

Communicative Language Teaching in Thailand: Communicative or Confused?

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The communicative approach in language teaching (CLT) has helped to expand the horizons of our profession a great deal. In the design of curriculum and in the methodology used in the classroom, CLT ideas have broadened the possibilities of learner involvement in the learning process. The term itself, 'Communicative,' seems to emphasize that language is used for interaction between human beings, something so easily forgotten in other approaches. At the same time, however, CLT is suffering because various professionals are defining and using its concepts from divergent perspectives and for different ends. Added to that has been the recent flood of books and materials onto the marketplace, some of which use the terms more for its popularity or profitability than for its philosophy. This may be a natural occurrence in a field that is still maturing, but the trend is clear and the danger is real. At the receiving end of all of this discussion and deal-making are the language teachers who must wade through all the muddy water before reaching the high ground of understanding. For many, other concerns at work and in life take precedence over the new trends and, given the constantly shifting currents in professional circles, some teachers simply do not make the effort to search for the higher ground (Fennel, 1986).

Because CLT has much to offer language teachers, this paper will briefly summarize some of the ideas about and key principles within the communicative approach. It will then analyze the context of education in Thailand, looking both at the problems that exist and the potential for improved educational practices. All the while, however, we should remember the wise witticism known as Hawkins' theory of progress, which states that "Progress does not consist of replacing a theory that is wrong with one that is right. It consists of replacing a theory that is wrong with one that is more subtly wrong" (Bloch, 1980:51). Kelly (1969) has noted that "language teaching has shared neither the honesty nor the self-knowledge of the fine arts. Whereas artists are willing to seek inspiration from the past, teachers, being

cursed with the assumptions that their discoveries are necessarily an improvement on what went on before, are reluctant to learn from history” (p. 396) This can be seen today by overeager, though perhaps native advocates of CLT. However, evidence of the opposite assumption can also be easily seen; the ‘if it was good enough for me 30 years ago, then it is good enough for my students’ attitude is common among some cynical, turned-off practitioners among us.

In fifty years, teachers might wonder how CLT advocates could have been so naive; at present, however, it seems to offer a good deal more than anything else presently available *if* it is understood and applied correctly. But regardless of the concern for blindspots in perspective that we need to be constantly on the lookout for, it is argued here that CLT is in danger of being discarded as a valid concept *not* because it is counterproductive to language learning and teaching, but rather because of misunderstanding, miscommunication, and misapplication of CLT principles, materials, and methodology. The bandwagon effect, discussed by Clarke (1982), seems to be running its course. As professionals, our responsibility must include the discipline to explore the muddy waters as independent-thinking people who care about other people who are attempting to learn from us and move toward that elusive higher ground.

Communicative Language Teaching

CLT to some in the field means an analytical approach to language that utilizes needs analyses and syllabi designed to supply learners with content for their particular purposes. To others, however, CLT means more natural and less controlled learning environments, integrated skill development, and experiential learner-centered activities concerned with acquisition. Stern (1981) notes that the first group is linguistically-based while the second is psychologically and pedagogically-based. Though it seems reasonable that the two views can be combined, they are often kept separate. Thus, materials aimed at communication can and are being taught via grammar-translation while structural syllabi can and are being adapted by communicatively-oriented teachers. The problem with both situations, however, is that neither is as effective as it could be. In the first case, the potential is ignored, which is reflected in Markee’s (1984) comment that “although it is theoretically concerned with communication, what happens in the so-called communicative classroom is not markedly different from previous practice” (p. 10). In the second case, the problem is one of stretching material beyond its intended purposes. Though positive results do occur, it seems relatively inefficient when compared to what a more global, unified communicative approach might achieve. Such an approach would entail needs analyses, syllabi geared to specific groups of learners, and more task-based activities in the classroom as well as integrating skill development and involving the learners to a far greater extent than is found in traditional classrooms.

Morrow (1981) lists five methodological principles for the Communicative approach:

1. Know what you are doing;
2. The whole is worth more than the sum of the parts;
3. The processes are as important as the forms;
4. To learn it, do it;
5. Mistakes are not always a mistake (sic).

