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Title
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Permalink
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Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 16(2)

ISSN
1050-4273

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Publication Date
2008-12-30

DOI
10.5070/L4162005098

Peer reviewed

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The Assumption of Participation in Small Group Work: An Investigation of L2 Teachers' and Learners' Expectations

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This qualitative study explores the claim that second language (L2) teachers and learners believe student participation to be valuable and expected in the context of small group work. Their perspectives were analyzed within the framework of recent research on the morality of teaching, which highlights the importance of the conditions underlying effective classroom interaction. Data gathered from an exploratory, in-class forum revealed both converging and diverging beliefs. These teachers and learners shared the assumption that student participation in small groups is expected and beneficial; they also valued the participation of all group members, favorably evaluated collaborative interaction, and did not view knowing the "right" answer as a prerequisite for participation. However, though learners' expectations regarding participation were clearly influenced by issues of personality and the composition of small groups, the teachers' beliefs were not as flexible. These results affirm the importance of teachers' and learners' involvement in classroom research as well as highlight the need to incorporate learners' perspectives into pedagogy.

Many second language (L2) teachers, discouraged by their students' habitual silence and minimal attempts to participate, ask them to work in small groups[1] only to find that their frustration is intensified as students remain quiet, engage in off-task behavior, or do not share tasks equally. While these teachers value collaborative activities, they may occasionally doubt the efficacy of small group work in SL classrooms. Consequently, some may forsake the notion of collaborative learning altogether; others might wonder if students' participation would improve if the class were more engaging. At a more fundamental level, some teachers may understandably question the value that students place on participating in their own learning process. That is, do students believe participation is at all worthwhile? And, if students do believe that it is worthwhile, why is it that at times they do not participate? Building on previous studies' support of collaborative learning, this investigation explores the claim that L2 students and teachers expect and value student participation in small groups. This study also explores the convergence and divergence of teachers' and students' beliefs regarding the assumption of participation.

The notion of participation in L2 classrooms is not as transparent as one might initially assume. Additionally, it has received relatively little attention in research on second language pedagogy (for one discussion of this issue, see Tsou, 2005). What is participation? Is a student required to talk to be characterized as

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
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Vol. 16 No. 2, 151-174

participating? Are non-verbal forms of communication such as nodding to express agreement or facial expressions to indicate confusion considered participatory even if one does not use words? Is note-taking a form of participatory behavior? And does off-task interaction in the small group context constitute participation given that students are at least talking?

Although other nonverbal behaviors are arguably participatory, valuable, and even pedagogically justified for the purposes of the present study, small group student participation is conceptualized as the interaction among students talking to each other in the context of small groups. More specifically, because students are most typically characterized (and, as will be seen, characterize themselves) as "participating" when they are talking to each other or to their teacher about a relevant course topic, this is the presently adopted, albeit limited, view of participation. This study stems from a previous, broader investigation of students' perspectives regarding small group work (Ewald, 2004); the recurring notion of student participation in those data suggested the need for the present study focusing specifically on teachers' and students' beliefs about participation. The present investigation embraces a wide definition of the term "beliefs." It includes those specific and sometimes overlapping and even conflicting perspectives, assumptions, expectations, understandings, viewpoints, and perceptions that, in this particular context, teachers and students hold about small group participation. As will be argued, these beliefs are linked to teachers' and students' actions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teachers' and students' beliefs regarding small group participation relate to recent studies on the morality of teaching (Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Johnston, Juhász, Marken, & Ruiz, 1998) in that these studies are concerned with the underlying conditions that reflect the "relationship between what people do in social settings and the inner values, beliefs, and standards that lead them to particular courses of action" (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 162). Having established a set of assumptions consisting of certain expectations for classroom behavior, such research provides a useful framework in which to explore teachers' and students' beliefs regarding participation in small groups and how these beliefs shape their behaviors and expectations. Moreover, these studies on the morality of teaching demonstrate that when teachers and students share beliefs, classroom interaction and instruction take place most effectively; therefore, their respective beliefs regarding the important issue of small group student participation also warrant analysis.

