

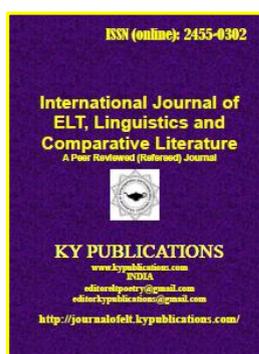


PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRATIC PEDAGOGIES IN THE THAI ELT CLASS ROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Thailand educational reform must manage educational shifts from traditional learning methods to more innovative pedagogical practices which require greater students' ownership and involvements in their own learning processes. The 21st century education in the ASEAN era will force Thais to interact not only with other Thais but also with other regional and international citizens. This will require EFL learners to specifically develop their communication competency with appropriate negotiation and persuasive strategies while perfecting vocational and professional knowledge and minute marketing strategies to attract and influence international cooperation. In order to improve an individual citizen's capacity to make meaningful contributions in his or her respective professional field, ELT educators need to shift their didactic practices to include greater democratic pedagogical principles to develop English communicators capable of carrying out myriad critical discourses. This article proposes possible democratic ELT principles EFL practitioners should implement to effectively respond to the students' needs in their linguistic and professional preparations in the 21st century community merging Asia-Pacific cultural, economical and political identities.

INTRODUCTION

"Students should not only be trained to live in a democracy when they grow up; they should have the chance to live in one today." - *Alfie Kohn*

"Rather than standing or speaking for children, we need to stand with children speaking for themselves.

We don't need a political movement for children...

we need to build environments and policies for our collective future." - *Sandra Meucci*

The Thai educational system needs to be revamped to reform and enable academic identities to produce citizens who are critical thinkers, initiators of one's own educational goals and pursuers of life-long learning. Each citizen's direct involvement in his or her educational procedures is critical for Thailand to be a successful team player in the international community. Teachers need to rethink about reprioritizing their lesson plans to perhaps produce positive use of large classes and redesign wiser assessment methods. Classroom action research needs to be revisited to further analyze for the better pedagogical performance. Such a transformation requires rethinking every aspect of the "game of school," because the game of life has changed (Zmuda 2010). The change will place even more pressure on language arts and ELT classrooms to educate students in ways that will enable them to effectively communicate in order to manage professional challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities available in the 21st century.

The formal Thai educational system is extremely autocratic and traditional. "Traditional" teaching is often didactic in form and characteristically teacher-centered. Traditional pedagogy is often formal, controlled, and autocratic enabling the teacher to specifically direct how, what, and when the students learn (Jonassen,



2003). Frequently, didactic teaching involves a teacher at the front of a classroom telling students what to do and how to learn. By and large, Asian educational contexts seem to exemplify the traditional instructional style. Alternatively, learner-centered learning is defined as responsive, collaborative, problem-centered, and democratic, with the student being an active agent in deciding how, what, and when learning occurs. Such learner-centered teaching and learning is commonly known as constructivist teaching and learning; formally recognized as social constructivism identifying knowledge exists as the result of social interaction and language use.

Democratic learning principles and approaches must be integrated into the Thai ELT classes. ELT educators must understand the concept and closely examine ways to implement the pedagogical concept in order to empower students' learning development. By definition, the term "democracy" is coined from the Greek words "dêmos" (people) and "Kratos" (power) combined as "dēmokratía" which is "rule of the people." The term is generally defined as a form of government in which all people have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives. It encompasses social, economic and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination. Democratic principles and ideology vibrantly exist through the stems of political and social mechanism. Most importantly, the extent to which the society can efficiently define and implement intricate interaction for the roles of democracy and education will determine the nation's negotiated level of success in the pragmatically borderless world communities. (Democracy - Building Info, 2004 – 2010). Specifically, a democratically competent academic setting makes provision for greater involvement between teachers and students in school decision making and administrative learning processes. A democratic pedagogy portrays equal educational philosophy and maximizes involvements and spheres of control by both individuals and academic communities at large. The schools embracing democratic spirit dynamically apply the norms of equal opportunity practice and foster involvement, reasoning, and knowledge over established ranks and autocratic methods. Most significantly, democratic- philosophical-ideal dynamically seeks students' perspectives, tolerant of educational and learning diversities and expects individual learners to voice their opinions and be actively involved in their own education and academic processes.