Briefly summarized, the first principle relates to having students accomplish something in every class that can be seen by them as being useful for communication. The second idea refers to the importance of context in language development; language is more than just sentences strung together, so the perspective needs to be broadened to fit the larger reality. The third idea is concerned with *how* people interact, dealing with such matters as information gaps between participants, choices of what to say and how to say it, and getting relevant feedback to what one says. Fourth, production needs to be included. As Morrow (1981) states:

There is no reason why a communicative method should not encompass stages of presentation, practice and production, the ideas behind which are perhaps more familiar in a grammatical context... Much published material which claims to be communicative turns out to be effective at only one of the three stages, and to the extent to which it embodies a total method is thus rather limited. (p. 64)

Fifth, error correction in class is seen as being much more complicated than many traditionalists have treated it. Though these five principles are not strictly limited to CLT, they do form a reasonable core of knowledge for understanding it.

Brumfit (1984) discusses the two tracks of CLT thinking in terms of product and process. Analysis of the product entails looking at the linguistic forms, types of interaction, e.g. situational and functional, and the content or topic. Analysis of the process refers to 1) communicative abilities, e.g. discussion, comprehension, extended writing; 2) orientation, i.e. the accuracy-fluency question; and 3) pedagogical mode, i.e. individual, pairwork, small groups, or whole class. The sum total of this thinking reflects the complexity of the communicative approach. Communication utilizes the forms of language but then goes far beyond them. As such, language teachers need to look at interaction patterns, strategies, and processes. As Mountford (1985) notes, "A view of language where all the emphasis is on language itself will inhibit the learning process. In a very real sense, language, at some point, gets in the way of language learning" (p. 7).

CLT In Thailand : Problems

1985 might have been called the year of CLT in Thailand, with Thai TESOL conducting its annual convention around that theme. But despite all of the public attention that CLT has received, its effects on language teaching seem marginal at best. Perhaps that is because the constant ferment in the field has made teachers suspicious of new trends, i.e. today's trend may easily turn up in tomorrow's trash heap. Perhaps cultural considerations work against CLT's appropriateness in this particular context. Perhaps there are other justifiable reasons why people are not teaching communicatively, but I have heard the term bantered about frequently only to see its implementation in the classrooms rare. Given that tendency, CLT is becoming just another fashionable buzzword, a bit of empty jargon that many talk about, but few understand and use. It is quite possible that the popularity of the term has poisoned the meaning of the movement. In any event, as a believer of CLT's contributions to the field, I will share some of my observations of materials and methodology in several institutions and then offer some suggestions for teachers interested in applying CLT to their own classrooms.

Materials. Some definite problems exist in materials development in Thailand, both in the sense that many materials are of the 'cut and paste' variety without any sort of central focus or rationale and in the sense that some delve into narrow topics which are of interest to only a few of the learners. With 'cut and paste' materials that are supposedly communicative, the lack of continuity between units and the lack of a clear sense of what constitutes a good basis for pair work or small group work activities seem to be pressing problems. There is an expression to the effect that "If you don't know where you want to go, you will probably end up somewhere else;" in materials development, that idea fits well. If we don't have any sense of what the curriculum is aiming at, then we cannot really expect to get very far in terms of progressive language development. As far as small group activities, they are indeed one of the bases on which CLT is built (Brumfit, 1984), but for small group or pairwork to be successful, there needs to be a justifiable reason for its use, e.g. information gap activities that require people to interact with others to arrive at the desired communicative destination. In fact, these types of activities are finding their ways into materials, although not nearly as consistently as one would wish.

For materials that delve into uninteresting areas, another problem presents itself. If an activity is to be communicative in a global sense, it needs to go beyond the reasonableness of the task itself and be geared toward the interests of the learners. For example, materials that focus on detailed biological comparisons or processes MAY be appropriate for science students but will probably be inappropriate for the

vast majority of students in a general English program. It may be argued that any material will be boring to some students, and that is true, but every effort needs to be made to insure that a large majority will conceivably be ready and willing to learn the language through the use of a particular topic. Exceptions exist here, especially for some types of reading strategy development, e.g. the *Reading and Thinking in English* series (especially *Concepts in Use*), which are less concerned with matters such as vocabulary building than they are developing skills of using nonverbal cues, guessing from context, etc. But even with good materials, problems spring up from teachers using them in ways other than intended.

