

Exploring Chinese Graduate Students' Learner Identity in Group Work in Western
Academia: Perceptions, Representations and Challenges

By

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Gao, Junfu

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ABSTRACT

Group work (GW) is commonly used in many countries around the world. The emerging predominance of GW assignments represents a major trend in higher education (Burdett & Hastie, 2009) as employers highly value teamwork skills and seek the development of these in university graduates (Cranmer, 2006). Universities are increasingly adopting group-based assessment tasks, and teachers often assign student group projects to enhance students' learning (Bacon, 2005). It is an effective teaching practice in many regards (Brooks, 1992). This practice was hailed over the last few decades, taken as one of the most successful teaching and learning strategies. In the university where this study was conducted, instructors utilized GW as a form of assignment for various reasons. Yet, little research has been done on GW in the context of Chinese graduate students' learning at a U.S. university. This study uses qualitative methods to investigate an often used, but rarely researched, classroom pedagogical practice – Group Work – in the case of US university adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and graduate students from China.

This study examines the perceptions of GW based on the experience of four adult Chinese ESL learners. The study aims to unpack the process of how Chinese ESL graduate students design, implement, and present their GW in the American classroom setting. Data were collected from multiple sources, including interviews, my self-reflections, and participants' course materials. Data were analyzed by using content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Neuendorf, 2002). This study

showed that, in their preparatory activities outside the classroom, students employed group discussion to generate ideas and seek peer comments. However, the study also describes how GW is designed and implemented in order to reveal the challenges, and their role in GW in relation to their learner identity. Finally, implications of this study are provided for future research purposes.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Open Doors Report (2013) reported a 21.4% increase since 2012 in Chinese student enrollment at higher education institutions in the United States (US). The enthusiasm of Chinese students pursuing academics outside our own country is not a short story. This tradition dates back to 2,500 years ago, when the great Chinese philosopher, Confucius, traveled with his fellow students to seven kingdoms and “participated in scholarly and political activities there” (Yang, Webster & Prosser, 2011, p. 69). The popularity of Chinese students studying abroad also comes from their attraction to the target language culture and real-life language learning experience, the quality of education in western academia, and the prospects for a better career in both home country and the hosting country (Chen & Zimitat, 2006).

One of the precious experiences of studying abroad is the active engagement with the new target language environment (Yang, Webster & Prosser, 2011). Effective group activities like Group Work (GW) delicately assert learners’ abilities to use the language in specific contexts. Thus, how to use the language properly and avoid pragmatic failure in communication becomes the key for demonstrating students’ ability and their active engagement. GW develops learners’ communicative skills and trains learners to use the language in real-life settings and situations. It is believed that to be able to effectively stimulate students’ interest in learning, educational institutions need to provide students with more opportunities to practice, which will significantly improve the quality of learning (Hénard & Roseveare, 2012).

GW is an effective teaching practice in many aspects. This practice was hailed over the last few decades, taken as one of the most important and successful teaching strategies. The emerging predominance of GW assignments represents a major trend in higher education (Burdett & Hastie, 2009). Employers highly value teamwork skills and seek the development of these in university graduates (Cranmer, 2006). Universities are increasingly adopting group-based assessment tasks. At the university investigated in this study, teachers use GW as a form of assignment for various reasons across all studied disciplines. But little research has been done on GW in relation to Chinese graduate students' learner identity representation in the context of US universities. This study intends to thoroughly investigate an often used but rarely researched pedagogical practice – Group Work presentation of Chinese graduate students in a US university.

This study was conducted in Fall 2013 at a Midwestern university and examined the perceptions of Group Work (GW) assignment of students at the University across the top four enrollments for international graduate students: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), Applied English Center (AEC) full time, the School of Engineering and the School of Education. The study unpacked how Chinese students at the University perceive and present their identity in GW activities to meet the requirement of the courses. Reviewing how their identity is perceived from multiple sources helps to identify potential problems and to provide implications for improving the students' performance of GW in western settings. Data were collected from multiple sources, including two rounds of interviews, my self-reflections, and field notes from the researcher's personal experience

with GW throughout the courses he took during his graduate study. Data were analyzed by using the method of content analysis.

At the University, the use of GW is not rare. From my personal experience at the University for the past two years, I have witnessed the use of GW in both required courses and other content subject courses. Further, I have observed students embracing and repudiating the use of GW in different courses. This is especially true among international students. Therefore, I was determined to design this study in order to investigate Chinese graduate students' perception of GW at the University. For the feasibility of conducting the study and the in-depth analysis, self-participatory study is included.

At the University, a total of 13 schools offer more than 345 degree programs in 200 fields (The University website). "Particularly strong are special education, city management, speech-language pathology, rural medicine, clinical child psychology, nursing, occupational therapy, and social welfare". Students, split almost equally between women and men, come from all 50 states and 105 countries and are about 15 percent multicultural. Among them, CLAS, AEC full time, Engineering, Education are the top four choices of students.

All subject courses widely adopt the pedagogical practice of GW. For example, in "Teaching English as a Second Language / Bilingual Education," a course taught by a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum and Teaching (C&T) in the School of Education (SOE), students are asked to conduct GW to lead a discussion on the weekly readings assigned by the instructor of the course. In the course offered by the Department of Linguistics in CLAS, "An Introduction to Linguistic Sciences," students are asked to

present an abstract worked out by a group in response to a topic in linguistics. However, little reflection is available regarding the Chinese graduate students' identity representation during these GW activities at the University. And I sense the urgency of conducting this study from the viewpoint of one of the Chinese graduate learners at the University to thoroughly expose his identity in the process of GW in order to draw some critical implications. This choice is also based on the consideration of feasibility, as self-participatory study allows the researcher to identify problems from within and research into the view of insiders.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to reveal Chinese graduate students' identity during the implementation of GW at a University in the US, in the hope of identifying the perceptions of GW from Chinese graduate students, examining what challenges they have encountered as minority students during their presentation process at the University. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, encounters with Chinese international students are increasing on many US campuses and beyond. Hence, this study targets at Chinese students, also in the hope of providing more information to the faculty members on how to work with Chinese students, especially at graduate level. Last but not the least, based on the gap in the literature of international student identity development in American higher education institutions, I wish to contribute to the literature in this field.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides the definition of Group Work and a theoretical framework for this study. It reviews the relevant literature to identify Asian students' endorsement and repugnance while conducting GW in western settings. Chapter 2 reviews specifically the research of

GW in relation to the research on identity. Chapter 3 describes the methods employed, the context in which this study is positioned, the participants' profiles, the data collecting methods, and the analytical methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings in the aspect of students' perceptions, the process of students' design and implementation of GW, and the issues of roles in relation to identity representation. Chapter 5 discusses the problems of GW use at the University and provides some implications drawn from this study. In the conclusion, this thesis discusses the caveat of this study and contribution for future study in this area.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter first reviews the relevant literature concerning group work (GW), including its advantages and obstacles. Then, it identifies the theoretical and analytical framework for this study. Finally, it reviews specifically the research of GW in relation to the research on identity of second language (L2) learners.

Definition of GW

Group work may be defined as “any activity involving two or more students in which, for a time, the teacher does not have to directly intervene” (Alley, 2005, p. 251). Bruffee (1984) defines group work as a form of engaging students in which the teacher poses a problem and organizes the students to solve the problem collaboratively. In this study, group work is extended and defined as the process of more than two students’ collaboration to solve problems assigned by teachers or initiated by students themselves. This process involves the whole cycle of how the problem to be solved is designed, how students design and implement the group work assignment, and how students evaluate the group work assignment.

Advantages of GW. In the literature, GW as a pedagogical practice is identified to be critical in second language acquisition (SLA) research (Brooks, 1992; Pica & Doughty, 1985) and has a number of learning benefits (Freeman, 1996; Jacques, 1984; Michaelsen, 1992), including providing an antidote to solely teacher-student response in classroom discourse (Alley, 2005); exposing students to other points of view from their peers, so that they can learn and generate new ideas, especially more for comprehensive assignments than for individual based projects (Mello, 1993); and building teamwork skills (Bacon,

2005). The status of GW is especially “entrenched in the repertoire of instructional techniques in language classrooms,” as GW provides opportunities “for students to engage in peer-to-peer learning” (Burdett & Hastie, 2009, p.62). Students’ learning experience is enhanced because they are able to share and clarify their knowledge that they acquired and build up their creative problem-solving abilities (Almond, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Academia often favors GW “for its anticipated reduction in marking loads” (Burdett & Hastie, 2009, p.62).

Smith (1987) cited two main benefits of GW in classroom settings. One is that GW shifts the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student, i.e. it eased the tension of “teacher-centered” towards the benefit of “learner-centered” learning; and GW also increases students’ achievement and improves their attitudes. Ghaith and Bouzeineddine (2003) asserted that GW has been shown by researchers to be a pedagogical activity which is superior to other forms of individual-based tasks, as more meaningful social and cognitive outcomes are able to be generated in this process. Researchers also demonstrated that GW is able to help students develop their critical thinking skills (Goodlad, 1984).

Long and Porter (2005) summarized five benefits of GW activities:

1. Their potential for increasing the quantity of language
 2. Their potential for improving the quality of student
 3. Their potential for individualizing instruction
 4. Their potential for creating a positive affective climate
 5. Their potential for increasing student motivation
- (p. 207-208)

Some other advantages of GW might be its function in block scheduling, as GW helps instructors to solve the problem in maintaining students’ “attention over the longer

instructional period” (Alley, 2005, p.251). In short, GW as one of the paradigms of collaborative learning, has its benefits in all aspects.

Obstacles to GW. Despite the above mentioned advantages, GW is not always regarded positively both by the teachers and the students (Davis, 1997; Burdett & Hastie, 2009). In the teaching of foreign languages, teachers feel obligated to conduct the “monologue” for the sake of efficiency and effective practice of the target language (Alley, 2005), and “condemning the use of GW as a ‘fashionable time waster’ (Davis, 1997, p.265).” Students who provide a dissatisfied work can “inhibit the performance of others, resulting in poorer group outcomes” (Burdett & Hastie, 2009, p.62). If the GW assignment fails in the negotiation and collaborative efforts, it always results in failing, compromised, and unproductive results (Livingstone and Lynch, 2002). In some cases, students’ course-specific learning can also be impeded by the whole group, as opposed to individual work completed (Bacon, 2005). These negative outcomes are likely to reduce satisfaction, a critical issue given that student satisfaction has been linked to decreased drop-out rates and higher learning performance (Suhre, Jansen, and Harskamp, 2007). Furthermore, valuable learning opportunities are missed when future group work is avoided (Volet and Mansfield, 2006) because of the bad experiences mentioned above.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework for This Study

Because this study examines the relationship between learners and the target language environment in which they interact with, a poststructuralist’s point of view on language and identity (Norton, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Pavlenko, 2003) is drawn as a theoretical framework. Poststructuralism “explores how prevailing power relations

between individuals, groups, and communities affect the life chances of individuals at a given time and place” (Norton, 1995, p. 15). The current study adopts the critical sociolinguistic view of “language learning as a social practice” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997), where language learning is “used to identify the broader patterns which constitute and sustain social relationships, particularly relations of inequality” (Tusting, 2005, p. 43). This perspective assumes that learning and socialization entail a process of gaining competence and membership in a discourse community. McGroarty and Calderon (2005) propose the use of cooperative learning in second language learning contexts. Collier & Thomas (2002) discuss the “dual challenge”- the challenge of learning the subject matter taught and the challenge to develop the English language proficiency needed to enable normal academic progress for students whose English is a second language. In addition, they suggest that an assessment that measures both individual achievement and the surrounding social environment should be encouraged in order to facilitate academic progress and foster the communicative and interactional skills.

Vygotsky’s (1987) description of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is relevant to a discussion of group work. According to Vygotsky, ZPD is any situation in which learning occurs through problem solving in collaboration with more capable peers. Initially, the more capable peer is the teacher who does most of the work of modeling the linguistic forms and applications that students are expected to master. Through group work, however, the students are given time and opportunities to practice and peer-teach the new structures and concepts on their own. As Kelly (1995) pointed out:

the more competent member and learners begin by doing the task together. At first the more capable individual does most of the work, gradually

handing over to the learners the responsibility for contributing particular actions until the learners can perform them without help. (p. 31)

As a result of this process, group participants produce more than the sum of their individual abilities.

