC in the long run” (p. 169).

In support of many other findings regarding anxiety and WTC, Liu and Jackson (2008) reported on their study of 547 students of English at Tsinghua University in Beijing, certainly one of China’s most prestigious educational institutions. The researchers based their study on the interrelation of various analytical scales: *Unwillingness to Communicate Scale*, *Language Class Risk-Taking Scale*, *Language*

Class Sociability Scale, Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale. In addition, they considered the *English-Learning Background* of the participants in the study. As mentioned above, Liu and Jackson found that “more than one third” of the participants in their study were unwilling to participate in class. Of particular interest to the present discussion is the finding that many of the participants were willing to participate in interpersonal conversations in English but not willing to participate in classroom discussions. Such a finding, obviously, suggests that the classroom environment itself may lead to learners’ unwillingness to communicate.

Liu and Jackson observed a pattern among participants: the combination of high anxiety, low perceived communicative competence, and a low valuing of oral communication led to a low level of WTC in the language classroom. This result in many ways echoes that of Fushino (2010), who in her study of 729 Japanese students of English found that beliefs about L2 group work influenced, indirectly, WTC. In both studies, learners’ perceptions of the utility of participating in the classroom affected their degree of WTC.

It should be noted that most of the WTC studies discussed here fall within the realm of the heuristic model proposed in 1998 by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément and Noels, a model which, after its publication, “remained the foci for empirical WTC research over the next decade” (Cameron, 2014, p. 64). MacIntyre et al. proposed a pyramid-type of model comprised of many layers related to a learner’s willingness to communicate: *communication behaviour, behavioural intention, situated antecedents, motivational propensities, affective-cognitive context, social and individual context.* Each layer is divided into sub-categories.

Though extremely relevant in terms of WTC in general, some of the sub-categories proposed by MacIntyre et al. may not be entirely related to the focus of the present discussion, which deals with WTC in a classroom setting. Nevertheless, the sub-categories are at least related indirectly. As a case in point, the authors mention that “an ethnocentric person would not be inclined to get involved in interactions with members of another ethnic community” (p. 557). This topic will be dealt with in a later discussion concerning the use of case studies in the foreign language classroom.

MacIntyre et al.’s discussion of *state communicative self-confidence* is especially related to the topic under consideration. The authors, taking from Clément (1980, 1986), describe the term confidence as “(a) *perceived competence*, and (b) *lack of anxiety*” (p. 549). And they go on to describe *state perceived competence* as “the feeling that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment” (p. 549). It would seem safe to say that the WTC studies mentioned above tend to coincide, whether directly or indirectly, in indicating that WTC depends heavily on a learner’s state perceived competence—that is, on the learner’s feeling at a particular moment (e.g., a classroom moment) that he/she is capable or incapable of participating in a discussion or activity. And it would also seem safe to say that a learner’s level of state perceived competence and level of anxiety are likely to have a significant influence on his/her state communicative self-confidence.

5. Toward Enhancing WTC

WTC-related research, as has been discussed above, points to several factors that tend to affect a learner's willingness to communicate at a particular moment. Specifically, whether or not a learner is willing to communicate at a particular moment would seem to depend, minimally, on the following: (1) degree of classroom anxiety, (2) degree of perceived communicative competence, (3) degree of fear of negative evaluation, (4) degree of general communication apprehension. Other factors such as a learner's perceptions concerning the value of oral communication also come into play when the learner decides or does not decide to communicate in class.

The research questions presented at the beginning of this paper indicate an underlying hypothesis: some practical and known teaching techniques and methodologies, by promoting team-building in the classroom, may serve to increase WTC in the L2. The discussion that follows will focus on four basic techniques/methodologies: (1) *the warmup activity as team-building mechanism*, (2) *case studies as team-building mechanisms*, (3) *cooperative learning techniques as team-building mechanisms*, (4) *task-based learning techniques as team-building mechanisms*. It will argue that the fundamental qualities of these techniques/methodologies lead to the creation of a positive learning environment and thus to the enhancement of WTC in the classroom.