Democratic learning principle holds the balance of knowledge designed in consensus between the teacher and the student. Two educational theorists who influence the idea for the co-construction of knowledge include Vygotsky and Freire (Kolb, 2012). Both saw learning as a social act, where teachers and students dialogued and all created knowledge together, rather than teachers filling the students with content and information as if they were empty vessels. Teachers and students can think together on finding the appropriate learning topic for the project based learning in class as well as searching and examining the best possible path to gain the needed resource materials and information. Teachers can use their own experience to share with the students on how to search for information. The students can be the ones who select the most suitable path and content to learn based on the learner's specific personal needs, background capability and interest. The idea of co-constructing knowledge with students can be a scary challenge for traditional classroom teachers. But if teachers truly desire to have the students involved and committed to their learning tasks, teachers must initially engage and invite students into the learning processes early on. The twentieth century learning pedagogy no longer requires the age-old role of teacher as the single orator and director orchestrating the classrooms. Co-constructing knowledge means giving up the "myself" and "them" role of teacher and students and fully embracing the wonder and journey of "us".

Every day teachers make decisions regarding the types of texts students will use, the poetry they will hear and/or read; the language patterns and vocabulary that will form discussions, the way each student will be acknowledged as a reader, how a student's choice of a writing topic will be treated, and the feedback provided on assignments. These are examples of the decisions that teachers make, often with little or no



acknowledgement of the extent to which they are teaching for or against democratic classroom principles. The messages students receive about their work, effort, and engagement shape their attitude about themselves as learners, and nothing is more fundamental to a well-educated populace than citizens who have a mindset to learn. These and a myriad of other decisions have profound impact on students' preparation for democracy. Language arts teachers have long included English classroom activities such as peer-readers and reviewers, Socratic type of discussion and interaction seminars, cooperative learning groups, and writing rubrics. Each of these strategies undoubtedly requires active student participation, freedom of voice and choice that truly strategizes democratic skills and dispositions.

According to Kalantzis and Cope (2008), there are three types of education system including a.) Didactic b.) Authentic and c.) Transformative. The details of which are as follows:

Didactic	Authentic	Transformative
Structural approaches	Communicative approaches	Task-based approaches
Skills for the many, education for the few	Transferable skills	Variety of learning
Institutions	Institutions/off-site	New technologies
Teacher control	Learner autonomy	Collaborative learners
Transmission	Interpretation	Enquiry
Book culture	Book plus IT	Greater variety of media
Knowing that	Knowing how	Knowing why
Defined role for teachers	Greater teacher roles	Teachers as educators, catalysts, agents
Uniform learners	Individuality	Learner differences

Democratic education reveals greater transformative approaches in comparison to those of the didactic pedagogical practices. The principle requires proactive participations and involvement on the parts of both teachers and students. The pedagogy calls for collaborative learning where dialogues and negotiations skills guide the structure of the curriculum based on the strengths and interests of each of the learners. Students are encouraged to use informational technologies and other media to gain and expand their knowledge and content studies. The learners are consistently required to be the reflectors and enquirers of their own educational tasks.

Specifically, democratic learning classroom allows for the following pragmatic setting such as: 1.) Individuality and Uniqueness; 2.) Sense of Ownership and Control; 3.) Voice and Choices; 4.) Peers and Community Involvement; 5.) Critical Thinking and Creativity and 6.) Opportunity and Non-Judgmental Environment