The utilization of group work in this study is the second language speakers learn from and associate with the new environment through either classroom participation or any other forms of group work. In this process, inevitably, their socialization with the native speakers of English helps them construct their identity and get acquainted with the new environment. Thus, these second language speakers of English develop and form their own identities around the new environment. The negotiation and collaboration between the non-native speakers and the native speakers of English in some way ease the tension of the special moments of the “new-comers”. The “new-comers” synthesize and digest what they encounter in both their academic and cultural life, so that they can perform well in these situations.

The analytical framework for this study is the concept of Community of Practice (COP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). COP is broadly defined as “a group of people who share an interest in a domain of human endeavor and engage in a process of collective learning that creates bonds between them” (Wenger, 2001, p.1). It has been useful for interpreting group projects across the curriculum (Leki, 2001). Lave and Wenger’s model view learning as a “socially situated process by which newcomers gradually move toward fuller participation in a given community's activities by interacting with more experienced community members--a process called legitimate peripheral participation (LPP)” (Morita, 2004, p.576). Wenger (1998) asserts peripherality and

legitimacy are crucial in making newcomers' actual participation possible and "individuals' positions within a COP can change over time" (Morita, 2004, p.576).

The rationale for using COP as the analytical framework for this study is as Wenger (1998) discussed:

In order to be on an inbound trajectory, newcomers must be granted enough legitimacy to be treated as potential members.... Only with legitimacy can all their inevitable stumbling and violations become opportunities for learning rather than cause for dismissal, neglect, or exclusion. (p. 101)

It is evident that a certain level of legitimacy is essential for learning and in this study, the international students' learning are situated in the participation in the target language environment, the interaction between the non-native speakers and the native speakers ensure that the new arrivals improve their skills, gain their power, and associate with the new environment. Using COP, I examined their GW practices that "contribute to the construction of L2 learners as individuals and as such reinforce traditional second language acquisition perspectives" (Toohey, 1998, p.61). Thus, it is crucial how the students perform in this process and how they interact with the new environment through GW.

Research on GW in ESL Programs

Group work in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs has been researched in various aspects: students' perceptions, design and implementation, group work in various cultural contexts, factors inhibiting or promoting group work collaboration, etc.

Alley (2005) demonstrated that student opinions are complex about group work. On one hand, Li and Campbell (2003) find that Asian students value the significance of classroom group discussions where they can interact with students from other cultures and backgrounds, improve their English-language skills, enhance their cultural understanding,

develop intercultural communication skills, and secure possible opportunities to make friends. Kim (2006) asserts that “English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers might better prepare East Asian students through listening and speaking activities” (p. 479), as they are typically known as being silent or reticent in class. Kim’s study participants reported that they were most concerned about leading class discussions and participating in whole-class discussions. On the other hand, Li and Campbell (2003) also speculated that Asian students’ negative views about group assignments stems from the scores being shared by every member in the group that they work with. The study found that most Asian students felt disheartened and helpless at having to complete mandatory group assignments when their grades depend on other members in the same team. Therefore, students’ needs, interests, cultural values, and negotiations and challenges should be considered as a priority in teaching in tertiary institutions.

While addressing the problem of cultural values, Chen and Hird (2006) asserted that students who approach learning from a highly collective orientation may experience discomfort in Western style group work situations that require a combination of both cooperative and individualist behavior from participants. Even though there are close connections between collectivist characteristics found in Chinese culture and the cooperation inherent in GW, productive GW also entails dissenting and challenging behavior from individuals. The article concludes by saying that Chinese students are capable of resolving their disagreements.

Though various research under different contexts reveals students’ different collaborative skills, all research proves that doing a group presentation requires

negotiations and challenges. Yang (2010) asserts that these challenges came from L2 students' underdeveloped English conversational ability. Burdett and Hastie (2005) suggest that the major barrier to students' group work satisfaction was workload. The amount of work an individual undertakes and the level of responsibility s/he assumes appear to be associated with questions of fairness and justice.

Role discussion in negotiation is also said to be influential in the outcome of the GW assignment. DeWever et al. (2006) points out that role allocation is crucial to the outcome and grade, successful collaboration and students' attitude toward GW. Higher levels of social knowledge were found in group discussion where roles were introduced right at the start of the discussion and faded out towards the end, and DeWever et al. attached that to self-assessment. Johnston and Miles (2004) reported they used self- and peer-assessment in an undergraduate social psychology laboratory course and found that students "clearly differentiate group members on their contributions" (Johnston and Miles, 2004, p.751), and when they rated their own contributions, they rated themselves higher.

Thus, the relationship between the group leader and his or her peers in an assigned cooperative group is an unavoidable question. Carolan et al. (2007) concluded that the selection of peer leaders have to be considered. They demonstrate the value of teacher's intervention in asking students who they thought would make the best leader in a group and assign them to groups accordingly. However, in some cases, teachers will not assign a leader to the group. In this kind of group, it is said that students are reluctant to critique fellow students' work. Witney and Smallbone (2004) adopted an online-tool to lessen student-to-student interaction, so that students may feel it is easier to give others honest

opinions on the GW. The review of literature thus far shows that some interventions, such as online-tools (Witney and Smallbone, 2004) and teacher mediation (Carolan et al., 2007) work on promoting students' collaboration.

Research of GW in Relation to Research on Identity Study

As issues about what kind of role the students play in GW is related to how they perceive themselves (i.e. their identity), the definition of identity used in this study follows Norton (2000) refers to how a person understands his or her relationship to the outside world and how do they construct their relationship across time and space. The notion of identity deals with the relationship between the individual and the context to the fore (Hirano, 2009).

Although extensive research are carried out on college student identity development, not many of them are targeted at the identity formation of international students. One example might be:

Over the last few decades, development research and theory has expanded with a great deal of attention paid to the areas of learning styles, cognitive thinking, and moral development, along with social identity theories of diverse student populations in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation...Despite a large volume of literature written on American college student identity development...International student identity development in American higher education institutions has been largely ignored (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). (p. 100)

Kim (2012) proposed the conceptual model of *International Student Identity (ISI)*, consisting of six phases: pre-exposure, exposure, enclosure, emergence, integration, and internationalization. Her study seeks to examine the patterns and characteristics of identity development among international undergraduate students studying in the United States with respect to their psychosocial adjustment, and it also attempts to investigate how

academic and social environments affect the identity formation of international college students (Kim, 2012). However, this pattern and the characteristics presented can be quite different for more advanced learners like graduate students. Do these patterns and characteristics of identity development apply to international graduate students here at this Midwestern University?

Hung and Hyun (2010) conducted a study focused on the ESL learners' understanding of the effect of Western and Eastern epistemological systems on these students' intercultural learning experiences. They found participants were highly aware of their positionality as ESLs upon first arrival: the students in the study were in a doctoral-level (Ph.D.) curriculum and instruction (C&I) program. Hung and Hyun made the generalization that "the awareness of positionality as ESOL gradually decreased because of the accumulating C&I schemata in light of increasing academic English literacy and competencies" (p.340). What's interesting is the effects on graduate students outside of a major where they're focused on that metacognition. I was wondering whether this applies to other majors in CLAS, AEC students who are solely taking language courses, or students who are majoring in Science majors, for example, like Engineering, which do not emphasize the academic English literacy skills and communicative competence abilities.

Even though students from East-Asian countries are alleged to be reticent in the classroom, studies reveal that they are actually eager to participate in class discussion (Cheng, 2000; Rodriguez & Cho, 2011). Rodriguez & Cho (2011) argues students' resistance to stereotypes against Asian and trying to make their voices heard. In contrast to

being shut out of classroom discussion, East-Asian students should feel comfortable to participate in classroom activities (Rodriguez & Cho, 2011).

From the assertions made above, research has investigated students' perceptions of GW in Western settings, critical factors influencing group work processes, the process of designing and implementing group work assignment, students' identity development, students' intercultural learning experience, and their awareness of positionality. The findings suggest that ESL students' interests, crossing cultural boundaries, students' underdeveloped English conversational abilities, their negotiating behavior in connection with their cultural backgrounds, and some teacher interventions are critical factors in GW. The problems of students' problem solving abilities are also being raised, while most of the researchers connect this to the problem of workload. Students are most concerned about leading class discussions and participating in whole-class discussions in academic oral communication.

However, little research has explored Chinese students' perception about their identity during collaboration in GW. While negotiating ideas, how do they assert their own point of view and how do they resist and appropriate others? Thus, the Chinese students' identity representation during their GW conducted in a Midwestern university in the US should be undertaken, presenting a holistic picture of their identity perception, especially during the procedures of students' GW design and students constructing their identity in the ultimate implementation of the GW. There is an urgent need for resolving this gap within GW study, as a GW final product should be able to reveal their identity within the group, the class, the university, and the new culture.

Thus, this study focuses on a group of Chinese graduate students at a Midwestern university to closely investigate their identity representation in GW. This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Chinese students perceive group work?
2. How do Chinese ESL students at the University design and negotiate their roles during the process of preparing for group work presentation?
3. What challenges do Chinese ESL students at the University in this study experience while preparing for group presentation?
4. How do the participants in this study represent their identity in group work presentation?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This part focuses on the introduction of context for this research, the participants' profiles, and methods. In the methods section, the research design, data collection and data analysis are introduced.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted from September to December 2013 and was positioned across the top four enrollments for international graduate students: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Applied English Center, Engineering and Education in a large Midwest public research university in the United States. The university has about 28,000 students enrolled each semester. Its diverse population comes from all 50 states and 105 countries and is about 15 percent multicultural. According to statistics from International Student Services (ISS) at the University (2013), in 2013 Fall enrollment, there was a total of 2,246 international students, which constituted 9.19% of all students at the University, of which 3.95% are graduate students. And students from the following countries constitute most of the international students who enrolled in the University:

Table 1 Enrollment

Country	2013 enrollment	2012 enrollment
China	875	913
Saudi-Arabia	258	187
India	181	150
Korea,-Republic-of	134	144
Japan	68	71

Students' enrollment in different majors is displayed in the following graph:

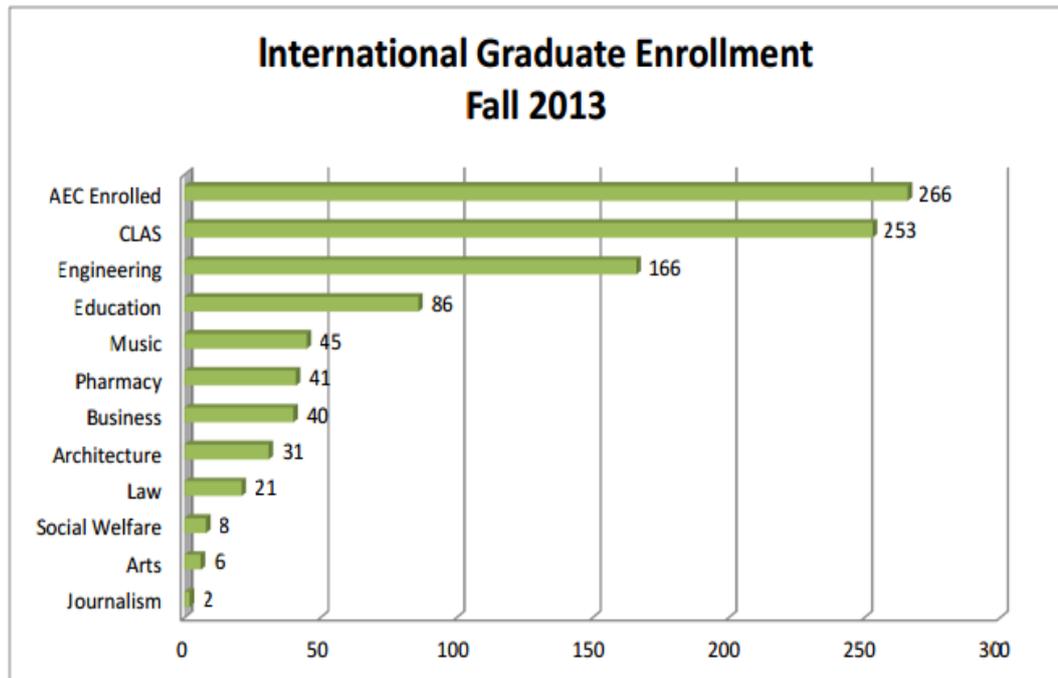


Figure 1 International Graduate Enrollment Fall 2013

Participants

The participants for the present study consisted of four Chinese graduate students from the University. Their ages ranged from 25-27. All of them are in their second year of graduate study, since first-year international students have “limited exposure to the American higher education environment” (Kim, 2012, p.106). The native language of all the participants is mandarin Chinese. All of the participants have EFL learning experience in China and received their bachelor degree in fields like English Language and Literature, Linguistics, Engineering and Urban Planning. They came to the U.S. to pursue a graduate degree. One thing to be noted here is that these Chinese students came to the U.S. for graduate study and research. As such their group work patterns might be different from the general Chinese students who come to America for undergraduate studies. Also, as shown

later in the findings section, group work pattern in this study does vary from the undergraduate level. Further details will be provided in the finding section.