5.1 *The Warmup Activity as Team-Building Mechanism*

It is safe to say that the concept of the warmup activity is one of the most basic in terms of teacher training. Novice teachers, upon entering a new institution, are frequently given instructions to start the lesson by "getting the students talking" or "getting the students on their feet". Such instructions, simple as they may be, do in fact have a pedagogical basis. Students entering a classroom, especially those in an EFL setting, may not automatically be tuned in to the L2 and may be more focused on issues not related to language learning than on issues related to language learning. Hence, the simple act of getting the students talking—perhaps while they are moving around the classroom—would seem to serve the purpose of focusing the students on the task at hand (i.e., the task of learning and practicing the L2).

Dörnyei (2001), in commenting on the need of generating initial motivation toward the L2, suggests that teachers need to "whet the students' appetite" at the beginning of a language course (p. 53). Eddy-U (2015) supports this argument in saying that "[e]ffort put into developing a good classroom atmosphere early in a course could pay off with stronger relationships in the classroom, greater task WTC and perhaps increased L2 learning motivation in general" (p. 52). The comments of Dörnyei and Eddy-U refer to what is commonly known as the course "ice-breaker", the type of activity presented at the beginning of a course in order to create a positive atmosphere and, ideally, to create conditions in which students will be willing to communicate.

The warmup activity serves essentially the same purpose as does the ice-breaker but does so every time the class meets. That is, it is not restricted to the beginning of a course. The warmup, because it is only a warmup, must be short and sweet. In order continually to promote team building, the warmup may

strive to meet the following criteria: (1) *foster group cohesion*, (2) *lower the affective filter*, (3) *create an expectation of success*.

5.1.1 Fostering Group Cohesion

Eddy-U (2015) points out that demotivating factors in L2 learning are often attributed to course materials. Granted, course materials of low quality are not likely to inspire students. There remains, however, the matter of interest in the topic. Even when materials are of the highest quality, the constraints of an established curriculum tend to limit teachers' ability to cater all of their lessons around students' interests. Imagine, for example, a textbook unit oriented around the topic of fashion: the student who wears whatever is available may have a hard time becoming interested in this topic. Curiously enough, Eddy-U, in her study of 25 ethnic Chinese students in Macau, noted that interest in the materials "made up only 13.5% of comments on motivating influences" (p. 49). Social influences such as "good groupmates" and "good classroom social situation" made up 52% of the comments in the same study (p. 49).

While high-quality materials will always be a key factor in the success of a course in general, they may not be enough to heighten WTC. Alas, the personalized warmup activity, an activity that allows students to talk about themselves and their interests regardless of the topic at hand.

For most people, a conversation concerning personal—but not too personal—matters is fairly comfortable. Such a conversation keeps us within our comfort zone. It is not surprising, then, that standardized exams such as the IELTS begin with questions about hobbies, studies, and work experiences. The first section of the IELTS Exam is no doubt geared toward letting the examinee warm up. Warmup activities in the classroom are sure to be more effective when they take a similar approach. Students start with the known and then, as the lesson progresses, move into new territory. And by starting a lesson with the sharing of personal information and ideas, they work toward creating group cohesiveness. As Dörnyei (1997) notes, "[b]y far the most crucial ways (*sic*) of consciously fostering cohesiveness is to help students learn about each other by sharing genuine personal information" (p. 485). Such a philosophy serves to allow the student who cares nothing about fashion into a conversation about fashion: he/she is given the chance to explain why he/she is not interested in the topic. In short, the student's lack of interest in the topic is offset by a classroom dynamic that provides him/her an avenue for expressing his/her opinions on the topic.

5.1.2 Lowering the Affective Filter

The notion of the *affective filter* (Krashen, 1985) is well known in the world of language teaching. It stands out as one of the most discussed of Krashen's five Input Hypotheses. The affective filter, according to Krashen, may serve to allow or block language input. Factors such as motivation, attitude toward the L2, anxiety, and self-confidence are all relevant in determining whether a student's affective filter is low or high. A low affective filter allows more language input to go into the learner's *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD); a high affective filter prevents input from entering the LAD (Du, 2009). Though Krashen's theories have encountered some criticism over the years, and though there is "little

conclusive evidence” concerning exactly how affective factors may impact students’ language acquisition (Hedge, 2002, p. 22), very few commentators would doubt the importance of motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-confidence in relation to L2 learning. These factors mirror those that have already been discussed in terms of possible influences on students’ willingness to communicate.