The criticisms made here, general though they are, are relatively 'cheap shots,' for as anyone knows who has gone through the painstaking process of writing or adapting material, imperfections, deadends, and 'dead lessons' are bound to occur. The above points reflect a concern for 'topic error' and 'artificiality of activity' and a hope for more wholistic design based at the intersection of student and institutional needs, characteristics and interests. Good materials writers work not only with language, but also with the learning process, specific types of learners, and definite institutional concerns and constraints. Too much focus on any one of the above works to detract from the process and distort the mission. Ultimately, however, as difficult as it is to make good materials, that is only 50% of the teachers's core concern for assisting learning. The other 50% happens in the classroom and it is there that the problems seem most severe.

Classroom interaction. An old Chinese proverb, slightly adapted by Benjamin Franklin, is as follows: 'Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I learn.' In the majority of classes I have observed in Thailand, which seem to be indicative of a pattern noted by others, there is much telling, some teaching, but very little involving of the learner taking place. Many teachers seem to dominate classroom interaction to such an extent that students are virtually spoon-fed, or perhaps force-fed, the foreign language in very small chunks. Many teachers take the active role and then rarely let go of it, leaving the students with little to do besides occasionally calling out a response chorally or copying down the correct answers. This tends to dampen the enthusiasm of many and creates an environment where learners become more inhibited and reluctant to take opportunities to actually use the language. As Littlewood (1981) points out, "the development of communicative skills can only take place if learners have motivation and opportunity to express their own identity and to relate with the people around them" (p. 93).

The issue transcends CLT and goes to the very heart of the language learning process and human development. Dulay and Burt (1977) have discussed the concept of the Affective Filter which serves to hamper foreign language

development. Krashen (1982) mentions three specific categories of affective variables which relate to language learning: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. In situations where the teacher controls the public arena of the classroom, the motivation and self-confidence of most learners will probably decrease while the anxiety may soar.

Ausubel (1968), from a cognitive perspective, notes six desires or needs of human beings, which relate to motivation, as being:

1. The need for exploration;
2. The need for manipulation of the environment;
3. The need for activity;
4. The need for stimulation;
5. The need for knowledge;
6. The need for ego enhancement.

Whatever the wording or perspective, the message seems clear; learners need a comfortable environment in which they can explore the world of language in an active and stimulating manner. How many teachers at present offer this to their students?

Perhaps for linguistics lovers, extended lectures on grammar or vocabulary may be stimulating, but they are not for most learners. Whatever the approach used in the classroom, especially those classrooms with 40+ students, a few students will find it of no interest. But where the teacher assumes total control over the class and lectures about English usage, the result has been more than a few students looking downward and drifting off in, one suspects, daydreams far away from the dull classroom. Too many teachers turn materials that could be used communicatively into grammar-translation exercises that twist the purposes of the materials and turn off the students. Given the fact that English is not the major subject for most learners and that the majority need it for practical purposes, it seems more reasonable to approach it as a skill to be acquired than a content area to be memorized. For students to acquire skills, they need to be able to be given opportunities to take initiative in the process of that acquisition. Where cultural characteristics, e.g. student passivity, interfere, ways to work toward ever-greater amounts of initiative-taking need to be explored and exploited.