1. Individuality and Uniqueness

Recognizing the great significance of an individual's differences and distinctive qualities, Piaget's (2013) theory of universal steps in comprehension and acquisition of knowledge for democratic schools implicitly stated that "No two kids ever take the same path. Few are remotely similar. Each child is so unique, so exceptional." For instance, the linguistic strength of the northwestern Thai students with the Mon ancestors would be different from the linguistic and cultural backgrounds possessed by the students in Pattani, a southern province of Thailand, who are capable of speaking the central Thai language as well as Malayu and Arabic at home. ELT educators need to bring out the individual strengths of the students and use the student's background as a springboard in expanding the target language learning repertoire. It is advantageous for ELT practitioners to perceive as a benefit and properly utilize students' background experience in expounding upon the learning development progress. It is not possible, of course, for ELT teachers to possess all of the abilities



the students might previously have. Teachers don't have to know all that the students know. Nevertheless, it is critical for the teacher to have the ability to guide and allow the students to display, to the greatest extent possible, their unique talent and background abilities. The students must have the chance to practice, integrate and implement what they know while performing the EFL learning tasks. By acknowledging students' schema and skills, the pace of student's language development will naturally increase.

Furthermore, the field of second language learning has become increasingly sophisticated as more research findings have been implemented in relation to learner needs and learner differences. Constructivist learning theory, in particular, assumes that students have individual learning styles (Kang, 1999). Learning a second language is usually a long and arduous process, however, by appealing strategically to the individual needs of learners as well as utilizing students background knowledge, obstacles to acquisition can be overcome (Van Deussen-Scholl, 2005). In order to captivate the learner, language must be meaning-centered, semantically motivated and culturally elaborated. Thai EFL teachers can design lesson plans in such a way that would connect to each of the students' learning goals and interests.

The principle of learner-centeredness is characterized by a movement away from teaching as the transmission of a body of knowledge towards learning as the active production of knowledge. The pedagogical practice focuses more on the methods of learning rather than the methods of teaching. Most importantly, it is the teacher who is crucial in setting the ambience for each of the relationships or interactions in the democratic classroom to effectively take place during the learning process. By allowing individual unique ability to grow, students can strengthen his or her long-term vocational preparation. By examining different students' strengths and abilities, ELT teachers can consistently integrate specific employable skills for various individual learners in the EFL classrooms. The curriculum that is relevant to the students' background will be appreciated and seen as a vehicle for introducing a sense of purposefulness and meaningfulness in the teaching-learning process. If students can see and understand relationships between what they are being asked to learn in their regular subjects and ways they can use that learning in the occupational society based on their own individual background abilities, they will be better motivated to learn the subject matter itself. If successful, the goal of education as preparation for work will assume amore proper and appropriate place among other educational goals in the minds of both EFL teachers and students.

2. Sense of Ownership and Control

A key factor in learner-centered learning is that the learners feel a considerable sense of control (Hoven, 1997). In order to make the most of this control, learners need to understand their own learning processes so they can make informed choices about the paths their learning takes, and to be proactive in managing and directing their own learning (p. 184). The concept of control and freedom embody the relationship between the teacher and the learners during the learning process. The pedagogical principle also refers to the relationship of oneself as a teacher or learner, amongst learners themselves as well as between an individual learner and other learners. Democratic education is consistent with the cultural theory that learning in school must be continuous with life outside of school and that students should become active participants in the control and organization of their own lives and community. Thai students are culturally ingrained to look and wait only to the structural authorities for answers. They have typically not been trained to be properly empowered to take their own learning initiatives. Thus, it is crucial for teachers to take an extra care in making it clear what their expectation is for their students' active participation in the classroom.

Core features of democratic education align with the emerging consensus on 21st century business and management priorities. Such features include increased collaboration, decentralized organization, and radical creativity. While democratic schools don't have an official curriculum, what each student actually does might be considered their own curriculum. Dewey was an early advocate of inquiry education, in which student questions and interests shaped curriculum, a sharp contrast to the "factory model" that began to pre-



dominate education during the 20th century as standardization became a guiding principle of many educational practices. Although there was a resurgence of inquiry education in the 1980s and 1990s the standards movement of the 21st century and the attendant school reform movement have squashed most attempts at authentic inquiry-oriented democratic education practices. The standards movement has rectified standardized tests in literacy and writing, neglecting science inquiry, the arts, and critical literacy. Altogether, ELT educators must wisely manage the classroom activities in order to fully employ the potentials and initiative of the students.