As mentioned above, the warmup, one would hope, will foster group cohesion. It will take steps toward doing so if it is oriented around the sharing of “genuine personal information”. The process of fostering group cohesion should in itself aid in lowering the affective filter and in increasing WTC. Chang (2010) points out that “[m]embers of a cohesive group show a strong connection by sharing ideas with each other, participating in group-related activities, [and] working easily together” (p. 131). However, even the classroom with the most cohesive group imaginable may have students with high anxiety and/or low self-confidence, qualities that would raise the affective filter and, by extension, lower WTC.

If the warmup activity is to help lower the affective filter, a certain amount of relaxation in the classroom no doubt needs to be present. Such relaxation may lie simply in “having a relaxed attitude about how seriously we take ourselves” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 41). It may also lie in the methods chosen to implement the first activity of a lesson. The standard comment to new teachers—“get the students on their feet”—serves well here. It stands to reason that a student who is talking to one classmate at the same time that his/her other classmates are talking in pairs should have conditions for lowering the affective filter: his/her level of anxiety should be lowered since not many people are listening to him/her; his/her state perceived competence and hence self-confidence should increase due to the relatively free-form nature of the task at hand.

5.1.3 Creating an Expectation of Success

As has been discussed above, research shows that numerous factors tend to lower WTC. Among the most salient of these factors would seem to be high anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low state perceived competence, low self-confidence, and a high affective filter. And research also seems to indicate that these factors tend to influence each other—for example, a high level of anxiety is likely to be related to a low level of state perceived competence. It has been argued above that warmup activities that “whet the students’ appetite” and foster group cohesion may go a long way toward combatting these negative factors.

Perhaps the most important—and simplest—characteristic of warmup activities that enhance WTC through team building lies in the creation of an expectation of success. Regardless of the specificity of the syllabus, students enter the classroom every day without fully knowing what awaits them. The warmup gives them their first concrete idea of what is forthcoming. If they are to participate fully in the class as a whole, they need to begin with the expectation of success. Hence, they need what Dörnyei (1994) calls “success-engendering language tasks” to start the day (p. 277). Again, this characteristic of warmup activities is simple. But one may assume a somewhat negative reaction on the part of a learner who begins his/her class on a negative note: the possibility of giving up and dropping out of the cohesive group begins to loom rather large.

The preceding comments are not intended to suggest that warmup activities should be child's play. Oxford (1994), in discussing need-achievement theory, notes that "students must believe that doing the specified tasks will produce positive results and that these results are personally valuable" (p. 18). Related to warmup activities, Oxford's view would seem to suggest that tasks should be personal and useful, challenging but possible. And if group cohesion is at stake, these tasks must be possible for all students involved.

5.2 Case Studies as Team-Building Mechanisms

Let us assume that, in any particular class, the warmup has been short and sweet and has done its job of whetting the students' appetite and promoting team building. Let us assume that it has also provided students with a challenging but possible task. As stated above, students start with the known and then, as the lesson progresses, move into new territory. Though there are always curriculum restraints, class size restraints, and numerous other restraints, the use of case studies in the classroom may serve to maintain the teamwork atmosphere and to create unique learning opportunities—especially in courses for students at the intermediate and advanced levels.

The case study method is currently used in a wide variety of academic disciplines, ranging from nursing to engineering, from business management to the hard sciences (Romm & Mahler, 1986). According to Romm and Mahler's survey of available literature on the topic, the case study method has several advantages: "(a) its success in promoting theoretical understanding and insight, (b) its strength in inducing motivation, psychological involvement and identification, and (c) its superiority over the more traditional techniques in encouraging self-direction in learning" (p. 677). These qualities of the case study method, in and of themselves, provide substantial support for the use of the method in the classroom, with the quality of "inducing motivation" standing out in particular. In terms of enhancing WTC through team building, however, case studies are especially relevant due to their employment of the rational-analytical model of cognitive operations, a model first proposed by Dewey (1933) and later expanded upon by Simon (1960) and Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret (1976). The rational-analytical model, as implemented in the case study method, leads students through a systematic process: (1) definition of a problem, (2) analysis of possible reasons for the problem, (3) consideration of various solutions to the problem, (4) choice of best solution.