The participants enrolled in the courses in the university for various reasons, either because they “want to learn from the Americans” (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013), they think what they (Americans) did here are better than what we did in China, so they want to learn some essence of working in the designated discipline. Or since most of the graduate students are here to do research, they need knowledge about statistics, linguistics or education. And all majors have their own requirements for obtaining a degree. The duration of their stay in the U.S. is approximately two years. For each participant I have given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity (See Table 1).

Table 1: Profiles of the participants

Students' pseudonyms	Author	Chen	Su	Lang
Age	25	27	27	25
Age of Arrival	24	26	26	24
Years of EFL studies in China	15	14	14	11
Interest in English	High	High	Low	Low
Major in China	English Language and Literature	Linguistics	Urban Planning	Engineering
Major in US	Curriculum and Instruction	Linguistics	Urban Planning	Engineering
L1	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese	Chinese
L2	English	English	English	English
L3	French	French	N/A	N/A

The rate of participants' interest in English was based on my observation in the past one year and half, as I have become good friends with the participants in this study. With Chen, Su and Lang, my friends, a more co-constructing discussion seems prevail than randomly choosing participants among Chinese graduate students at the University. This interpersonal relationship influenced the findings in both positive and negative ways. Even though there are debates about whether qualitative researchers should be members of the

population they are studying (Dewey & Buckle, 2009), when conducting research within specific group, “insider perspective on how the community explains its language choice and attitudes” (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 148) is important in “accessing and presenting participants’ beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences” (Talmy, 2010, p.133). In this study, it seems that due to my personal relationship with participants, the constructive discourse seemed to flow in our discussion. However, the disadvantage might be the shared information between me and the participants might be missed during the interview. The contextual and personal relationship during the discussion of GW seems to play a crucial role in inquiring about the quality of collaboration and outcome of GW.

Methods

In this section, the research design related aspects such as the researcher’s positionality, data collection and data analysis are briefly introduced.

My Positionality. Following the explanation of the context and the participants in this study, in order to help readers understand my interpretation of this paper, it is necessary to introduce my positionality before presenting any findings (Rodriguez and Cho, 2012). The best way to know what students’ understanding of a group presentation and their identity within a group presentation is to elicit the data from group members. Therefore, a participatory case study is employed in this study. A participatory case study is a mode of case study research that involves the participants, local groups, or the community in all phases of the research process, from conceptualizing the study to writing up and disseminating the findings (Reilly, 2010). The central concern for participatory action researchers includes bringing together advocacy to create new ways of knowing that are

capable of disturbing existing power imbalances (Fine, 2008; LeCompte, 1995).

Participatory case study is beneficiary in the truthfulness of the data collection and the observation, as the conductor is one of the participants. The features and characteristics presented can be more easily recorded than researchers intruding from outside.

More importantly, a participatory case study is more likely to thoroughly expose the distinctive features presented by the group and the present status of GW assignment in such a university in the US. To be specific, how students represent their identity during their design and implementation process is likely to be fully described by me. Thus, a participatory case study is the best way to reveal the indwell situation as it is more real to be actually participating in the sampled group.

Besides, as a participating member, my reflections were kept as one source of data. Thus, autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) is employed in this study for critical reflection. "Autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic fieldwork and writing" (Maréchal, 2010, p.43). By reflection and observation, I, as one of the native speakers of Chinese who came to America for graduate study, share numerous common features with the members within the Chinese graduate student community. The shared information among the participants in this study is seen as the ethnography of this designated group, which means the findings can be generalized to make further discussion and implications. Further, my reflection is based on my subjective experience and encounters in this target language community.

Data Collection. Since the study adopts a qualitative case study design to gain a deep understanding of the participants' identity during their experience in group work, multiple sources of data are required. Therefore, I collected data from various sources over one month in the fall semester of 2013, with several follow-ups via emails and Skype. Interviews are effective in “ethnographies, case studies, and action research concerning an equally diverse array of topics, as well as narrative inquiries, (auto) biographical research” (Talmy, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, individual informal interviews about their experience of GW at the University and back in China were voice recorded and transcribed into texts. The participants were interviewed twice in Mandarin Chinese, with occasional codeswitching in English. For example, participants used English terms such as “program” when discussing GW with me rather than Chinese equivalent terms because when we refer to academics or scholarship in America, we usually use the English term since we are studying in an English-speaking country, and that is how we refer to it when we talk about study with our classmates, most of the time American students. Some semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B for interview questions) include their experience with GW in American classrooms and their perceptions of GW practice; the category of topic they present in class and their understanding about the designated topic; their preparatory activities before presenting in class and their challenges during their presentation; students’ design of GW and what role they play in the entire process.

After interviewing with the participants, I translated the Chinese data into English. (See Appendix C for transcripts). Each interview is about half an hour. Lastly, field notes were kept and analyzed during the classes I took. In summary, the data set for this study

include interview data, curriculum data of the University, my self-reflection and field notes of my own experience throughout the past two years at the University.

Based on the research question and the nature of the data in this study, the analytical method employed in this study is content analysis. Content analysis does its very best in “systematic text analysis (Mayring, 2000)”. Neuendorf (2002) offers a broad definition of content analysis as "Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented" (p.10). Addressing students’ perception of group work assignment, I used content analysis. In addition, content analysis is also used to analyze my field notes; this should be the best way to expose the identity negotiation during students’ group work assignment. By using content analysis, I try to thoroughly address the research questions in this study. I went through the transcripts of the interview recordings, and tried to find the information that most participants share, or their problem might be generalized and need to be noted. Through synthesizing the information, some common features, problems and challenges that students face while conducting a group work in the western academia are revealed and presented in the findings. My own field notes are excerpted from previous reflections that I composed right after each group work experience. They are re-read and the distinctive remarks are picked out and some common features and trends among the presentations are presented in the finding part too.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of this study as organized by each participant.

Within each participant, the participant's perception, detailed process of student's preparation and design of the GW assignment, presentation of the GW assignment in classroom, and the analysis of the role and identity issues during the GW full cycle process are included.

Participant's Background

Chen. Chen was born in 1987 in Shandong Province, China. He received his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in French language and literature in Central South University of China in 2006 and went to Hong Kong Chinese University for a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Linguistics. He has been enrolled in the University to pursue his Ph.D. degree in Linguistics for one year and half. He is taking a lot of courses from his own major, such as Linguistics from Department of Linguistics, statistics in Psychology and Research in Education (PRE). Since most courses are taken at a graduate level, he regards the courses are able to provide him knowledge, and since he is "taking a lot of research courses" (Chen, Interview), he "want(s) to take a look at how other people do research, how teachers evaluate the study, how they evaluate the research programs." (Chen, Interview).

Su. Su was born in 1987 in Shi Jia Zhuang, He Bei Province, China. He was majoring in Urban Planning in his Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree and then went to the countryside to work for one year. Then he decided to apply for a Master degree in US. He has been in US for a year and half and been enrolling classes throughout this time. He is

currently taking courses in Urban Planning starting from Fall 2013, and the courses include History Theory, Introduction to Land Use, and Introduction to Transportation. Previously, Su was also taking courses in the Applied English Center (AEC). Courses like English Listening, Academic Reading and Writing are mandatory for the international students at the University who didn't pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) requirement. After he completed the requirements of the AEC, he started to take courses by the instructor's recommendation.

Lang. Lang was born in 1989 in An Hui Province, China. Same as the previous two participants, he has been in the United States for a year and half and enrolling classes at the university during the time period. He is taking courses in computer science at the university and like Su, he has taken AEC courses. When asking about the courses Lang has enrolled, Lang replies that he has enrolled AEC courses which includes "all courses related to English. For my (his) major, I (he) have (has) taken courses including database, computer architecture and other courses related to internet" (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013).

The AEC at the University offers English language courses to students since all international students whose English is not their first language are required to provide proof of English proficiency. If the student does not meet the requirements for demonstrating English language proficiency, he or she will be asked to take the AEC English proficiency test. Depending on how many parts the student passes in the test, students can enroll full-time, one or more university academic courses. While asking about why Lang is taking these courses, Lang responses by saying that "they're oriented on my

(his) focus area. It's all according to the study plan. I (He) always choose (s) my (his) courses according to my (his) study plan” (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013).

However, while asking about his opinion towards these courses, besides mentioning they are useful, Lang said some courses are “tricky”. So based on his understanding about these courses, he participate differently accordingly: he does pretty well in some courses if he thinks the courses are easy and pleasant; however, he claims that some courses are very “tiring and I (he) did pretty bad in those courses. I (He) do(es)n’t participate actively in those courses, I (he) just follow(s) the rules (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013). And he thinks the teacher’s teaching practice does not impact students’ learning fundamentally, as he believes, “how well we learn totally depend on how well we read our books” (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013).

Gao. I was born in 1989, Yingkou City, Liaoning Province, China. My mom is a Chinese language teacher in a middle school and my dad is an entrepreneur due to the fact that he was laid off from a small size state-owned factory. Since my parents have realized the importance and cruciality of educating me, and they did everything to lead me towards a better education. That is why I enrolled in Curriculum and Instruction (M.A.) program at the University in Fall 2012. I have taken courses in Curriculum and Teaching, Psychology and Research in Education, Linguistics and Anthropology in CLAS. Linguistics courses like Phonetics, First Language Acquisition and Linguistic Anthropology, and education courses like Bilingual Education, Second Language Assessment and Acquisition and Educational Research provided me with valuable and necessary background knowledge in the language learning and teaching discipline. I first worked as a Chinese history tutor in

the University Athletic Tutoring Program when I first came to the University and became a Chinese language instructor in the East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) department at the University in Summer 2013. I assert GW undoubtedly “served a fantastic platform for our EFL learning” (Gao, reflection). And language proficiency is critical in GW since we are in the US, it is required that students use English to present, which means student’s English language proficiency directly affects the listener’s evaluation.

Students’ Perception

This section presents the findings regarding Chinese graduate students’ perceptions about Group Work (GW). Using the method of content analysis (Hodder, 1994) and the analytical method of COP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) in analyzing the interview transcripts, the following main themes emerged from the interview data: (1) students’ recognition of the value of GW, (2) admitting the bad results of most previous GW experiences, (3) students’ interest in GW, (4) students’ GW and the Internet/technology, (5) students’ preparation and their perception about the impact of English proficiency over GW, and (6) the role issues in students’ collaboration in GW.

COP is used to “differentiate participants from one another and contribute to the community stratification” (Toohey, 1998, p.61). This stratification is based on the themes mentioned above, i.e. some students recognize the value of GW and value the opportunity, so they take an initiative role in the practice of GW and be successful in the outcome. On the other hand, others might not recognize the advantage of GW and presents a negative attitude during the process. They act like a “follower” in the GW practice. More details are presented in the following sections.

Students' recognition of the value of GW. As research has shown (Alley, 2005), students hold complex feelings towards GW. For the graduate level, GW can be taken “as an opportunity to apply what I (students) learned in this class to practice. It’s a very good opportunity to present my (their) own project” (Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013). As with Chen, Lang’s attitude towards GW is also positive, as he thinks that he “always learn faster in group cooperation. And I (he) learn(s) more systematically from GW” (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013). Same as Chen and Lang, Su’s attitude on GW is very positive too, as “it’s very good for subjects which needs communication like we are majored in. Presentations allow you to present your ideas clearly to your audience” (Su, Interview). To achieve this goal, he believes that GW allows students to be engaged in the process of self-exploring more about different cultures and thoughts.