Thai students, in particular, would need to be aware that in the language classrooms, specifically, students need to be proactive in the practice of their communication whether with the classroom teachers or with their EFL peers. Though the concept would be a great challenge for the Thai autocratic classroom, the students' sense of control and ownership must exist for them to be actively responsible for their own academic learning tasks. Particularly, Thai students must be taught how to manage and take control of their own ELT learning activities. They need to know that ultimately it is their own obligation to learn. The successful outcome of their English learning goals depends mostly on how they individually handle the tasks. They have to be taught how to 'look in' and reflect on their own best practices; rather than to always 'look out' to others for solutions.

3. Voice and Choices

Democratic education provides greater decision-making power for students in the running of their own learning tasks. Democratic pedagogical principle gives full rights and authority to students to decide individually how, when, what, where and with whom they learn. The students have an equal share in the decision-making as to how their academic classroom activities are run, and which rules and sanctions, if any, are necessary. This type of pedagogical practice upholds democratic and equalities ideals among different academic and classroom members. Such philosophical ideals include respect and trust for children, equality of status of children and adults, shared responsibility, freedom of choice for classroom activities, joint democratic governance by children and staff together without interference by any supposed superior guide or system. Culturally unfamiliar with the democratic and open type of the classroom setting, Thais will need greater conviction and encouragement from teachers. ELT teachers need to constantly remind themselves that they do not have to be the ones to govern strict control of the classrooms; but should always be ready to provide the open platform for students to express their own voices with the liberty to make learning decisions.

Increasingly important is the view that students need to learn to communicate their own personal intentions. The communicative approach focuses on the need for students to express meanings that are important to them and their lives. Mutual respect means the recognition of the right of all people capable of speech and action to be participants in the conversation, and egalitarian reciprocity requires that within discourses each participant should have the same right to speak, to initiate new topics, and to ask for justification of the presuppositions of the conversation. Enabling critical discourse must be exercised to sufficiently and effectively incorporate student voice in the classrooms. In practice, this means recognizing the right for students to question what they are doing in schools. As described by Beyer (1996), "Students needed to have the freedom to choose and the freedom to criticize, without any externally imposed ramifications. These criticisms had to be taken seriously with the view of effecting change; the why inquiries initiated by the students had to be asked and answered constantly" (p. 117). This type of pedagogy requires constant active roles and participation on the part of the students. Students must take ownership in their own learning tasks and dynamically seek to critically construct their own learning and knowledge acquisitions through the proper strategic collaboration within their own academic learning community.



4. Peers and Community Involvement

Thais will also need to effectively collaborate with others on the ELT learning matters. The work of education for democracy specifically demands a whole-school and a whole-learning approach that is supported by every level of the school's governing bodies. It can be a process where ELT teachers and Thai students work collaboratively to reconstruct curriculum that would be relevant to each of the students in class. In at least one conception, democratic education teaches students to participate in consciously reproducing their society, and conscious social reproduction. Thai students will need to realize their roles in the community in order to evaluate possible contributions they can make to the betterment of their own community. The linguistic tasks undertaken by the students will be more meaningful if they can tie the learning content to their personal goals and interests.

The community involvement in the democratic pedagogical setting can be integrated through a variety of people, including parents, teachers, public officials, and ordinary citizens. Thai EFL teachers can invite other people within the community to help with the EFL learning aspects of the students. Thai ELT community members can be organized to develop a democracy that involves intensive participation in group decision making, negotiation, and social life. The concept of the hidden curriculum includes the belief that anything taught in an authoritarian setting is implicitly teaching authoritarianism. Thus, civic education, if taught in a compulsory setting, undermines its own lessons in democracy. Therefore, Thai educators need to be broadminded in expanding curriculum to include relevant ELT professional specialists to participate in the classrooms. Thai EFL parents who are proficient in English can be invited to be guest speakers at the school. Through the use of proper technological tools such as Digital Video Conferences (DVC), Skype, Line, or other types of social media, relevant EFL learning activities can be engaged as exchanges among Thai EFL classrooms in the north, for example, with a different group of students located elsewhere around Thailand, within the region or internationally. Osler and Starkey (2005) describe this type of classroom-community approach as "outward-looking." In this sense, community is defined broadly, including local and global, individuals and groups. Connections can be made to students in other countries through multimedia, local community members can be brought into the classroom for presentations and projects, global organizations can be contacted and supported, and student field trips can take place throughout the community.