By going through the processes mentioned above, students necessarily work as a team in order to produce a group product. The product is important; the process of producing the product is also important. The process requires a constant team effort in which all students' opinions must be taken into account. Of particular relevance to the present discussion is the method's inclusion of *possible reasons* for the problem and *various solutions* to the problem. Though a best solution will need to be determined, there is, initially, no one right answer. Hence, used for the purpose of enhancing WTC, the method effectively reduces fear of negative evaluation: with no one correct answer immediately available, the opinions of all students in a group carry weight. And students with lower perceived communicative competence, in carrying out the process of a case study, may feel that their ideas, more

than their language skills, are called for. In expressing their ideas, they will also develop their language skills.

Case studies may be included in any of a number of courses geared toward English for Academic Purposes (i.e., EAP courses). In teaching an Academic Writing course for students majoring in Mechatronics at Shantou University, the author of this paper has employed various case studies related to engineering ethics and to sexism in the field of engineering. The first guiding principle, needless to say, is the choice of “interesting, thought-provoking cases” (Romm & Mahler, 1986, p. 677). The choice of which case studies to use always depends on the focus of the course. An instructor of a Business English course, for example, would only choose a case study related to sexism in the field of mechatronics for a very special reason.

One type of case study, commonly known as the *critical incident exercise*, can feasibly be implemented in language courses regardless of the specific focus of the course. This type of case study was originally intended for courses related to intercultural communication skills but is now widely used in foreign language classrooms (Snow, 2014). Critical incident exercises present an intercultural communication problem, and students are asked to go through the steps of Dewey’s rational-analytical model (discussed above) in order to come up with possible explanations for and solutions to the problem. If it is assumed that “[l]anguage and culture should never be separated in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages” (Pérez Sarduy, Harper, & Velázquez León, 2015, p. 488), it may also be assumed that critical incident exercises may add value to almost any language course.

To clarify, let us consider the following critical incident exercise, written by the author of this paper for students of Shantou University:

INDIVIDUALISM/EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE: Huan-Yue, originally from a small province in China, is currently a senior at a university in Great Britain. As she has won several awards for her debating skills, she has been asked to serve as an advisor for this year’s university debate team. The team is now in the fourth week of a 16-week training period and seems not to be progressing well. Curiously enough, just last week a very talented debater named Hugo approached Huan-Yue and expressed interest in joining the debate team. Hugo apologized for not joining earlier and mentioned some serious family issues that had demanded his attention. Huan-Yue, understanding Hugo’s situation and also realizing the poor state of the debate team, promised Hugo a place on the team. But when Huan-Yue mentioned Hugo to others (i.e., to her fellow advisors and to other debate-team members), she was greeted with lots of criticism. Her critics all insisted that the team had already been formed and that no exceptions could be made.

- **In what ways can this situation be interpreted?**
- **What, if anything, can be done to improve this situation?**

This critical incident, like most others, is based on a real-life scenario but modified to suit the needs of the target audience (in this case, students of the third required level of English at Shantou University, a

level that focuses specifically on intercultural communication). This example, chosen because of its brevity, fits the needs of open-ended critical incident exercises (i.e., those which allow for *possible reasons* and *various solutions*. As Snow (2014) points out, “[o]pen-ended critical incident exercises encourage learners to think more broadly about the situation, and to explore the many factors that may affect intercultural communication situations” (xvi).

The critical incident is discussed in small groups. It should thus serve to lower the anxiety level of the students involved in the discussion. Fear of negative evaluation, a major contributor to anxiety, is minimized since any particular student will only present his/her thoughts to a small group and since, in the early stages of the discussion, any logical interpretation of the situation is viable. Ultimately, according to the rational-analytical model mentioned above, a *best solution* will need to be found. This solution, however, will be presented only when all members of a group have reached a consensus. A team reaches a consensus; no one loses face.

As pointed out above, MacIntyre et al. mention that “an ethnocentric person would not be inclined to get involved in interactions with members of another ethnic community”. Extreme ethnocentrism no doubt contributes to students’ unwillingness to communicate in the L2, and one activity (e.g., one critical incident exercise) is not likely to alter an extremely ethnocentric frame of mind. Nevertheless, as Dörnyei (2001) notes, “[w]e all like learning about places and people which are unique and have a certain amount of grandeur” (p. 76). The sample critical incident given above takes place in Great Britain, certainly a place with plenty of grandeur. The Chinese students analyzing the situation are led to think about their own values and to consider the issue from the point of view of *the other*—that is, from the point of view of those who disagree with Huan-Yue’s decision to allow Hugo to join the debate team. The end result of the group study of the case may not be as important as the process that goes into it. Students are led to consider different points of view and the logic behind those points of view, with the ultimate goal being that of creating a sort of “cultural synergy” (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, p. 202).