Students value GW as it allows students to delve into topics at hand in a collaborative manner. It also allows students to learn by participating. GW provides an opportunity for students to examine their English communicative skills and presentational skills, which is believed to be crucial for a university graduate in his/her future real life social and professional settings.

On the other hand, they also admit that the effects of GW can be negative. This negativity could result from students’ attitude toward the GW assignment.

Excerpt 1

Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in the US?

Chen: I think it really depends. (Grin). Because some people try really hard, and you think that he/she really has some idea. But some people really just want to get over with it. For those, even though he/she made a presentation, it makes no sense. So I think it probably depends on the person who does it.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

As indicated in the excerpt, Chen did not take the cultural or geographical factors into account. Instead, GW depends on the peers' effort and the intellectual demonstration that the group members present in it. If the peers' attitude towards GW is not very positive, it might inhibit the final outcome in some way. Participants' attitude is found to be related to their experience with GW presentations, as Chen continued on mentioning his lack of GW experience in China prohibited his GW in the US:

Excerpt 2

I don't think I had a lot of opportunity in making presentations while I was in China. And I didn't remember I did many presentations in Chinese. There's really not much comparison between doing presentation in US and in China. So I can never have an idea that I may do worse in English than Chinese.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

Participants' perceptions were that since the foreign language teaching method in China was predominantly conducted by traditional grammar teaching, teachers and educators paid less attention to students' communicative skills (Zhang, 2000). Besides, the size of Chinese classrooms does not allow students to have a lot of opportunity in presenting separately (Hu, 2005). Therefore, the goal and aim of teachers are on trying to help students master as much language points as possible. Since students come to the US, they started to experience more classroom activities, such as GW. As mentioned above, students perceive GW positively. For Su, one of the participants in this study, he thinks GW is very helpful for his major:

Excerpt 3

Gao: Based on your understanding about these courses, how did you participate actively in these courses?

Su: Take the history theory course for example, we have a team project. The professor wants us all to participate in actively. Another homework of this

course is to interview some professionals in urban planning. And then we make presentations.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

While asking about what he wants to learn from these courses, Su addresses,

Excerpt 4

How to communicate and how to discuss with others are very important. On the other hand, since you are in the class, if you have something that you don't understand, you can ask your classmates. You can definitely gain more knowledge than reading a book.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

Su thinks of the teacher's teaching strategies at the University as "they focus a lot on students acquiring the knowledge. They want you to form a network of knowledge. They won't impose on how your network looks like" (Su, Interview).

While asking about group work or group presentation practice at the University,

Lang's response is different from that of Chen and Su:

Excerpt 5

Gao: Since we took a lot of courses at the University, in these courses, do we have any group work or group presentations?

Lang: Yes, in some courses. Not in the courses I've taken so far. We do have group projects. In some courses, we have group discussions.

Gao: What kind of classes generally have GW?

Lang: I'm not really sure. Generally, it is geared toward the practice, like database. If the courses are more theoretical, it won't have presentations.

Gao: Do you want to have group work or group presentation in this kind of courses?

Lang: Indeed, I do want presentations in those courses.

(Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

The interviews with the three participants reveal the belief of students' perception on GW assignment, at least for the one which this study focused on. It seems that students spent a lot of time and efforts on GW and paid attention to the form of the assignment, PPT making, etc. However, students also think they should improve in the following aspects:

1. Clarification of the content while making the presentation.
2. Try to present your ideas rather than getting over with it.
3. Though it's actually something quite relaxing. But it requires a very strong structure. If your structure is not clear, you can easily confuse your audience.

(Chen, Su, Interview, December 19, 2013)

The factors contributing to the student's favor on GW in classroom seems always associated with student's interest in GW, student's English language ability, culture values of students and the workload, which will be further elaborated on in the following sections.

Students' interest in GW. Students' interest could possibly play a role in doing a GW assignment. In the perspective of the designer, students are motivated to participate in GW if the topic matches their interest. As one of the interviewee said,

Excerpt 6

It depends on what kind of course I'm taking. For the courses I'm interested in, I'll play a role of leader. I'll have an idea. And everybody follows. I'll speak out my idea and see what kind of opinion everybody has. If my idea passes through, we'll do it according to my idea. But for other courses, which are not my specialty, and I'm not familiar with, I'll be more like a follower.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

Another very important side is the interest of audience. While preparing the GW, the designers (the person preparing the GW) are supposed to consider the audience interest. If they fail in this aspect, they may cause the listeners' reluctance to engage in the presentation, as Chen states,

Excerpt 7

Coz you know, the audience may have all kinds of questions, sometimes, it is because I'm not quite familiar with some aspects. That means I really have problems with my study. You don't know how to mediate. On the other hand, it is very likely that what they ask is not relevant to what you present. (Laugh aloud). So you don't know how to answer.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

Addressing the audience, as the participants in this study are native Chinese, so for them, doing presentations in US is a little bit different than students doing presentation in China, as they stated,

Excerpt 8

Coz sometimes even you are very clear about this [your presentation] in mind, your audience are always Americans, and sometimes you cannot effectively present what's on your mind. I think it'll be better if we use our mother tongue.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

Therefore, while doing the GW, students' interest needs to be considered, designers' interest helps their involvement in the designing process, and the listeners' interest helps engage them in classroom presentation.

Students' language proficiency in relation to GW. L2 researchers have argued that student's English proficiency is a critical factor influencing the outcome of GW (Yang, 2010). In this study, however, students held conflicting ideas on language proficiency in relation to GW assignment. One of the participants, whose English ability is limited, reveals how he managed to overcome the language proficiency problem. "Like I usually practice before I present. I usually make a PowerPoint and then practice at home" (Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013). Another participant's interview also indicates his disagreement that GW requires high English language proficiency:

Excerpt 9

Gao: Do you think group presentation requires you have a relatively good English proficiency?

Su: I don't think so, as long as you present your ideas clearly.

Gao: Does doing presentation in US has anything to do with how long you've been staying here?

Su: I think it's not related. Sometimes Americans don't make themselves clear either and they are nervous too!

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

As we can see from the discourse above, the participant in this study does not think conducting a presentation in US is related to how long the person stays in America, as the most important factor in group presentations should be how clearly they present the information. And the assumption that international students might be nervous in the presentation is challenged by the statement of the participant that “Americans are nervous too.” In addition, if the Chinese students are assigned to one group to present in a class, while preparing the task, students won’t use English to negotiate. They would choose to use their mother tongue as all members in the group are Chinese (“Gao, Reflection”). So this study finds that student’s English proficiency seems not thus determining in the outcome of the discussion and negotiations that the participants went through during doing their GW assignment. However, more practices is essential. As Su, another participant asserts different ideas towards doing GW presentations in China:

Excerpt 10

I think I might present more if I’m in China. Since in US, I need to speak in English. I’m always slow. ...coz in English, you need to put articles, infinitives before words. Since I’m not a native speaker of English, I need to speak slowly.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

Students accomplishing GW by using the Internet. Normally, students will search on the Internet to find relevant materials to the teacher’s assigned tasks. They search for relevant materials, read them, edit them to fit their preference and think about some words accompanying. So the Internet plays an important role in students’ GW preparation.

Excerpt 9

Gao: What do you usually do after class when the professor asked you to do a presentation?

Su: I will collect the materials (online), make a PPT, then I'll practice by using the PPT.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

Students' online search is not only carried out when they wish to finish the teacher's assignment, it also occurred when they do not understand the assigned topic or they don't know much about the topic.

Excerpt 10

Gao: What kind of problems you encountered before?

Su: Like the professor who teaches introduction to transportation, he cares a lot about the structure. Like this time, what I was presenting is something new, there're very few historical facts can be related to it.

Gao: When you encountered some problem, how do you usually solve them?

Su: Ah. I have no way to go. I have to find more materials, coz I cannot leave it blank.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

It seems that problems also occurred when students are unable to find sufficient materials related. They found they have "no way to go and have to continue to search" instead of discuss with their group peers. It seems in this study, even though the participants are assigned with peers, they didn't make the best use of their group members. As GW is supposed to be a collaborative work, when students encountered problems, they should sit down together and discuss the problem, instead of solving the problem individually.

With the advancement of internet facilities, such as global audience, online discussion forums and online surveys, online search will take its effect in every process of GW assignment, especially for ELLs, technology could potentially offer a solution (Witney and Smallbone, 2004) for students' who feel overwhelmed when finding materials to present in class.

Collaboration and the role issues in GW assignment. Role negotiation seems to be the most critical factor to students' satisfaction of GW. The relationship between the

peers is actually subtle but influential. For international graduate students often feel frustrated and over-loaded, as their burden mainly comes from their academic learning,

Excerpt 13

Su: Like the professor who teaches introduction to transportation, he cares a lot about the structure. Like this time, what I was presenting is something new, there're very few historical facts can be related to it.

Gao: When you encountered some problem, how do you usually solve them?

Su: Ah. I have no way to go. I have to find more materials, coz I cannot leave it blank.

(Su, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

This one-role play, i.e. student initiate a question by him/herself, solve the problem by him/herself, obviously led the workload monotonously fall on themselves. However, the participants hold mixed opinions about this monotonous role-play.

Excerpt 14

Gao: So you think group presentation requires you to have a good English proficiency, is that correct?

Lang: I think it depends. If there's one person in your group is a foreigner (to me), or someone whose English is good, then it does not require your English is very good. What you need to do is just do some operations, etc. But if the group are formed by Chinese, you have to say something. You need to be active and sacrifice.

(Lang, Interview, December, 18, 2013)

Lang admitted one-role play is not desired but acceptable because “foreigners” (Americans; to Lang) are good at the language, so Chinese students who are assigned to the group trust him/her (the American) for obtaining good scores (Gao, Reflection). There are also participants who think about the negative sides about this role allocation as “my role in the GW is more like a follower” (Chen, Interview) and “actually, in our last presentation, I was only introducing the policies about the background, history.” (Su, Interview).

Generally students hold positive perceptions and cooperative attitudes towards GW in this study. By using GW in classrooms at the University, they can have a better understanding about the discussed topic and promote their interest in English. As one participant pointed out, GW is “actually (it’s) very good for subjects which needs communication like we are majored in (urban planning and education)” (Chen, Interview), as it “allows you to present your ideas clearly to your audience” (Chen, Interview). But some participants also showed their dissatisfaction with the assignment of GW, because they take the GW as a compulsory assignment by the teacher and learning opportunities were not evenly distributed.

Excerpt 15

It depends on the nature of the course. For some of the courses, it is more appropriate to do homework than project. In that case, when the teacher is designing that course, they won’t give you project to do or opportunity for you to do presentation. I think teachers have their own consideration about it.
(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

So in this study among the participants mixed feelings exist regarding their perceptions of GW in class. But they all believe the potential beneficiaries that GW brings to them as international students. However, it seems that the role distribution among group collaboration plays a crucial role.

Design and Implementation of GW Assignments

This section describes the process of designing and implementing the group work assignment in the courses students take at the University. Four stages are identified during the process: conceptualization and idea collecting, individual task assignment and synthesizing, implementation and onsite feedback. The stages are divided in the category

of content, not the linear process. That is to say, some of the stages may be over-lapping or simultaneous.

Conceptualization and Idea Collecting. The topics of GW among the four investigated majors in this study varies from their own research project (Chen) to environmental system about the aerospace (Su). This does not conflict with any assumptions as students come from four different majors. Students took different roles while conducting GW assignment, and searched online alone without discussing with other group members. During the process of designing the GW assignment, the first process is conceptualization. However, this conceptualization is solely done by the individuals in this study, which involves two steps. Firstly, students picked the topic that they want to present in class. Secondly, they narrowed down the topic and searched online to find relevant materials. Realizing that it might be difficult for them to carry out their presentation by themselves either because they think “English is still an obstacle” (Lang, Interview) to them or they choose to meet with their professors after class about their project and their presentation (Chen, Interview), they resorted to their membership. One thing to be noted and will be talked about in the discussion part is at graduate level, unlike most undergraduate level GW practices, GW is not limited to be conducted among students. Based on the nature of graduate study, the GW practice a lot of times carries out among the professors, teachers and the students. One-on-one discussion between the professors and the students are prevalent at the graduate level and it satisfies the requirement of a GW practice as well.