Walberg (1980) has termed the word "career education" as pedagogy of general employability skills in regular classrooms by regular teachers introducing a sense of purposefulness and meaningfulness into the teaching and learning process. Walberg further explains that career education particularly is "collaboration." The term refers to the principle that career education is not something the education system can do by itself. Instead, it involves active participation, including joint assumption of responsibility by both the business-labor-industry community and by the home-family structure. In reality, if students can see and understand relationships between what they are being asked to learn in their class subjects and ways they can use that learning in an occupation, they will be better motivated to learn the subject matter. They will then acquire these general employability skills. If successful, the goal of education as preparation for work will assume a more proper and appropriate place among other educational goals in the minds of both teachers and students.

Furthermore, the theme of individualism refers to a kind of cultural isolation found among teachers, for unlike members of some other professions, teachers do not see themselves as participating in a close, collegial sharing of common knowledge and practice (Walberg, 1980). The history of school organization plays a part in the origin and continuation of this theme; teachers have worked apart from one another, and still do in most schools, having little opportunity to talk with one another and develop a common and detailed view of their work. They have, in recent years, increased their capacity to work together on matters of collective bargaining. Particularly for Thai EFL teachers, different subject content areas can integrate the learning



activities. English teachers can work with the mathematic instructors or social studies sections to construct various creative EFL learning projects using English as the medium of instruction.

Precisely, democratic schools are characterized by involving students in the decision-making process that affects what and how they learn. Some democratic schools have no mandatory curriculum, considering forced learning to be undemocratic. Most democratic schools officially offer voluntary courses, and many help interested students to prepare for national examinations so they gain qualifications for further study or future employment. In fact, some democratic schools have no official offering of courses, although courses can be offered or requested by school members. Altogether, whether detailing the need for students to listen to and share their voices, provide peer assessment and feedback, or engage in collaborative dialogue which deliberates controversial issues, cooperation and teamwork are imperative to a democratic pedagogy. In practice, this collaboration needs to permeate the classroom, but it also needs to exist between the classroom and the community at large—bringing community into the classroom while also taking the classroom out into the community.

5. Critical Thinking and Creativity

If educators effectively prepare students for their public life, they will be able to examine assumptions and biases in the media, for example. They will be able to critique and assess the value of information. They will look for the logic behind arguments. They will be able to discuss difficult issues with diverse groups. Most importantly, in the technological globalization arena, the role of the educators will also, more than ever, need to equip the learners to deal with critical cognitive online capabilities. For example, teachers must prepare students to examine assumptions and biases ingrained through a myriad of print and social media. Learners will need to be able to critique, value, assess or evaluate the perceived data. It is pertinent for them to be capable of analyzing motifs and/or logic behind arguments. They will need to be able to discuss difficult issues with diverse groups. If students have the classroom practice to effectively engage in the type of dialogues through which invite their analytical examination, the students will be efficiently ready to engage in the dialogues technique required in their chosen career path. Language classrooms should be a place where they can learn how to communicate critically; not the place where they learn how to memorize someone else ideas and speeches. What happens in the language classroom depicts the kind of society individual citizens are taught to play out on the national and international level. Individuals who know how to critically communicate in class will engage successfully in the dialogues with the team of their professional counterparts. While language arts teachers enrich their students' today, their work is vital to their students' tomorrow. Each skill taught and connected to other skills, each concept taught and connected to other concepts; and each word of encouragement spoken build the student's future as a literate, thoughtful, and compassionate citizen.