5.3 Cooperative Learning Techniques as Team-Building Mechanisms

Cooperative Learning (hereafter referred to as CL) was first introduced into the field of language teaching back in the 1960s, but it was not until the 1990s that its techniques began to receive the attention that they had received earlier in other disciplines (Dörnyei, 1997). And the positive qualities often attributed to CL make it unsurprising that the method would eventually receive a great deal of attention in discussions of language teaching. Dörnyei (1997) explains the interest in CL:

Investigations have almost invariably indicated that CL is a highly effective classroom intervention, superior to most traditional forms of instruction in producing learning gains and student achievement, higher-order thinking, positive attitudes toward learning, increased motivation, better teacher-student and student-student relationships accompanied by more developed interpersonal skills and higher self-esteem on the part of the students (p. 482).

And Oxford (1997) seems to agree: in discussing the attributes of CL, she mentions the attributes of “promoting intrinsic motivation and task achievement, generating higher-order thinking skills, improving attitudes toward the subject, developing academic peer norms, heightening self-esteem, increasing time on task, creating caring and altruistic relationships, and lowering anxiety and prejudice” (p. 445).

Although the focus on CL may now have dwindled somewhat due to a more recent focus on *tasks* (see Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the techniques employed in CL continue to stand out for their usefulness in enhancing WTC. Among other techniques, of particular note are the following: (1) *CL’s attempts to balance student participation in group work*, (2) *CL’s promotion of an expectation of success*, (3) *CL’s attempts to minimize fear of negative evaluation*. These three qualities of the method, though interrelated, will be discussed separately.

5.3.1 CL’s Attempts to Balance Student Participation in Group Work

The CL format automatically promotes group cohesion simply by being based largely on cooperative group work. CL goes further, however, by assigning specific roles to the members of a group—roles such as “explainer”, “summarizer”, or “note-taker” (Dörnyei, 1997, p. 484). The roles of course may vary tremendously. The author of this paper, for example, tends to promote critical thinking by assigning the role of questioner, with the questioner’s job being that of asking follow-up questions in order to lead his/her groupmates to explain ideas in more depth. Other instructors, particularly those in mono-lingual classrooms, have been known to assign a role related to language control. In other words, a student is in charge of keeping the discussion in the L2 as opposed to the L1.

The technique of assigning specific roles takes an important step toward avoiding problems sometimes associated with group work—problems such as one student’s dominating, one student’s slacking, one student’s disrespecting others, etc. Most practitioners can provide testimonies of group work gone awry due to such situations. Granted, the notions of sharing of responsibility and division of labor may not come easy to all students. Hence, especially in multi-lingual, multi-cultural classrooms, some class time may need to be dedicated to the teaching of the required social skills (Dörnyei, 1997). The time spent, incidentally, is part of the CL process. And by taking this time, the instructor takes steps toward minimizing the likelihood of unproductive groups.

5.3.2 CL’s Promotion of an Expectation of Success

In a previous section of this paper, it has been argued that the creation of an expectation of success is one characteristic of warmup activities that enhance WTC through team building. The inclusion of “success-engendering language tasks”, as long as they include challenges, may always serve to enhance WTC for the simple reason that very few people are willing to expend a lot of energy on tasks that doom them to failure. CL techniques, as evidenced by the assignment of roles to members of a group, go a long way toward promoting the “positive interdependence” of group members (Dörnyei, 1997, p. 484). Aside from the assignment of roles to every group member, CL techniques promote positive interdependence by requiring the structuring of group work in such a way that every member of a

group marches at the same pace. That is, no one member of a group may proceed until his/her partners are also ready to proceed. This focus on positive interdependence leads to a greater expectation of success.