Assigning Tasks and Synthesizing. During the process of assigning the different proposed work to different group members, students responded,

Excerpt 16

Ah. How to design? We'll split into parts. For example, while you're doing the presentation, there're three of you. One will be in charge of the introduction and literature review. The other will be in charge of how to design the experiment, the last one will be the person who reports the results. So, yeah, we'll split into parts.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

It seems the process is simultaneous in terms of assigning tasks when considering the nature of the work. However, the priority for allocating the work is to ensure each group members will do different work. This allocation principle is that the individual members would work on their own original ideas, which is not ideal for conducting a GW based on the nature of GW. Further discussion will be carried out in the analysis part.

During this process, students initiated PowerPoints (PPT), they attach their parts to each other's PPT (Gao, Reflection). Sometimes it involves gathering a series of pictures online and combining music with it. Sometimes students just make PPTs by themselves and didn't discuss with any peers in the assigned group.

Implementation of GW Assignments. In this part this study presents the two processes involved in how the GW assignment was implemented: presentation and on-site feedback.

Presenting GW in class. Students used a wide variety of materials, including PPT text sources, computer audio playing, and descriptions about the designated topic while presenting. During the presentation, the audiences had a general feeling when they listened to the speaker's presentation. The audiences were also encouraged to ask as much question

as they can in the Question and Answer (Q&A) part, if possible. Basically, it was interactive between the speaker and the audiences. Teachers seemed to be impressed by the presentation by “giving nodding in the middle of the presentation” (Lang, Interview). But the whole process of presenting the GW was also solely done by the speakers separately. The contributions from other members were only acknowledged by the first speaker, during the process of in-class presentation. The participants in this study feel that what they need to do is just as Lang describes “do some operations” (setting up the PowerPoint and the presentation tools that they need) instead of uttering their voices.

The whole presenting time varies from 8 minutes to an hour. This variation does make a difference in students’ perceptions of group work, as they encounter pressure and problems of choosing which information is the most important to the presentation when the time is approaching to the end. They will just “wrap it up (Lang, Interview)” quickly and students claim that teachers “don’t have requirement on solving our problems.”

Dealing with On-site Feedback. The participants provided some comments upon the on-site feedback of group presentation.

Excerpt 17

Chen: The biggest problem might be, when others ask me a question, I don’t know how to answer.

Gao: Why?

Chen: Coz you know, the audience may have all kinds of questions, sometimes, and it is because I’m not quite familiar with some aspects. That means I really have problems with my study. You don’t know how to mediate. On the other hand, it is very likely that what they ask is not relevant to what you present. (Laugh aloud). So you don’t know how to answer.

Gao: When you encountered some problems, how do you usually solve them?

Chen: Okay. If I think the question he/she is asking is very meaningful, or can be taken as a very good question for my study, I'll try to answer his/her question, try to let him/her get clear why I did it in this way.

(Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013)

As COP indicates, students become stratified in their learning and practice in classrooms (Toohey, 1998). As shown in Excerpt 17, this stratification does not only occur within the participants of a group, it is also visible to the audience who are listening to their GW presentation in class. To be specific, Chen, as a L2 learner, who encounters various challenges in GW activities in American classrooms, acknowledge the problems, synthesize the response and differentiate the solutions to contrasting situations. In this process, the L2 learners systematically “appropriate their identities and practice in growing competence and expertise” (Toohey, 1998, p. 61).

However, students also critiqued group presentations as follows,

Excerpt 18

Su: It was not very good at first. The teacher only gave me a medium score. There was once I think I did a good job, but the score was still not good.

Gao: Why?

Su: I think for the last time, we were too focusing on the sample that the teacher gave us. But for our case of introducing New Shanghai, we should provide some background knowledge. I think that's why our scores are low.

Gao: Does your presentations meet your expectations?

Su: I think most of them meet my expectations. But sometimes, when I'm in a rush, I did a bad job.

(Su, interview, December, 18, 2013)

It can be seen that Su was adopting community practices for using and interpreting English through participation in the American classroom in which he spend his time. Su, as a L2 learner in US, came to understand that there are community stratification (Toohey, 1998) while presenting GW in western settings.

Since his experience is sitting in the same classroom with the other American students, he needs to situate himself in the target cultural practice, in his case, to provide more background knowledge while introducing artifacts from home country.

Analysis of the Roles in Designing and Presenting Process

As previous research has shown that the roles of group members when doing GW is an important factor in the outcome and collaboration (DeWever et al., 2006; Lucy and Lynden, 2004; Carolan et al., 2007), this study also reviews the roles of the participants in this study. During the process of collecting ideas and assigning tasks, the four student's roles in their engagement in the group discussion are different compared to conducting the whole process of group discussion in Chinese. I have a high interest in English and higher English proficiency compared to Chen and Lang. I also showed my substantial engagement and contribution in the process of group discussion ("Gao, Reflection"). In sharp contrast with the discourse pattern of co-construction, the other type indicates there might be some imposition from the group peers on the other group members in choosing the topics, for example, based on their personal preference. Excerpt 19 shows Su's problem while I asked him about what aspects he did not well in the previous GWs. When Su had collected all the ideas, he was assigned in a group with two American students who have strong opinions. The excerpt indicates that when Su could not provide his ideas and being imposed.

Excerpt 19

Gao: What are the aspects that you think you did not do well? Why?

Su: Well. I did suffer from two other American students who have strong opinions, they were imposing me to do something. They wrote something very sophisticated. I had to read several times to understand it. But in the end, what they present didn't went well either.

(Su, interview, December, 18, 2013)

The relationship between language and power are revealed here. Fairclough (2001, p3) brings the term ‘manufacture of consent’, which means, if one person can convince the other to accept your ideas and opinions in enacting in a certain way, thus the person can enact. As shown in Excerpt 9, English language proficiency is not the only factor in determining the quality of GW. The content knowledge of students makes a difference in the GW process amongst group members As a consequence, students with limited language proficiency and content knowledge may hesitate to get their voice heard or assert their opinions. The inequality between the one with the power and the powerless results in the powerless party’s difficulty in making assertion. In this chapter, problems addressing students’ perception, students’ preparation and design of the GW, and presentation of the GW assignment in classroom are discussed. Based on the remarks above, effective measures on improving their engagement should be taken on solving their recognition of the value of GW, their low interest in certain GW, their problem while trying to accomplish GW by using Internet, and collaboration and role issues while conducting a GW assignment.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter discusses the practice and characteristics of GW at the University based on the findings on students' perception, design, and implementation of GW.

Discussion

This part comprised with the following sections: values of GW at the University, students' interest in GW, English language proficiency in GW and group members' roles in GW.

Values of GW. In the University's curriculum design, GW is widely adopted in all classes across disciplines. Scholars have argued GW as a pedagogical practice is believed to be crucial in learning, especially in some content subject courses. In this study, the values and advantages of GW have been acknowledged and recognized by the students.

Students value GW as it allows them to get to know new American culture and thoughts, gets them involved in self-exploring the topics covered by the curriculum, allows them to improve their presentational and communicative abilities, and also has the potential to improve students' interest in learning as they are participatory agents in the learning process. Also, students value GW as a good learning platform for allowing them to have a better understanding about discussed topics, promoting their interest in the subject, and broadening their knowledge and thoughts. For example, Chen mentioned students can communicate with the others and exchange ideas with them through GW activities, and it is also a good opportunity to connect students' knowledge to practice (Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013). Therefore, GW should be encouraged and widely adopted at the university level.

Students' interest in GW. Students' interest is one of the factors contributing to their choice of GW as they become involved in learning. For the students, the designers could be more motivated to participate in the GW designing process if they are interested in the topic. For audiences, if the topic matches their interest, they could be more engaged and attentive when listening to the presentation.

However, there is a gap between students' interest about GW. In this study, the different interest of speakers of the group and audience's interest are not well coordinated. This coordination relies on participants' awareness of their interest in the topic under discussion, and peer members' specific interest in those topics. If this coordination could be achieved, there could be a great potential to improve the quality of GW as a classroom pedagogical practice.

English Language Proficiency in GW. Another factor in contributing to the choice of GW in classrooms is students' English language ability. Students believe GW can play a better role if they have good command of English. From this study, it is noticed that language proficiency is not a critical factor in GW. As the students' interview revealed, the international students could work hard and prepare well so that they could overcome the constraint of language skills. Students also assert that language proficiency is not a critical issue as GW requires the participants' better understanding about a topic, not their advanced skills in English. Moreover, if Chinese students are assigned to one group, they tend to use Chinese to prepare for the GW assignment, even though they have to use English to present in class.

Thus, regarding English language proficiency, students think adequate language proficiency surely will be an advantage in presenting the GW. However, for students who are lacking in language proficiency, more practice, more engagement in the topic and enhancing students' interest could overcome the language barrier.

Group Members' Roles in GW and Learner Identity. In this study it seems that the problem of group members' roles in GW is the most problematic factor. Since identities are “co-constructed, negotiated, and transformed on an ongoing basis by means of language” (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 452), as mentioned in the methodology section, international students' identity construction is based on the negotiation and encounter with the speakers of the target languages. However, as this study shows, from the process of conceptualization to presentation, the whole of GW is all accomplished separately by the group members. There is a lack of negotiation and co-constructing of the task throughout their GW. Thus, the whole process seems to be one role play. However, the dissatisfaction about GW from students mainly resulted from the uneven role distribution. The lack of group discussion during the process of GW is severe and leads to a less collaborative and co-constructive assignment.

Also, in this study the relationship between power and language emerged from group discussion. Members of minority status groups are more likely to be aware of their own linguistic differences from the majority status group (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). It seems that the participants' relationship with other group members plays a more significant role than group members' knowledge background and English language proficiency.

Students have experience working with both native speakers of English and non-native

speakers and they are more likely to work with Chinese students because of the language and the culture that they share. Regardless of their English language proficiency, non-native speakers of English may have a larger content knowledge of subject than their native counterpart. However, the dynamic and fluid relationship between native speakers and non-native speakers has an effect on whether the non-native speakers of English are given an open space to express their opinions. For Chinese students, while in GW, it always involves working with native speakers. In GW, constructive discourses are always welcome in the discussion. Fairclough's (2001) "manufacture of consent" involves convincing people that they should accept things as proposed. However, for peers who do not feel free to express their opinions in GW, the collaboration process seems more like assigning tasks and the person who has the power sounds more imposing and authoritative. Further, their peers' ideas may not be likely to be adopted, as shown in the example of Su who contributed his understanding of the discussion topic. However, his idea was not used eventually. Therefore, the leadership becomes relational and is situated in different contexts. The contextual and personal relationship during the process of designing GW assignments seems to play a crucial role in the quality of collaboration and in the outcome of GW.

Furthermore, while conducting GW in classroom settings, the instructor might let students select their group members themselves or the instructor might assign the students into groups. Students prefer to select their group members by themselves. Chen explicitly explained his opinion on the participant assignment:

Excerpt 20

Chen: I'm thinking generally we select by ourselves is better. If the teacher assigns me to someone that I don't want to work with, I don't like it. But I need to see why the instructor assigns me to that person. Probably he/she has his/her own considerations. But generally I think it is better that I select by myself.

(Chen, interview, March, 14, 2014)

Native speakers are encouraged to micromanage because of their language proficiency in English. Non-native speakers' reliance on the native speaker's performance is due to the fact that the non-native speakers regard native speakers as fluent in the target language, and are likely to get highly scores (Gao, Reflection, October 18, 2012). This reliance comes from students' sense of the native speakers' familiarity with teachers and proficiency in English. This influence can even form a routine, which indulges non-native peers in the group to not to participate and get used to it.