Most critically, an expansion of consciousness and a more diversified view of how second languages are required and necessary to move beyond what Brooks and Brooks (1993) called a "cookbook approach" to teaching languages. Successful language teaching must integrate cognitive, metacognitive, linguistic, social, psychological, cultural, interpersonal, intrapersonal aspects of communication. As teachers become more conscious of their students' individual differences and are able to integrate theoretical perspectives into their practice, the quality of learning possibilities will continue to improve. As stated by Maurer and Davidson (1998) who affirmed that teaching students to think is the most important goal of education. In keeping with basic constructivist theory, Maurer and Davidson made an important distinction between thinking and remembering. They emphasized the view that "thinking is a process that involves the active mental manipulation of the things we remember" (p. 167). Teachers, in a sense, function as architects and mediators providing structured guidance without overly imposing control. Thai teachers who wish to appeal to all types of their ELF learners' preferences may benefit from the use of a multimodal and the Thai commonly used interactive approach, i.e. social media, to language teaching. In doing so, Thai teachers should not be



preparing a teaching method but a teaching repertoire designed especially for different groups of students in the classroom. In turn, Thai ELF teachers would be assisting Thai ELF learners to become aware of their own learning strategies and learning preferences.

Language arts and ELT teachers, in particular, play a special role. While most modern societies may want their schools to produce “literate” people, a democracy demands a special kind of literacy that goes beyond merely comprehending words on a page or adding up columns of figures. It requires a literacy that includes such skills as critical inquiry; knowing how to ask questions and what kinds of questions need to be asked in a given circumstance; knowing how to evaluate the legitimacy and accuracy of an argument and the data that accompany it, to view issues from a variety of perspectives, and to evaluate the implications of a given text, read between the lines, and recognize and understand the unstated, the omitted, the subtext. In other words, literacy in a democracy is not only a special kind of literacy; it is also a more complex kind of literacy. And because of its uniqueness and its importance, teaching literacy in a democracy has a different kind of ethical dimension than teaching language and literacy under the more controlled style of the authoritarian pedagogical regime.

6. Opportunity and Non-Judgmental Environment

Pedagogical of tolerance also needs to be readily considered and applied into democratic ELT classroom environment. Cooperative learning, for example, provides the opportunity for diverse people to interact with each other in the classroom. According to Birch (2009), the cognitive factors associated with authoritarian personalities include mental rigidity, closed-mindedness, and dogmatism; intolerance of ambiguity; ethnocentrism; decreased cognitive complexity; decreased openness to experience, uncertainty, avoidance, and need for cognitive closure. People possessing cognitive style of the authoritarian personality look to authorities to explain and resolve problems. They accept their leaders’ simple answers to complex issues. They want to quickly close a complex issue in their minds so that they know what to do. Decreased cognitive complexity means that people with this conservative style of thinking are not willing to weigh and balance subtle factors or different perspectives in order to make a decision.

Meanwhile the concept of freedom is depicted as learning that is pupil-centered, democratically negotiated and collaborated where the teacher maneuvers in a sense to elicit those behaviors in a student that will lead to the achievement of the lesson objectives. Thus, under freedom, the Thai EFL teacher simply provides as many opportunities for the Thai EFL student as possible to learn and practice the target language by designing or searching for student-centered materials which promote a non-threatening learning environment. Thai children already possess a distinct characteristic in obeying authorities. Thus, teachers must set the learning environment that is free from judgement; inviting free sharing of ideas through the process of ELF learning. It is also important that the materials go “beyond the experience-activating exercises of the humanistic approaches” (Legutke & Thomas, 2014). Additionally, further than the Thai teacher ELT resource books provided by the Thai Ministry of Education, Thai ELF instructors must always seek alternative learning materials and resources that would engage Thai EFL students’ needs and interests. Teachers can creatively focus on activities which have a language-teaching orientation, in addition to developing: trust-building and relaxation; awareness and sensitivity training; information-sharing; thinking strategies and problem-solving; imagination-gap, fantasy and creative expression; role-playing and creative dynamics; interaction and interpersonal; values clarification and discussion; and process evaluation (Widdowson, H.G. 1994).