Positive interdependence leads to “promotive interaction”, a phenomenon which Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1995) describe as “individuals encouraging and facilitating each other’s efforts to achieve and complete tasks and produce in order to reach the group’s goals” (p. 20). Logically, the student who feels supported by his/her partners is likely to feel that he/she can succeed: when the student is not stuck in an “every-man-for-himself” type of situation, success becomes more tangible. As pointed out earlier, some studies (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Fushino, 2010) have suggested that a low opinion of the utility of oral communication may lead to a low degree of WTC. A framework which leads to a high probability of success in oral communication should lead to a greater valuing of such communication. As Fushino (2010) points out, “[a]lthough no studies have investigated how to strengthen students’ Beliefs About L2 Group Work, having students experience cooperative learning group work might potentially be beneficial for this purpose” (p. 717).

If it is assumed that CL techniques create a situation in which the members of a group “sink or swim together” (Johnson et al., 1995), and if it is assumed that the same techniques make swimming more likely than sinking, the CL method must be considered as one that heightens self-confidence. Dörnyei (1997) points out that CL techniques tend to increase self-confidence by lowering anxiety and stress. One might argue, from a commonsense point of view, that the possibility of sinking in company is probably less stressful than the possibility of sinking alone. The likelihood of not sinking, however, stands out as a greater influence on WTC. Given group support and thus a high probability of success, the student has good reason to feel more self-confident. Specifically, his/her state perceived competence—“the feeling that one has the capacity to communicate effectively at a particular moment”—should show significant increases.

5.3.3 CL’s Attempts to Minimize Fear of Negative Evaluation

The preceding comments concerning CL no doubt shed light on certain characteristics of the method that lead toward the minimization of fear of negative evaluation. The CL method focuses mainly on group work, with prior instruction and practice in carrying out group work often being useful if not absolutely necessary. It requires “the necessity of spending initial time training CL skills such as building trust, providing leadership, and managing conflicts” (Dörnyei, 1977, p. 486). A method providing instruction in these skills naturally promotes group cohesion, a primary factor in promoting WTC.

Contrasting with the CL method are *competitive* and *individualistic* methods, with the former being oriented toward an attempt to be the best, the latter toward personal achievement regardless of the success or failure of others (Dörnyei, 1977). One may associate the competitive method with the well-known *gaokao*, the Chinese university placement exam, and its equivalents in other countries. These exams determine which students are able to attend which universities and which majors (within a

given university) students are able to choose. In short, students compete for the best places in the best universities. Though students may or may not cooperate in their preparation for the exam during in-class and out-of-class time, competition is at the core of the system. One may associate the individualistic method with the traditional lecture-style learning format in which students do not necessarily need to interact at all. Students attend class and take exams, and each student is responsible for his/her own success.

Students in a foreign language class are subject to evaluation—whether positive or negative, whether from the teacher or from classmates—every time they open their mouths. There is, of course, no reason to believe that students in a competitive or individualistic learning environment wish the worst for their classmates. Care and concern may exist anywhere. The CL format, however, with its focus on cooperation and group achievement, inherently discourages negative evaluation. Thus, it is not surprising that studies of CL inevitably mention an “improvement in the learners’ self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence” (Dörnyei, 1977, p. 489).

5.4 Task-Based Learning Techniques as Team-Building Mechanisms

The term *task*, as pointed out above, has become ubiquitous in discussions of language teaching. The notion of task-based learning and teaching (hereafter referred to as TBLT) is certainly not new: interest in TBLT was triggered by Prabhu’s well-known 1987 work *Second Language Pedagogy*; Ellis (2003) cites definitions of the term *task* dating back to 1985. And an impressive number of publications related to TBLT have appeared since 1987 (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Since its inception, TBLT has become a well-known and even fashionable component of the language-teaching profession. Nevertheless, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) notes, “a consensus definition of *task* continues to elude the profession” (p. 64). While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the great number of definitions of the term *task*, a brief consideration of differences and similarities between TBLT and CL should reveal the utility of TBLT techniques in promoting team building and thus enhancing WTC.

5.4.1 Differences between TBLT and CL

The primary difference between TBLT and CL is that the former, unlike the latter, is open to a variety of learning formats. CL, by definition, requires cooperation among students, who “spend most of the class time working in small groups of between 3 and 6 students” (Dörnyei, 1997, p. 483). A cursory glance at the TBLT literature will reveal that discussions of cooperative tasks dominate. But TBLT techniques do not necessarily require cooperation. Ellis (2003), who suggests that tasks typically have a “pre-task”, “during-task”, and “post-task” phase, notes that individual work may be the focus during all three phases. And Nunan (2004), in his discussion of task types, lists certain cognitive tasks which are quite often done individually (e.g., note-taking, inferencing). In short, TBLT allows for some class time to be spent in ways that make WTC a non-issue.