Teachers. Various factors work against the facilitation of learning (or acquisition) in the classroom. One of the most obvious is the reality of large classes of 40+ students. In such environments, moving from teacher-based to task-based activities may seem disruptive and inefficient; indeed, several teachers have remarked that time constraints prevent them from using CLT activities. However, in my observations, I have informally timed different types of classes and found that in

some relatively simple activities, a learner-based approach took the same amount of time as the teacher-based activities (using the same material) except in one case, in which the learner-based class took *less* time than did the teacher-based way. It is very possible that some of the objections stated against using CLT techniques may have more to do with the teachers' fear of the unknown and confusion over what to do once they change their roles rather than actual experimentation with such techniques. (Imagine a teacher saying "I tried CLT once and it took too much time...so I'll stick with the old way."). Of course, some CLT activities may take more time and are less subject to compartmentalization, but there are many variations on the theme which are simply being ignored.

Another factor, which has already been alluded to, relates to the characteristics of the teachers themselves. One characteristic of many is a lack of self-confidence in English and/or teaching. It is certainly understandable that people who have doubts about their own abilities would be suspicious of an approach that challenged both teacher and students alike to change traditional patterns of interaction. At the same time, it is surprising and shocking that many who need help are reluctant to go and seek it out, either by looking through the professional newsletters, magazines, journals and books (see Fennell, 1986) or by attending professional workshops or conferences, e.g. those sponsored by Thai TESOL.

A second characteristic relates to lack of knowledge in specific content areas of the lessons, which is most severe in the case of teaching language for specific purposes (LSP). Teachers have various options in such cases, from genuinely seeking knowledge about the subjects from the students themselves to moving away from the specifics of the lesson to a broader look at and use of the core language elements in it. Unfortunately, all too often the lack of specific knowledge results in an even greater emphasis on the technical aspects of the language presented, leaving meaning and use by the wayside.

A third characteristic³ of some teachers might be interference in the teaching of language caused by the teachers' own backgrounds. Stated simply, those interested in linguistics and literature may be tempted to view those particular fields with too high a regard when it comes to teaching language to people who have no such love of either. Language learning for most people is a chore, and it is a chore that needs to be tied to concrete needs as the learner sees them. It is too easy for language teachers standing on top of the language mountain, or on a ledge halfway up, to look down at the learners just beginning to climb and tell them everything we know about the language. But the learners are climbing for different purposes and hope to reach different heights than the language teachers; the big mountains for the students to climb are elsewhere.

Institutional Culture and Politics. A very important question to consider in any educational setting is who gets rewarded and recognized and for what reasons? The act of teaching is, or should be, dynamic and challenging; the teaching profession, on the other hand, is often lacking in that dynamism or systematic concern for improvement. If teaching is not dealt with in an organized way for reward and recognition, then it will often be given lower priority by people than it should be. Of course, the evaluation of teaching is a treacherous course to pursue, with the criteria used shifting with different evaluators and varying perspectives. Furthermore, too many evaluators have abused the process by letting personal biases become their main criteria for judging the worth of others. But if there is no linkage in some way between what the teacher does in the classroom and how that teacher is rewarded professionally, then there becomes no reason for many, other than pride and professionalism, to continue to learn about the field and to keep struggling in the classroom to improve teaching. In other words, the structure of the educational system tends to hinder creativity and concern for real communication in the classroom.

A second drawback in the present system, seemingly prevalent at many institutions, is the bombardment of materials thrown at both the learner and the teacher. Whether this actually part of the institutional culture or merely a lack of creativity on the part of teachers is another matter, but clearly, many teachers feel bound to cover every page of material given to them, regardless of its worth in helping the learner learn the main points of the lesson. This heavy reliance on 'covering the materials' completely distorts the learning process and the learning that does take place is probably more rote than relevant.

Another part of educational culture in Thailand, though this seems to vary from institution to institution, relates to the individual nature of many work assignments. This may relate to traditional Thai culture for, as Embree (1950) has pointed out, "The longer one resides in Thailand, the more one is struck by the almost determined lack of regularity, discipline, and regimentation in Thai life" (p. 181). There may be decided advantages in such a system, and it could be argued that the lack of regimentation may lead to a more creative working environment, but that does not appear to be the case very often. Work done solo here seems to bring with it secrecy, suspicion, and finally, stagnation. Personality conflicts emerge when one teacher writes material and then others use and criticize it. Sometimes criticisms are voiced behind closed doors to avoid conflict; but such situations serve to impede progress in making better materials and in instilling a shared sense of mission and identity as professionals helping students.