Furthermore, in this study, one question that we can ask is, what leads to effective collaborative learning tasks? Obviously students have gaps in understanding this as GW should be more about the group members' discussion and negotiation as a group. A gap exists between the group goals and individual accountability (Bacon, 2005) since most of the participants conduct GW that prioritizes individual task completion. The damaging effects of students' reluctance in doing GW is that the value of discussion is eliminated. This is because the function of all the other members in the group is to finish their assigned tasks. In other words, the process of negotiating and discussing in the GW is transferred into the group leader (or the peer who has the power), who assigns tasks to the members in the group. The problems which appear in the presentation and the script of the PowerPoints slides might be that they all monotonously done by one person and do not involve any

other members in the group. While presenting “their” GW, all they need to do is like as all other students in the rest of the class and listen. The whole GW is split into several individual tasks and eventually results in an independent report. All benefits contained in GW no longer exist. Both the speaker and the peers are not satisfied with this as the interview with Lang demonstrated. He mentioned that he “do(es) not think I (he) did well in the presentations” and he hopes that he “can do better and better” (Interview, December, 18, 2013).

Students’ collaboration in GW also reflects some inequality among the peers. The process of assigning tasks was not cooperative (Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013). This situation needs to be changed. Only in this way can collaboration happen in GW authentically. Therefore, the problem in this sampled group persists. In a strict pedagogical sense, the GW failed.

Students claim that whether they prefer to work in a homogeneous group or a diverse group “depends on what the topic looks like. If the topic is multicultural, a diverse group might be better” (Chen, Interview, March, 14, 2014). A homogeneous group in which participants share a similar culture and social background might make the discussion easier and smooth, as the language and cultural barriers are eased. However, if the participant is working in a diverse group, and selected or assigned with someone whom he/she works very well, this is more important than cultural background and it is still going to be effective in doing the GW.

Lastly, the teacher should also play a role while students are negotiating and discussing the GW during preparation. It is obvious that in this particular study teachers

were not involved in the whole process except for giving the topic for the GW assignment and providing some onsite feedback. Besides, in the study, it was reported that some teachers mentioned nothing about how students should collaborate in group work, which is a core problem in group work. Even though teachers mentioned students' involvement in their syllabus, there's even no instruction and explanation on how students should collaborate in GW assignment. However, the teacher should participate as they discover some problems in a student's group, as teacher's involvement in students' GW is very important in the outcome of GW.

Implications

This study aims to demonstrate Chinese graduate students' negotiation and challenges that they face in GW. It examines the GW process as perceived by Chinese graduate students, including the value of GW, student interest in GW and the power that they possess in a designated group. Based on the discussions in the previous sections, some implications are drawn for teachers and students in higher education.

Implications for university instructors. In the discussion of learner identity, in particular, it is crucial to consider the role schools and teachers "play in [learner identity] construction by providing a rich web of meanings and expectations, precisely during the most active period of meaning and identity construction in people's lives" (Hirano, 2009, p. 35). Chen mentioned he was acting like a "follower" in the GW that he is not interested in (Chen, Interview, November, 24, 2013). In the implementation of GW teaching practice, the teacher should think more about the topic being chosen and help the students during their preparation. As the research (Burdett and Hastie, 2005) indicates, teachers adopt GW

for solving the problem of workload. However, while adopting the GW, the teacher should encourage students and take student interests into consideration.

In addition, teachers need to give specific instructions to facilitate collaboration. There is also a gap among students' understanding of GW and what an effective GW actually entails. Without the teacher's appropriate instruction, students may fall into some extreme mistakes that may cause the group dysfunction. The findings show that when students encountered problems, they had no choice but solving them by themselves. Therefore, teacher guidance and intervention should be employed after a task is assigned. What's more, after GW is presented, if the students have a gap in reaching teachers' expectation, further helping and guidance in conflict resolution should be done by the teacher. Despite English language proficiency is not considered as a critical factor in GW as shown in this study, more opportunities and guidance should be given to the students whose English is limited.

Lastly, on the assessing of GW, teachers should take students' cooperation in GW into consideration, not directly by the outcome of GW. Teachers should consider students' cooperation in their evaluation and check what percentage of collaboration is employed in GW.

Implications for students. Students are the main body in the implementation of GW. Group projects provide an opportunity for students to engage in peer-to-peer learning. Thus the most valuable component in group work is discussion and negotiation. Group work is not a simple individual task completion; rather it is collaboration amongst peers that requires a considerate planning on role assignments. Without students' cooperative

spirits and more effort done during the preparatory process, successful GW can never be accomplished. In conclusion, since GW should be continuously encouraged and widely adopted, more understanding and more work needed for further improve the quality of students' GW assignments. While working with Chinese students, since English is not their native language, native speaking students should have tolerance and understanding about their international peers. For Chinese graduate students, while working on GW, instead of simply solving the problem by themselves or turning to the Internet, they should try to seek help from the instructor and peers too.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study investigated various aspects of GW on a small group of Chinese graduate students at an American university. I strive to work as an insider focusing on collaboration in which students negotiate and encounter challenges with designated GW experiences. Of particular interest was: student's perceptions of GW, students' different roles within groups, English language proficiency and students' interest in GW.

The study suggests students tend not to negotiate during GW because they perceive GW as individual task completions. Therefore, there are gaps in student perception of GW as GW should be a collaborative effort, instead of individual assignments. Without students' cooperative spirits and more effort done by group peers, successful GW can never be accomplished. In order to avoid this problem in the future, it's more important to focus on the process than the final outcome. Therefore, on the construction of a GW, the procedures of doing a GW are important.

More importantly, a good relationship between the group members should be built before any GW preparation. Intercultural communication experiences are promising factors leading to enhanced intergroup attitudes (Imamura et al., 2011). Therefore, when students are preparing GW, they should avoid interpersonal relationship inequality by having more tolerance and understanding about their peers. Role allocation problems among Chinese graduate students are also discussed in this study because role issues are critical in GW. As group roles involve language and power and variety of cultural and linguistic context, the roles student take in GW is relational and situated in different contexts. By investigating

the learning process, this study examines students' roles in GW, which could possibly inform teachers how to cultivate students' cooperation and collaboration.

This study has several limitations. The primary data were interviews with Chinese students and my reflective journals on GW. Class observations and more follow-up interviews over time—at the beginning and the end of the semester should have been useful to triangulate the data on GW. The study is made on the top four fields of study with the highest number of international graduate students, not the whole learning process. Some problems were not studied in-depth, such as students turning to the internet for help rather than sitting together and discuss the topic; their ability of solving a problem independently and creatively. Still, I aim at working as an insider in researching the experience embedded in Chinese graduate students' academic learning situations and their identities construction (Park, 2012), to identify student perception, the process of design GW, and the implementation. My hope is that this study can contribute to our understanding of international graduate students' learner identity with regard to GW.

APPENDIX A: HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE APPLICATION APPROVAL



APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

March 21, 2014

Junfu Gao
junfugao@ku.edu

Dear Mr. Junfu Gao:

On 3/21/2014, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Modification
Title of Study:	Exploring Chinese Graduate Students' Learner Identity in Group Work in Western Academia: Perceptions, Presentations and Challenges
Investigator:	Junfu Gao
IRB ID:	20866
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

The IRB approved the study from 3/21/2014 to 5/6/2014.

1. Before 5/6/2014 submit a Continuing Review request and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.
2. Any significant change to the protocol requires a modification approval prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 5/6/2014 approval of this protocol expires on that date.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms, MPA
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

Human Subjects Committee Lawrence
Youngberg Hall | 2385 Irving Hill Road | Lawrence, KS 66045 | (785) 864-7429 | HSCL@ku.edu | research.ku.edu

5/6/2013

HSCL #20866

Junfu Gao
1603 W 15 St Apt #C606
Lawrence, KS

The Human Subjects Committee Lawrence reviewed your research application for project

20866 Gao/Cho (C & T) Identifying Chinese Graduates Students' Learner Identity in Group Work Assignment in a US university: Perceptions, Presentations and Challenges

and approved this project under the expedited procedure provided in 45 CFR 46.110 (f) (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

The Office for Human Research Protections requires that your consent form must include the note of HSCL approval and expiration date, which has been entered on the consent form sent back to you with this approval.

1. At designated intervals until the project is completed, a Project Status Report must be returned to the HSCL office.
2. Any significant change in the experimental procedure as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HSCL about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training.
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported to the Committee immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity. If you use a signed consent form, provide a copy of the consent form to subjects at the time of consent.
6. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.

Please inform HSCL when this project is terminated. You must also provide HSCL with an annual status report to maintain HSCL approval. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date. If your project receives funding which requests an annual update approval, you must request this from HSCL one month prior to the annual update. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Dyson Elms
HSCL Coordinator
University of Kansas

cc: Hyesun Cho

APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RUBRIC

1. How many years have you been staying in US? How long have enrolled in courses at the University?
2. What kind of courses you enrolled at the University now? What courses you enrolled previously? Why do you enroll in these courses?
3. How do you understand these courses? Based on your understanding of these courses, how did you take an active role in these courses?
4. How do you understand the teaching practice of teachers at the University? What do you expect to gain from the class?
5. During our stay at the University, we enrolled a lot of courses. Are there any group work or group presentations in the classroom? If so, in what kind of class? If not, do you want to have presentations in class?
6. What do you think of presentations? So far, what's your impression on the group work assignments? What are the strengths and weaknesses do you think they have?
7. What kind of topics do you choose to present in class? How do you understand these topics?
8. Every time the professors ask to do a presentation, how do you do it after class? How do you present these topics?
9. Do you have any difficulty in doing the presentation? When you encounter some difficulties, how do you solve them?
10. For you and other members of the group, how do you design the presentation? What role did you play in the entire team?
11. What is the result of your presentation? How do you evaluate your performance in the group work assignment? Did your presentations meet your expectations? If so, in what way? If not, why it didn't?
12. Do you think the basis of the group work requires a high level of English language and is relied on how long you stayed in US? If so, how do you feel doing these presentations in US? If not, why?

13. Did teachers give you guidance on doing presentations? Do you think such guidance is necessary? For doing group work in US, do you have any suggestions or comments?
14. Have you ever worked with native speakers of English while you are doing a GW? Was it assigned by the instructor or you selected by yourself?
15. Which way do you think of forming a group is better, assign by the teachers, or select by yourself?
16. Do you prefer a homogeneous group or a diverse group while doing a GW? Do you think whether homogeneous or diverse groups affect the effectiveness of your GW?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview 1

Gao = Interviewer

Chen = one of the members in the focus group in this study

1 Gao: How long have you been in the States?

2 Chen: Er, I've been here for one year and a half, almost 15-16 months.

3 Gao: How long have you been enrolling classes at the University?

4 Chen: Almost also one year and a half.

5 Gao: What kind of courses you are taking at the University?

6 Chen: I'm taking a lot of major courses, that is, linguistics.

7 Gao: What kind of courses you have enrolled before?

8 Chen: I've taken courses like PRE statistics.

9 Gao: Why you take these kinds of courses?

10 Chen: Coz I'm doing research. I need some knowledge about statistics. So that can be taken as a requirement for my major.

11 Gao: What do you think of these courses?

12 Chen: There are two kinds of courses. One kind is required, it is required by the program. The other kind is depended on your own interest. I always take these two points in enrolling courses.

13 Gao: Based on your understanding about these courses, how did you participate actively in these courses?

14 Chen: For the first kind of courses, the required kind, the main goal is to attain a good score. So I'll be active and answer questions in this kind of courses. For the second kind, which I have interest in it, it's always seminar. Since I have interests, so I'll pose a lot of questions, so I'll act more active in this kind of courses.

15 Gao: What do you think of the teacher's teaching practice at the University?

16 Chen: Comparing to China, the University's teachers are very much paying attention to interact with students. Especially for graduates, students can ask questions at any time. And teachers like students to interact with them.

17 Gao: What do you want to learn from these courses?

18 Chen: En. (Long pause). Learn what? En. Knowledge is one aspect, I think. The other aspect might be, since I'm taking a lot of research courses, I want to take a look at how other people do research, how teachers evaluate the study, how they evaluate the research programs.

19 Gao: Since we took a lot of courses at the University, in these courses, do we have any group work or group presentations?

20 Chen: Yes, there're a lot.

21 Gao: Since we have, it's what kind of classes generally?

22 Chen: Generally in the research courses I'm taking, you know, those seminars, all have presentation. For example, you might be asked to present someone else's study, or your own project during finals.