TBLT may not only move away from group work in order to focus on individual work; it may also move away from group work in order to work within what Ellis calls the “whole-class context” (2003, p. 272). TBLT, when carried out in a whole-class context, requires the class discussion to contain

certain features: “(1) shared responsibility for directing the conversation, (2) opportunities for students to make comments that are not elicited by the teacher, (3) a clear thematic focus, (4) the use of extending utterances to build on students’ responses to the teacher’s questions” (Ellis, 2003, p. 274). CL, in contrast, might include whole-class instruction during the initial phase of training learners in the art of participating in cooperative work. But the use of a whole-class context would be a prelude to the ensuing small-group learning format. In short, TBLT, when considered in the whole-class context, requires a focus on the entire class as a team in order to promote WTC—whereas CL techniques tend to emphasize team building within small groups.

5.4.2 Similarities between TBLT and CL

In spite of some differences in scope, TBLT and CL seem to join forces in a number of ways. While many definitions of the term *task* include an emphasis on *outcomes* (see, for example, definitions given in Nunan, 2004; Wang, 2013), at the core of TBLT is a focus on *process*, a key element in CL and a key element in team building. Nunan (2004), taking from the work of Kohonen (1992), mentions “process rather than product” as part of the “theoretical blueprint for TBLT” (p. 12). He goes on to state that work in small groups, yet another key element of CL, is part of the same blueprint. Though it would be careless to say that TBLT and CL are the same, it is probably not especially careless to say that, in terms of promoting WTC through team building, the two share many qualities.

As mentioned above, the existing literature on TBLT seems to emphasize cooperative tasks (even if TBLT in and of itself does not specifically require cooperation). Work in small groups, though not required, forms part of the blueprint of TBLT. And the similarities between TBLT and CL do not end with these two related components. Ellis (2003) takes into account many of the components of CL in his discussion of group work in TBLT: accountability, group size, the need of providing students with skills related to group work, group cohesion (p. 271). And he mentions that “cooperative learning through collaborative dialogue” is the “answer” to questions concerning how task-based group work might best be exploited (p. 269).

Due to its pedagogical similarities to CL in terms of group work, TBLT could perhaps be taken simply as an offshoot of CL. Perhaps. But it might best be viewed as “a curricular content rather than a methodological construct” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 65). Viewed in such a way, and viewed in terms of the enhancement of WTC, TBLT may be seen not as a methodology but rather as a part of a curriculum intended to incorporate techniques and methods which effectively lead to the building of a positive group climate and hence to an increased level of WTC. The cooperative aspect of TBLT, then, by providing curricular content, supports CL techniques and hence serves as an additional tool for promoting WTC through team building.

6. Conclusion

The present study, through an analysis of “what’s out there”, has sought to bridge the gap between an abundant amount of research dedicated to causes of willingness or unwillingness to communicate and a relative scarcity of research dedicated to the enhancement of WTC in the classroom. It has revealed that classroom anxiety stands out as a major factor determining WTC. Other factors such as motivation, general self-confidence, state communicative competence, and beliefs concerning the utility of L2 interaction in the classroom also play a major role in learners’ decisions as to whether or not to contribute orally in classroom activities. These factors are all interrelated. The study has also made use of the notions of group cohesiveness and team building, both frequently addressed in theoretical discussions of language-learning motivation, in order to find matches between WTC theory and teaching practices.

The study suggests that certain, well-known classroom techniques and methodologies (i.e., the warmup, the case study method, cooperative learning and task-based learning) lend themselves to the promotion of team building (and hence to group cohesiveness) in the classroom and thus to the enhancement of WTC. As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) point out, “learner group characteristics have important motivational bearings, and central to these characteristics is the level of cohesiveness among group members” (p. 111). The study suggests, then, that the well-known techniques and methodologies mentioned above, if carried out with team building in mind, should result in greater group cohesiveness and thus in greater WTC.

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