Whatever the constraints on effective teaching and enhanced learning, the two central factors seem to relate to materials and methodology. These are obviously not the only factors, for needs analyses at the beginning and evaluation throughout play key roles as well, but materials and methodology do form the core of a teacher's time and concerns for educating people. What follows, then, is a simple illustration of what should happen in organized learning experiences, followed by two examples of what often happens instead. Figure 1 shows the learner materials appropriate for his or her purpose, followed by or in conjunction with teaching based on the learner's linguistic and psychological needs, characteristics, and desires, with the result being a vertical leap toward his or her learning goals. This is not meant to contradict the notion of the learning spiral found in communicative circles, but is meant rather to simply show the relation between the various elements in the learning process.

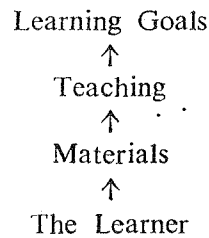


Figure 1
The Ideal Educational Situation

Figure 2 indicates what often happens when the material goes off course and does not serve the learner's purposes. Good teaching may help to get the process on track again, but valuable time is often lost, more effort is required and the results are not as successful as they could be.

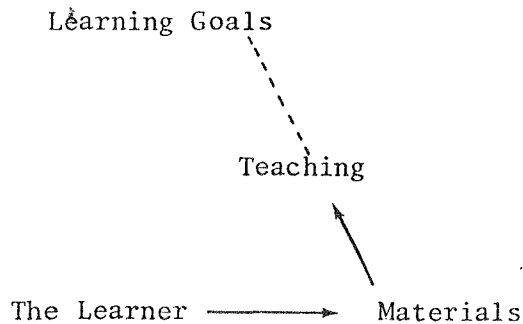


Figure 2
The Educational Situation with Ineffective Materials

Figure 3 shows what happens when the material is acceptable but the teaching takes the learner in the wrong direction, sometimes to the point where learning is actually interfered with and learners regress rather than progress.

Learning Goals

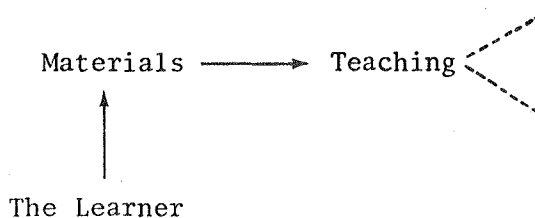


Figure 3

The Educational Situation with Ineffective Methodology

These figures are designed only to clarify the broad picture somewhat and not as in-depth explanations of the learning process. If the main function of the teacher is to assist the learner toward the attainment of the learning goals, then the materials we write and the ways in which we teach can have dramatic effects, for better or for worse, on the actual learning that takes place. Hopefully, the figures illustrate that, but the reader is encouraged to design other, more precise illustrations which can better describe the process.

CLT in Thailand : Potential

Up to this point, the situation portrayed in Thailand has been bleak. However, that is *not* the case in all educational settings. Teaching that is careful, caring, and communicative is being carried out here. Some teachers are very skillful in promoting language skill development rather than simply knowledge about language as a subject. As such, the potential for change is already with us. What follows, then, are a few thoughts on how that potential might be realized.

Materials. The first recommendation for improvement relates to the process of developing materials. Given the tendency in some institutions to write specific materials before looking at the broader curricular concerns, with a resulting patchwork full of unsightly seams, it seems important to step back and look at 'the big picture'. Materials development, then, should be put in the framework of curriculum design. Relationships need to be spelled out between the content covered in one year and that covered in the next and between one skill area and the others.

Second, needs analyses, which form the first step of any design, should be broadened and deepened to include not only language needs, but psychological

needs and wants as well. This can be tricky since some students may want whatever is not being presently offered, but the key is to map out a general plan which crosses the intersection of language needs and student characteristics. For example, if it is determined that students need to know how to compare in the foreign language, we need to think beyond the linguistic ways to handle it to comparison of matters that they might genuinely want to communicate with others. For general English courses, it seems wise to stay away from biological minutiae and go into more detail about current events, cultural customs, and so forth. For science students on the other hand, introduction of materials more to their specific academic interests may indeed be more motivating.