23 Gao: What about those courses that we don't have presentations?

24 Chen: I think those courses are low-level ones. (grin) For example, undergraduate classes, etc. (grin) For those courses, you can just do your homework.

25 Gao: Do you want to have group work or group presentation in this kind of courses?

26 Chen: It depends on the nature of the course. For some of the courses, it is more appropriate to do homework than project. In that case, when the teacher is designing that course, they won't give you project to do or opportunity for you to do presentation. I think teachers have their own consideration about it.

27 Gao: What do you think about group work or group presentation?

28 Chen: (silence). I think it's a very good practice. You can communicate with other students. You can exchange ideas with them.

29 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in the US?

30 Chen: I think it really depends. (Grin). Coz some people try really hard, and you think that he/she really has some idea. But some people really just want to get over with it. For

those, even though he/she made a presentation, it makes no sense. So I think it probably depends on the person who does it.

31 Gao: What kind of advantages and disadvantage do they have?

32 Chen: The advantage might be their English is good, so their presentation is fluent. The shortage might be, err, (silence), sometimes they don't present clearly. Even though you presented, you didn't make your audience clear about your sequence and content. I think this might be taken as their shortage.

33 Gao: What kind of topic you choose to present in class?

34 Chen: (thinking) present my own project. (Laugh aloud)

35 Gao: How do you usually perceive your own project?

36 Chen: I usually take presentations as an opportunity to put what I learnt in this class to practice. It's a very good opportunity to present my own project.

37 Gao: What do you usually do after class when the professor asked you to do a presentation?

38 Chen: After class? After class I'll arrange the feedback from the professors and the rest of the students.

39 Gao: How do you usually collect the feedbacks?

40 Chen: En. (pause) I always take Q&A as an opportunity for the teachers and the students to ask me questions. I'll write down their questions. While, you can also choose to meet your professor after class about your project and your presentation. The professors usually will provide you with some opinions.

41 Gao: How do you usually present in class?

42 Chen: Introduction is followed by literature review, and then you introduce your experiment, and your results.

43 Gao: So your presentation is always related to your research?

43 Chen: Exactly.

44 Gao: What kind of problems you encountered before?

45 Chen: The biggest problem might be, when others ask me a question, I don't know how to answer.

46 Gao: Why?

47 Chen: Coz you know, the audience may have all kinds of questions, sometimes, it is because I'm not quite familiar with some aspects. That means I really have problems with my study. You don't know how to mediate. On the other hand, it is very likely that what they ask is not relevant to what you present. (Laugh aloud). So you don't know how to answer.

48 Gao: When you encountered some problem, how do you usually solve them?

49 Chen: Okay. If I think the question he/she is asking is very meaningful, or can be taken as a very good question for my study, I'll try to answer his/her question, try to let him/her get clear why I did it in this way.

50 Gao: And how did you do this?

51 Chen: Before you present, you need to make some preparation. You need to think about what kind of questions people might ask me. You have to prepare it in mind. During presentation, try to make your answer clear.

52 Gao: What about group presentation? How do you usually design a presentation?

53 Chen: Ah. How to design? We'll split into parts. For example, while you're doing the presentation, there're three of you. One will be in charge of the introduction and literature review. The other will be in charge of how to design the experiment, the last one will be the person who reports the results. So, yeah, we'll split into parts.

54 Gao: What kind of role do you play in the whole team?

55 Chen: It depends on what kind of course I'm taking. For the course I'm interested in, I'll play a role of leader. I'll have an idea. And everybody comes. I'll speak out my idea and see what kind of opinion everybody has. If my idea passes through, we'll do it according to my idea. But for other courses, which are not my specialty, and I'm not familiar with, I'll be more like a follower.

56 Gao: What's your general result of your presentation?

57 Chen: I think they are good.

58 Gao: How do you evaluate your performance?

59 Chen: I think I always have a clear sequential order, but sometimes my English is not very fluent. And I need to improve my on-site response while answering questions.

60 Gao: So you think doing presentation is relevant to English proficiency?

61 Chen: Yes. Coz sometimes even you are very clear about this in mind, your audience are always Americans, and sometimes you cannot effectively present what's on your mind. I think it'll be better if we use our mother tongue.

62 Gao: You think mother tongue is a main obstacle?

63 Chen: (silence) Er. This is one of the obstacles.

64 Gao: What other obstacles do you have?

65 Chen: Well, you might be not familiar with your study.

66 Gao: Does your presentations meet your expectations?

67 Chen: I think most of them meet my expectations.

68 Gao: What are the aspects that you think you did good?

69 Chen: I think I did well in the preparations. (Chuckles)

70 Gao: What are the aspects that you think you did not do well? Why?

71 Chen: I'm slow at on-site response.

72 Gao: Does doing presentation in US has anything to do with how long you've been staying here?

73 Chen: I think it's related. On one hand, your language skill will be improved. On the other hand, you'll be more used to ask and answer questions in this kind of English context.

74 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in US?

75 Chen: I think it's very good. I don't think I have a lot of opportunity to make presentations when I was in China. And I didn't remember I did many presentations in Chinese. There's really not much comparison between doing presentation in US and in China. So I can never have an idea that I may did worse in English than Chinese.

76 Gao: Have teachers given you any instruction while you were doing the presentations?

77 Chen: Yes.

78 Gao: What kind of instructions have they give you?

79 Chen: En. (Thinking) It might be an organization problem. After you meet with him/her, you may organize your session more reasonable. Secondly, the professor might point out some problems you have. So it's helpful for you to prepare and response to other's questions.

80 Gao: Do you think this kind of instruction is necessary?

81 Chen: I think it is very necessary.

82 Gao: Do you have any suggestions or advice for making presentations in the US?

83 Chen: Err...Err...probably, if you have time, you'd better listen to other people's feedback before you make it, especially feedback from teachers. Secondly, you'd better be more coherent while doing it, especially we're using English to make presentations, that'll make your presentation fluent.

84 Gao: Do you have any other questions?

85 Chen: No, I don't.

86 Gao: Ok. Thank you.

Interview 2

Gao = Interviewer

Su = one of the members in the focus group in this study

1 Gao: How long have you been in the United States?

2 Su: Oh, half a year.

3 Gao: How long have you been enrolling classes at the University?

4 Su: Oh, half a year.

5 Gao: What kind of courses you are taking at the University?

6 Su: I'm taking courses in Urban Planning now, like history theory, introduction to land use, introduction to transportation, etc.

7 Gao: What kind of courses you have enrolled before?

8 Su: I've taken courses in AEC listening, reading and writing.

9 Gao: Why you take these kinds of courses?

10 Su: When I first started AEC, it was because it is a requirement for the University international students who didn't pass the TOEFL. Then I started to take courses by the instructor's recommendations.

11 Gao: What do you think of these courses?

12 Su: I think these courses are very helpful for my major.

13 Gao: Based on your understanding about these courses, how did you participate actively in these courses?

14 Su: Take the history theory course for example, they have a team project, they want you all to participate in actively. Another homework of this course is to interview some professionals in urban planning. And then we make presentations.

15 Gao: What do you think of the teacher's teaching practice at the University?

16 Su: They focus a lot on students acquiring the knowledge. They want you to form a network of knowledge. They won't impose on how your network looks like.

17 Gao: What do you want to learn from these courses?

18 Su: How to communicate and how to discuss with others are very important. On the other hand, since you are in the class, if you have something that you don't understand, you can ask your classmates. You can definitely gain more knowledge than reading a book.

19 Gao: Since we took a lot of courses at the University, in these courses, do we have any group work or group presentations?

20 Su: Yes.

21 Gao: Since we have, it's what kind of classes generally?

22 Su: For the courses I'm taking this semester, all of them have group presentations.

23 Gao: What do you think about group work or group presentation?

24 Su: Actually it's very good for subjects which needs communication like we are majored in. Presentations allows you to present your ideas clearly to your audience.

25 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in US?

26 Su: It's actually something quite relaxing. But it requires a very strong structure. If your structure is not clear, you can easily confuse your audience.

27 Gao: What kind of advantages and disadvantage do they have?

28 Su: The main advantage might be it is very flexible. Everybody are free to express their ideas. Some people might be very engaged in their presentation, but some may be just reading the presentations.

29 Gao: What kind of topic you choose to present in class?

30 Su: I think, the main point is not how fully you covered---like you include everything when you talk about the environment system about the aerospace. What you need to do is just fully present one of the main points, like focusing on the relationship between the railway and the airport. I'll cover some case study in it. I'll tell my audience why I need to show you the case study when I'm presenting this topic. I'll present what problems they have, what it will look like in the future I think as long as I present these three points clearly in my presentation, I'll be fine.

33 Gao: What do you usually do after class when the professor asked you to do a presentation?

34 Su: I will collect the materials, make a PPT, then I'll practice by using the PPT.

35 Gao: How do you usually present these topics?

36 Su: A lot of the times, these materials are very theoretical, like "someone proposes..." sometimes in my major, there're also historical reviews, in those presentations, I'll focus

more on the history part. If it requires me to elaborate more on the case study part, I'll talk more on the case study. It depends on what kind of materials we collect, right?

37 Gao: What kind of problems you encountered before?

38 Su: Like the professor who teaches introduction to transportation, he cares a lot about the structure. Like this time, what I was presenting is something new, there're very few historical facts can be related to it.

39 Gao: When you encountered some problem, how do you usually solve them?

40 Su: Ah. I have no way to go. I have to find more materials, coz I cannot leave it blank.

41 Gao: How do you usually design a group presentation?

42 Su: Ah. Like our last topic, the topic is huge. It's about the air force. The professor split the big topic into small ones. We each share a different part and find the materials. For example, if it's 18 minutes, we three will each have 6 minutes to talk.

43 Gao: What kind of role do you play in the whole team?

44 Su: Actually, in our last presentation, I was only introducing the policies about the background, history. There was another presentation about small city, medium city and metropolitans, I was introducing the medium cities. I was one part of the whole integral part.

45 Gao: What's your general result of your presentation?

46 Su: I think they are getting better. At first, I was very nervous. Gradually, I found my pace. So I spoke little by little, it's getting better and better.

47 Gao: How do you evaluate your performance?

48 Su: It was not very good at first. The teacher only gave me a medium score. There was once I think I did a good job, but the score was still not good.

49 Gao: Why?

50 Su: I think for the last time, we were too focusing on the sample that the teacher gave us. But for our case of introducing New Shanghai, we should provide some background knowledge. I think that's why our scores are low.

51 Gao: Does your presentations meet your expectations?

52 Su: I think most of them meet my expectations. But sometimes, when I'm in a rush, I did a bad job.

53 Gao: What are the aspects that you think you did good?

54 Su: I think I did well in attracting my audience attention, like inserting some interesting pictures, or some interesting stuff.

55 Gao: What are the aspects that you think you did not do well? Why?

56 Su: Well. I did suffer from two other American students who have strong opinions, they were imposing me to do something. They wrote something very sophisticated. I had to read several times to understand it. But in the end, what they present didn't went well either.

57 Gao: Do you think group presentation requires you have a relatively good English proficiency?

58 Su: I don't think so, as long as you present your ideas clearly.

59 Gao: Does doing presentation in US has anything to do with how long you've been staying here?

60 Su: I think it's not related. Sometimes Americans don't make themselves clear either and they are nervous too!

61 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in US?

62 Su: I think I might present more if I'm in China. Since in US, I need to speak in English. I'm always slow. Coz in English, you need to put articles, infinitives before words. Since I'm not a native speaker of English, so I need to speak slowly.

63 Gao: Have teachers given you any instruction while you were doing the presentations?

64 Su: Yes. For some professors, they are very strict. I didn't meet his requirement on the forms of my presentation.

65 Gao: Do you think this kind of instruction is necessary?

66 Su: I think it is necessary.

67 Gao: Why?

68 Su: It's very good for my future study.

69 Gao: Do you have any suggestions or advice for making presentations in the US?

70 Su: I think it's very important to attract your audience attention in making a presentation in US. It's the same in China.