Efficient EFL professionals must absorb the best techniques of all the well known language-teaching methods into their classroom procedures using them for the most appropriate purpose. Democratic education allows for the two active learning participant pillars namely; self-determined learning and a learning community based on equality and mutual respect. A common belief in democratic schools is that democracy



must be experienced to be learned. The learning environment must be conducive to academic and social inclusion, to deliberative democracy, for English language learners. By incorporating these methods, teachers play a vital role in creating a context that makes students feel compelled to participate. Especially important is that the Thai EFL teachers encourage students not to be judgmental of each other. "Losing face" issues should never exist in the Thai democratic EFL classrooms. Everyone should be free from any emotional threats which would impede a student's motivation for learning. Teachers might also request that they suspend their disbelief of a peer's experience with discrimination, point out parallels with oppression that they may recognize, question assumptions, model risk taking by articulating unasked questions and apparent contradictions and teach vocabulary about oppression and discrimination issues. (Bolgatz, 2005).

It is also important to note that the first step teachers have to take is becoming familiar and comfortable with saying "I don't know" out loud to his or her students. Maybe that sounds nonsense, but it's a critical step in opening the path for the joint adventure in the learning process. Thai teachers, in particular, are not willing to lose face with the students by admitting that they don't have all the knowledge and background that the students may have. Some Thai student's English proficiency might even be better in comparison to the skills possessed by the ELF teachers. However, it is extremely critical to be open with the students and to design the kind of democratic classroom that allows for both teachers and students to learn together. It is a must that Thai EFL instructors permit the students to take an active responsibility in their own academic tasks; focusing on them to share ideas and brainstorming information. The teacher doesn't have to be the "know-it-all" identity. Teachers can creatively engage Thai students in connecting the content transitions in the class. Teachers have the ability to set the stage for: "I can't remember what topic we were discussing last time; can anyone tell me where we left off?" "Who knows something about this that they can share?" A few students might share some ideas and thoughts they have about the topic. Then teachers can follow the student's comments with, "Who wants to find out more?" "Who believes differently about the topic or might have a different experience and point of view regarding this?" It is true that teachers still need to be the ultimate decision-makers to keep students on task. But the pedagogical paradigm shift occurs when teachers are willing to experiment with pathways that let students create their own learning and take control and responsibility for their academic tasks. Less teacher-talk and more student-centered learning focus makes for a happy, healthy, and productive learning environment. Ultimately "learner-friendly environments" in the Thai learning communities are fostered when the teacher makes a concerted effort to provide opportunities which are relevant and meaningful to students and that encourage their creativity and independence. That, in turn, can challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning, a skill essential to survival in the real world in the new millennium (Jacobsen & Lock, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Allowing a more democratic classroom in Thai ELT practices does not negate teachers' responsibilities as leading authorities in the classrooms. Thai EFL educators indeed are still in charge of the students' learning, though with a less rigid style of teaching allowing students to better articulate their authentic language needs while fulfilling the course's overall objectives. Increasingly more critical is the fact that Thai EFL teachers will need to minimize their traditional authoritarian statuses in order to maximize a more open scholastic flow of academic freedom and a spirit of individual learning ownership for the Thai EFL students. Thai teachers will need to integrate more open-ended questions to leave room for the display of student's creativities and complex thinking process. Thai EFL language students must hold the kind of freedom to freely practice and carry out their linguistic learning activities in the proper level of challenges and not shying away from classroom authoritarian dilemmas or academic roles ambivalences.

Altogether, Thai EFL teachers should adopt democratic practices in the Thai ELT classroom. With the understanding that the approach is still considered to be a considerable challenge for Thai EFL educators.



Brown (1995) has specifically mentioned that his numerous observations of language teachers in action have led him to conclude that good language teachers must be very flexible. Thai ELT practitioners must remember that there is no one-size-fits-all way of successfully implementing the most effective democratic pedagogical method for each of the learners. ELT educators need to seek ways to promote democratic practices to maximize their own groups of Thai EFL students. The learning empowerment will indeed establish long term EFL ownership with the ultimate outcome for the successful engagement of Thais dealings long-term particularly with other ASEAN citizens in the international communities. In an ever-changing world toward globalization, it is imperative that Thai EFL educators make the changes in the classroom which will contribute to the development of critical thinking which models democratic skills and processes.

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