Third, evaluation of materials should be seen as an ongoing process, both for the revision of work that is not as effective as it could be *and* for staff development and teacher training to familiarize teachers with alternative ways to approach the material. This is a critical area of concern, especially since many find it easy to criticize materials simply because they have not tried to deal with them beyond simple explanations of texts to students. Alternative techniques can be found for virtually any material made and ways need to be explored to expand the alternatives for everyone.

Fourth, where possible, materials development needs to be coordinated, with the leader having a vision of what needs to be done in accordance with an overall curriculum plan and also having the flexibility to work with people who have different perspectives. This is much easier said than done, but it remains an essential part of the task of leadership and leadership is badly needed in this area. Leaders must plan, and involve group members in the planning, and then use the subtle powers of persuasion to carry out the plan to as close to perfection as the group and the institution will tolerate.

Classroom Interaction. The fundamental matter in the classroom would seem to be greater levels of learner involvement in language skill development in ways meaningful to them. Greater involvement, and initiative, by learners implies a less dominant role by the teacher; focusing on the skill of language rather than the subject of language enables, and requires, a different approach to teaching; bringing relevant meaning to the forefront of the learning task helps to both motivate and to challenge the learners. There are many ways to accomplish these ends, ways that have been discussed and used for years--role-plays, simulations, open-ended discussions, and so forth. More time may be needed in planning some of these activities, but the teacher can then use the precious classroom time not to lecture but to allow the students to try to actively learn. As Beebe (1983) has noted, communicative activities "may be more effective than mechanical drills in part

because the perceived gain, or value attached to communicating one's own ideas, may motivate more speaking and involve some risk-taking" (p. 62). This risk-taking seems to be a key element in language learning. Smith (1971), in a discussion of reading, states that "the more often you want to be right, the more often you must tolerate being wrong" (p. 24). Learners need the opportunities to try, try, and then try again.

For teachers in Thailand, then, it seems worthwhile to plan more learning activities and fewer teaching activities. Rather than asking "What am I going to teach today?" a better question is "How am I going to get them involved so that they can learn the essentials of the lesson?" Several suggestions follow.

First, a greater emphasis on task-based activities seems to be in order. Students generally respond well to projects that challenge them if they know the relevance of the projects to their ultimate aims. From making a student newspaper to detailed simulations geared to their needs and interests, such projects can help to galvanize involvement and promote learning. Tasks focus on doing, not drilling, use, not usage.

Second, much more small group work seems appropriate. Brumfit (1984) argues this point strongly, noting that "any use of group work will massively increase the likelihood, in large classes, of students both producing and receiving language. It will also contribute considerably to both cognitive and affective development" (p. 75). He further explains:

Because the small group simulates natural conversational settings more closely than any other mode of classroom organization (if we include pairwork with group work), it will combine most effectively...aspects of communication, learning, and human interaction...in the most integrated, non-threatening, and flexible mode of class organization available to the teacher. The teacher in the large class cannot control the language being used in all groups—in view of our argument, a virtue rather than a deficiency (1984:78)

Brumfit's ideology is clearly CLT. Long and Porter (1985) are less concerned with the specific approach than with research in classroom interaction; they have found that group work offers greater quantity and variety of practice, similar levels of accuracy, higher correction of other students, and more negotiation for meaning than does more traditional lock-step teaching. Some disbelieving readers might say that it is fine for the U.K. or the U.S., but it will not work in Thailand, but it has been tried and used successfully here with groups of 50. Clearly, in a land full of large language classes, the potential for improved learning via group work is vast.

Third putting friendly competition into the classroom can serve to maintain student interest and concentration on the tasks at hand. Especially when competition is set in a context between groups, and not individuals, it can stimulate greater comfort and cooperation as well as involvement.