71 Gao: Do you have any other questions?

72 Su: No, I don't.

73 Gao: Ok. Thank you.

Interview 3

Gao = Interviewer

Lang = one of the members in the focus group in this study

1 Gao: How long have you been in the United States?

2 Lang: Err. I think it should be a year and half.

3 Gao: How long have you been enrolling classes at the University?

4 Lang: A year and half.

5 Gao: What kind of courses you are taking at the University?

6 Lang: I'm taking courses in computer science.

7 Gao: What kind of courses you have enrolled before?

8 Lang: I've taken AEC courses. AEC includes all courses related to English. For my major, I have taken courses including database, computer architecture and other internet courses.

9 Gao: Why you take these kinds of courses?

10 Lang: They're oriented on my focus area. It's all according to the study plan. I always choose my courses according to my study plan.

11 Gao: What do you think of these courses?

12 Lang: Well, some of the courses are very useful. However, some courses are tricky.

13 Gao: Based on your understanding about these courses, how did you participate actively in these courses?

14 Lang: I do pretty well in some courses, I think those courses are easy and pleasant. However, some courses are very tiring and I did pretty badly in those courses. I don't participate actively in those courses, I just follow the rules.

15 Gao: What do you think of the teacher's teaching practice at the University?

16 Lang: I still think how well we learn totally depend on how well we read our books.

17 Gao: What do you want to learn from these courses?

18 Lang: I want to learn from the Americans. I think what they did in America are better than what we did in China. I want to learn some essence.

19 Gao: Since we took a lot of courses at the University, in these courses, do we have any group work or group presentations?

20 Lang: En. Yes, in some courses. Not in the courses I've taken so far. We do have group projects. In some courses, we have group discussions.

21 Gao: Since we have, it's what kind of classes generally?

22 Lang: I'm not really sure. Generally, it leans more on the practical courses, like database. If the courses are more lean on the theoretical stuff, it won't have presentations.

23 Gao: Do you want to have group work or group presentation in this kind of courses?

24 Lang: Indeed, I do want presentations in those courses.

25 Gao: Why?

26 Lang: I think I always learn faster in group cooperation. I can learn more systematically from group work.

27 Gao: What do you think about group work or group presentation?

28 Lang: I think presentation gave me a lot of pressure, coz English is still an obstacle to me. I'll try my best to prepare, make some PPTs, etc.

29 Gao: So you think group presentation requires you to have a good English proficiency, is that correct?

30 Lang: I think it depends. If there's one person in your group is a foreigner (to me), or someone whose English is good, then it does not require your English is very good. What you need to do is just do some operations, etc. But if the group are formed by Chinese, you have to say something. You need to be active and sacrifice.

31 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in US so far?

32 Lang: So far I've done only 2 presentations. I did one by myself, I think that one was horrible. (Grin). For the other one, we have one person whose English is relatively good. So she was in charge of talking in that presentation.

33 Gao: What kind of advantages and disadvantage do they have?

34 Lang: I think Americans have a lot of advantages. At least they don't have language obstacles. But during the assessment, since we're in the same group, so it doesn't matter. Therefore, we'll just do it by ourselves.

35 Gao: What about disadvantages?

36 Lang: I think sometimes they talk too much. They should give me more chances.

37 Gao: Do you want these chances?

38 Lang: Yes, I do. Chances are precious.

39 Gao: What kind of topic you choose to present in class?

40 Lang: There're two different kinds. My first time is you have to write a thesis, and then you introduce your subject based on your thesis. The recent one is about doing a project. You show your project to the class.

41 Gao: How do you perceive these two topics?

42 Lang: These two topics...I tried to say as many as possible. Mostly, I describe.

43 Gao: What do you usually do after class when the professor asked you to do a presentation?

44 Lang: If the task is based on a thesis, then what I need to do is write the thesis. And then you put your outline on the PPT, and then you just describe it, there's not much. I don't see much difference between this and simply write a thesis without presentation.

45 Gao: How did you present these two topics in class?

46 Lang: I write everything very clearly on the PPT, I'll just read from it. (Grin)

47 Gao: What kind of problems you encountered while you were making the presentations?

48 Lang: Problems...like the first time, my time was not enough. This was big. I didn't understand the standards of time. I forgot how much time they require. It was like 8 minutes. While I was writing the PPT, I conducted like 70-80 pages. I didn't finish that time. I felt so awkward that time. It was bad.

49 Gao: When you encountered some problem, how do you usually solve them?

50 Lang: I saw when the time is approaching to the end, I'll just try to wrap it up. They don't have requirement on solving our problems.

51 Gao: How do you usually design a presentation?

52 Lang: If the other person can speak more, then I'll make more sacrifice, I'll do more operations, etc.

53 Gao: What kind of role do you play in the whole team?

54 Lang: My role is operator. Sometimes I'll do something, raise some questions, etc. If others have questions, I'll answer them.

55 Gao: What's your general result of your presentation?

56 Lang: I don't really know. Coz it doesn't really count as credits in my college. It's just presenting. You are just telling other people what you're doing in project or your paper.

57 Gao: How do you evaluate your performance?

58 Lang: I don't think I did well in the presentations. I hope I can do better and better.

59 Gao: Does your presentations meet your expectations?

60 Lang: No, it didn't.

61 Gao: Why?

62 Lang: Like I usually practice before I present. I usually make a PPT and then practice at home. But I still got nervous in class.

63 Gao: Does doing presentation in US has anything to do with how long you've been staying here?

64 Lang: I don't think so.

65 Gao: What about language proficiency? Does doing presentation in US has anything to do with your language proficiency?

66 Lang: While there might be a little relevance. The longer you stayed here, the more professional you got.

67 Gao: What do you think about doing presentation in US?

68 Lang: I think that's it. It's nothing big. There's not much difference from doing it in China.

69 Gao: Have teachers given you any instruction while you were doing the presentations?

70 Lang: It was funny these two times. The first time the professor was not there, so his TA arranged the whole procedure for us. The second time the professor is Chinese. He respected us very much. You make the presentation on the stage, he just sit there and didn't speak. Sometimes he would nod, to show that he's satisfied with your work.

71 Gao: Do you have any suggestions or advice for making presentations in the US?

72 Lang: We should try to be more active. Since I'm taking classes on a graduate level, all of us are 23-24. Sometimes, it's boring. It's not like the undergraduate courses, which are much more alive. I hope it can be more alive.

73 Gao: Do you have any other questions?

74 Lang: No, I don't.

75 Gao: Okay.

Interview 4

Gao = Interviewer

Chen = one of the members in the focus group in this study

1 Gao: Have you ever worked with native speakers of English while you are doing a GW?

2 Chen: Not yet so far. Previously I was working with Chinese students all the time.

3 Gao: Was it assigned by the instructor or you selected by yourself?

4 Chen: Generally we pick by ourselves. We pick our own teammate.

5 Gao: Which way do you think of forming a group is better, assign by the teachers, or select by yourself?

6 Chen: I'm thinking generally we select by ourselves is better. If the teacher assign me to someone that I don't want to work with, I don't like it. But I need to see why the instructor assigns me to that person. Probably he/she has his/her own considerations. But generally I think it's better that I select by myself.

7 Gao: What kind of person that you don't want to work with?

8 Chen: For example, the person might not be punctual while working together. And you don't see the person hand in his/her homework in class. Probably if you work with the person, you won't be able to find him/her for more than half of the semester. And you'll ended up by doing a GW mostly by yourself coz you can't find him/her. But when you submit the work, you still subscribe both of your names. I don't want to work with those people at all.

9 Gao: Is your conception of these based on your daily observation of the person?

10 Chen: Exactly.

11 Gao: Do you prefer a homogeneous group or a diverse group while doing a GW?

12 Chen: I'd say it depends on what the topic looks like. If the topic is multicultural, a diverse group might be better.

13 Gao: What about your own experience?

14 Chen: Since I've only worked with Chinese students, so I think language barrier is not an issue to us while doing GW. It's very easy for us to communicate. But even though you might be familiar with that person, that doesn't mean that person works efficiently.

Sometimes if you are too familiar with that person, you might hesitate while speaking some words. You might not feeling comfortable to rush that person.

15 Gao: Do you think whether homogeneous or diverse groups affect the effectiveness of your GW?

16 Chen: I don't think so. I think even you work with an American, and you're not that fluent in the language, if the person can keep pace with you, and you two work very well, I think the outcome is going to be good.

APPENDIX D: MY SELF-REFLECTIONS ON GW

Self-reflection 1

We believe we will never forget the experience of this evening – our first discussion leading. It was said the language competency really plays a role in a presentation. So actually we were so afraid before we lead this session. Even by the moment we stood on the stage, we still could not help feeling nervous. We are so thankful to our classmates. With their cooperation, our nervous were eased gradually.

For us, personally speaking, we regard our discussion leading being successful. The first argument is our pursuit to group work. Not only because our topic is about group work; while we were preparing, we two worked very well with each other. Secondly, we learnt a lot during our preparation time. We discussed a lot and modeled our class in Anschutz Library Room 305 several times, where we practiced on linking each section to curriculum; we spent a lot of time focusing on making our demo lesson natural, as we believe teacher's guiding in class is so crucial; we learnt how to put things into our schedule. While we were designing our activities in class, we put all efforts in providing opportunities for peers to participate in; while we were presenting, we paid attention to interact with our classmates. Last but not the least, it can be seen that our classmates were taking an active part in our discussion.

However, we know we still have a lot of shortcomings which we need to improve on. We must admit we are still green hands in controlling time, as we tried to prepare as thorough as we can; so during our presentation, we had to adjust our teaching plan in order to get everything on schedule. Also, being non-native speakers, we have so much enthusiasm in expressing our ideas, but sometimes it happened to us that we found ourselves wordless.

After class, it was long before we could really calm down, as we both enjoyed our session. It was just because of our preparation, we had the opportunity of sitting in students' position to think and have deeper understanding about working as team. We really appreciate each of us effort. Most importantly, we appreciate our advisor --- Dr. Cho, who allows us to have this opportunity in practicing our teaching strategies which we learnt from readings and in class. We guarantee we'll try to keep on working to better our learning and teaching.

Sincerely,

Ying and Junfu

Oct. 18, 2012

(Qi, Y, & Gao, J., personal communication, October 18, 2012).

Self-reflection 2

It's my second time leading a discussion as a graduate student in KU. The discussion leadings are different from each other based on different courses I enrolled in. This seminar focuses more on examining the topics talked about each week from critical perspectives on identity while C&T 820 is more focused on teaching practice. So while we were preparing for the discussion leading for C&T 896, we kind of thought about the differences that we need to pay attention to.

Generally, I think we did a pretty good job in our discussion leading. We tried all means to come up with activities that we can employ throughout our discussion leading. We were thinking that probably next time we can try to generate more critical questions for our classmates to discuss on.

While we were preparing for the discussion, as you said, two people may have time conflict in meeting each other. But Maddy and I tried our best to make our meetings possible and one night she even had to discuss with me after she just went back from giving a ride to her roommate to Kansas City.

All in all, we really enjoyed our session today. We are going to cooperate again in Maddy's session on gender study. Working as team enabled us to learn from each other, as Maddy is more good at describing theoretical methodology while I'm good at coming up with the activities. In this way, we can cooperate with each other when each of us cannot come up with an idea about a topic.

I appreciate your instruction,

Junfu

(Gao, J., personal communication, February 21, 2013).

Self-reflection 3

Thanks much for the comfort that you lend to me before my discussion leading activity last night. I tried to follow your instruction about making the discussion interactive, and I saw our classmates sharing their thoughts and experiences about Gendered Identity topics voluntarily.

Personally, I enjoyed your class of student leading discussion so much and I know this would be the last time that I could lead a discussion in my graduate study as I only experienced this in your courses. And I think if I got a chance to do it again, I would try to incorporate more materials and studies about the topic and make my discussion more enjoyable and interesting.

I did experienced some challenges this time as this session is more of a session that Maddy picked, and I decided to co-lead with her, but she was unable to present in class. But I tried all my best to keep contacting her through emails and it was fun to cooperate on-line as this was the first time I did so.

Overall, I really enjoyed my session and I hope everyone did too. Through my discussion leading, I got to know more about the topic and possibly be clearer about what I would like to do in my academic career.

Thank you for providing me the discussion leading experience through this past year. It's really nice to work with you and I'm honored to have you as my advisor.

Regards,

Junfu

(Gao, J., personal communication, April 18, 2013).

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