Finally, an element in all of the suggestions mentioned is the breaking down of barriers between the teacher and the students. Once teachers step out of the role of lecturer and into the role of facilitator, more genuine help can be given to individuals and groups who need it. Many people, teenagers and adults alike are intimidated by the public arena; it is easier to ask questions of an authority figure who is roaming the class quietly than it is to address a question to him or her in front of 49 others.

Teachers. Moving toward group work on a regular basis relieves some of the pressures that teachers face with large classes. Another suggestion, involving more advanced learners (relative to the learners in question), would be to have the more advanced learners assist teachers with regular classes or in specially-designed special projects sessions. Such a system would help to give the language learners more individualized attention while the regular teachers would be able to refocus their energies and the advanced students could gain valuable classroom language experience under guidance from the teacher. At the very least, graduate students in the field could be used in some universities to supervise 'special projects' sessions or to assist in helping individual learners in regular classes.

For teachers who lack confidence in changing their classroom patterns of interaction, workshops aimed directly at their situations, types of students and materials could help a great deal. Stated simply, teachers need more than generalized staff development; they need to be given guidance and training in alternative ways of approaching the material and the classes that they actually face. Brainstorming by groups of teachers can help—provided they follow the principles of the technique and withhold judgement. In addition, for those who lack confidence in their own language abilities, technique 'clinics' can be held to show how they can make their weaknesses into strengths, or at least to keep the weaknesses from interfering with their teaching.

Institutional Culture and Politics. This is probably the most difficult dilemma to be resolved. Politics related to promotion are often ingrained and are rarely offered up for review or for changes. However, the notion of changing work assignments from individuals to groups seems a much more practical matter. Quality circles, implemented by people who can both listen and lead, can help to keep materials development on track *as* it is being produced instead of having belated calls for rejection or major revision after the work is finished. Just as greater

learner involvement in classroom activities can lead to increased learning, so too can wider teacher involvement in needs analyses, materials development, testing, and so forth, lead to better organizational or departmental effectiveness. Task forces are not panaceas, but they do represent possibilities for improved performance.

Beyond the classroom. Resource centers seem to be spreading through the country, though at what pace I do not know. Such centers *may* be (and should be) excellent places for students to broaden their skill development and understanding of the foreign language. However, without continued maintenance, they can easily end up dusty and unused. To ensure their use and to fulfill their full mission, it seems that resource centers should not only serve the comprehension needs of students, but production needs and interests as well. Three basic ideas for that, each of which has been around for a long time, are:

1. Discussion clubs, where topics related to different cultures, news, subject-specific notes of interest can be talked about in an informal environment.

2. Student-run newspapers, already mentioned as an in-class activity, can also be run as extracurricular activities or as a program project with selected students from various classes coming together.

3. Special events, from group outings to parties around special cultural themes, in which students and teachers can get together informally to break down barriers and use the target language.

Ideally, teacher involvement in such activities would be given administrative support and some sort of work credit. Whatever the administration's position, such activities can foster better student-teacher relations and provide learners with a richer environment for language acquisition.

Final Remarks

As Krashen (1982) notes, "our responsibility goes beyond the language classroom...our task is to provide the students with the tools they need to continue improving without us" (p. 76). That *is* our mission, but too often it becomes muddy as one semester blends into another and one set of students is replaced by another, younger (from our perspective) set. But foreign language teaching is an important endeavor, not only for the expanded professional capabilities of the learners, but also for expanded horizons of thought and awareness as well. Foreign language educators do not just teach language; they teach people how to use language as a key with which to open up the world.

CLT is not the final step on the long road to the perfect approach to language teaching, but it does seem to offer much to language teachers in Thailand today. CLT is too valuable a movement to be reduced to a trendy buzzword or a catchall term that merely covers up confused practices. It deserves our attention, our study, and our willingness to try it. Thailand is already blessed with some good facilities, libraries, resource centers, materials and teachers. It is also burdened by the fact that the above represents only a small fraction of what is happening in language teaching here, even within some of the major universities. The challenge for the rest of the decade will be to shed the inertia of the too conservative past and to propel ourselves into a more progressive future.

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