In their research, Jackson et al. (1993) examined three overlapping areas of expectations: (1) the "assumption of truthfulness" (p. 18), that is, the teacher's assumption that students are honest about their understanding of the material and the students' assumption that teachers know what they are talking about and do not claim knowledge they do not possess; (2) the "assumption of worthwhileness" (p. 24), that is, the shared belief that an activity is of inherent value and is worth

doing; and (3) assumptions regarding issues of "social justice," that is, mutual trust in the "general rubric of fair play" (p. 28). Jackson et al. (1993) and Johnston et al. (1998) claim that these assumptions constitute the "curricular substructure" which underlies, and supports, what goes on in the classroom. In short, a teacher's and students' set of shared beliefs (i.e., their assumptions that everyone's classroom behavior conforms to particular expectations) is the supporting framework that enables instruction to be smoothly negotiated.

Although these previous studies clearly demonstrated the existence of shared assumptions, Johnston et al. (1998) also claim that future research on teachers' and students' beliefs should "anticipate the possibility that it will be a lack of shared understandings and diverging expectations or assumptions that will emerge" (Johnston et al., 1998, p. 71); although teachers' and students' beliefs converge on many points, it is likely that their perspectives on all pedagogical issues are not identical. Additionally, Johnston et al. (1998) point out that the focus of previous studies has been on researchers' interpretations of these issues. They emphasize the need to involve the student voice in this research as well.

Paying particular attention to diverging beliefs, the present study explores teachers' and students' understandings of the "assumption of participation"; more specifically, their beliefs regarding student participation in the specific context of small group work in L2 classrooms. This study focuses on beliefs, more accurately on what teachers and students claim to believe. Certainly it is possible, and even probable, at times, that what one claims to believe may not necessarily be what one actually believes; moreover, for various reasons, one's beliefs may not be clearly reflected by one's actions. Nevertheless, both of these matters fall outside the scope of the present investigation. Though it is valuable that we analyze and interpret the actions of those we study, it is arguably more fair to those studied to begin our investigations with what they themselves claim to believe. Thus, this is a study of teachers' and students' reported beliefs about their practices, not necessarily of their actual beliefs or practices.

PREVIOUS STUDIES OF SMALL GROUP WORK

The vast, and still growing, body of research on small group work provides the context and background for this investigation of participation. While it is not the particular focus of this study, small group work has likely informed current teachers' experiences, methodology, and beliefs. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies have demonstrated that carefully designed and well implemented small group work has long been recognized to have many positive characteristics that potentially influence the L2 classroom and affect a number of issues related to various aspects of second language acquisition and pedagogy (see Alley, 2005; Bee Tin, 2003; Brooks, Donato, & McGlone, 1997; Cohen, 1992; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Ewald, 2005; Ghaith, 2002; Kobayashi, 2003; Koenig & Zuengler, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Lapkin, Swain, & Smith, 2002; Liang & Mohan, 2003;

Morris & Tarone, 2003; Omaggio, 2001; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Slimani-Rolls, 2003; Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998; Storch, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Thompson, 1996; Wintergerst, DeCapua, & Verna, 2003). As a result, most language teachers, perhaps especially those working within a communicative, proficiency-based approach, value its importance and employ it as a regular practice in their L2 classrooms.

However, there is also an awareness that small group work is not the panacea often wished for in L2 pedagogy as its potential benefits are not always realized (Alley, 2005; Allwright, 1999; Long & Porter, 1985; Slimani-Rolls, 2003). Teachers' objectives are not always realized: some teachers are frustrated by the felt need to insist, with varying degrees of success, that students interact in the target language, and, at times, student interactions completely veer off-task. Moreover, teachers' positive perceptions of small group work do not guarantee that individual learners share similar views (Alcorso & Kalantzis, 1985; Davis, 1997; Eken 1999; Eltis & Low, 1985; Garrett & Shortall, 2002; Nunan, 1988; Slimani-Rolls, 2003).

This is the point of intersection, that of beliefs with practice, that became the focus for the present study. Ironically, while communicative language teaching claims to create classrooms that are learner-centered, the failure to take learners' perceptions and desires into account in the area of pedagogical practices creates a gulf that is not easily bridged. Rather than assuming that learners share teachers' views, teachers and researchers must discover what learners think (Barkhuizen, 1998). To this end, the present study responds to the call to include both teachers and learners in research on pedagogy and on issues related to the morality of teaching (Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Eken, 1999; Garrett & Shortall, 2002; Johnston et al., 1998). Also underlying this study is the assumption that it is valuable to discover where the beliefs of teachers and learners overlap as well as where they do not. Thus, the possibility that teachers and learners do not always share the same assumptions (Johnston et al., 1998) shapes the present analysis and underlies the following research questions: To what extent do L2 teachers and learners share a common understanding of the assumption of participation in the context of small group work? And, conversely, to what extent do their beliefs diverge? These questions are particularly relevant for exploring teachers' and learners' assumptions of participation in the small group setting, an underexplored area in the field of L2 research.

CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted in a large, U.S. university in two contexts: an undergraduate language class and a graduate methods class. Although the student and teacher participants were of two separate groups, (i.e., they were not a group of teachers and the teachers' own students), for the most part, they were "typical" of this particular university's language program. The decision to include both groups of participants (teachers and students) was necessitated by the desire to

have multiple perspectives on the issues. Limiting the study to one teacher and his or her group of students would have provided multiple student perspectives but only one teacher's views on the issues. Because the students belonged to the same classroom, they regularly engaged with each other. Their particular teacher was not included in the teacher participants.

The language class (LC) is a first-year Spanish class taught by the author. These 21 students ranged in age from 17 to 40 but most of them were "traditional" college students, enrolled in "Spanish 101" to fulfill their university language requirement. They represented a wide range of majors, and all but two were born in the U.S. Though several students had some previous foreign language experience, only two-thirds (14) had prior high school or college Spanish instruction. Prior to this study, these learners had completed various types of collaborative tasks including daily short question/answer exchanges, information gap activities, polls on personal preferences, as well as interviews in which they shared information about themselves (their majors, family details, etc.) in small groups.

The methods class (MC) is a graduate-level methodology class emphasizing communicative language teaching. This group of 15 participants was composed of nine graduate teaching assistants and six teaching specialists,[2] non-tenure track faculty with MAs or PhDs, who were all currently teaching language classes. These teachers ranged in age from early 20s to 50. There were five native English speakers, eight Spanish, one Portuguese and 1 Catalan speaker. They represented a wide range of language teaching experience at the high school and university level. The fact that this graduate methods class was a required course for all instructors new to the department, regardless of past teaching experience, accounts for the relatively high average (seven years) of teaching experience.

DATA COLLECTION

A classroom forum, or series of in-class activities, lasting 50-60 minutes was conducted in both the Spanish 101 (LC) and the Methods (MC) classes. On the day of this forum, participants were seated in groups of 2-4 and audio recorders were positioned throughout the room to capture their spoken interactions. Though participants were not totally accustomed to the presence of the recorders, they had been recorded and/or videotaped prior to these activities. In fact, the informal comments, sighs, laughter, and rustling papers recorded in each of the small groups created its own characteristic microcosm of activity. The unique character of each group, composed of its particular members, suggested that the participants were speaking freely. This also for the listener created the sense of "being there."

Oral and written data were collected from a variety of forum components[3] including journals, questionnaires, small and whole group discussions, and homework (see Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of Forum Schedules and Components

	Language Class (LC)	Methods Class (MC)
Day #1	• Assignment of first journal due Day #2 (J1)	---
Day #2	• Questionnaire (Q) • Small group discussion (SGD) • Whole group discussion (WGD) • Assignment of scenario homework due Day #3 (HW)	• Questionnaire (Q) • Small group discussion (SGD) • Whole group discussion (WGD)
Day #3	• Assignment of second journal due several days later (J2)	---

1. Student journal (only in LC)

Homework journals were assigned to encourage learners to think on their own about group work prior to the in-class activities. Learners responded to the following questions: What do you think about working in groups in Spanish class? Why do you think instructors ask you to work with a partner(s)? Do you see any advantages/disadvantages? What do group members do to make a group activity effective or not?

2. Questionnaire (in LC and MC)

Both teachers and learners completed a short questionnaire to introduce the topic of small group work (see Appendix A).

3. Small group discussion (in LC and MC)

Working in small groups, participants discussed effective and ineffective student collaboration. These groups provided participants with the opportunity to express their opinions and collaborate with colleagues.

4. Whole group discussion (in LC and MC)

Participants were invited to share with the class what they had discussed in their small groups.

5. Scenario homework (only in LC)

Learners completed a homework task in which they applied their understanding of effective group work to possible scenarios in which they might find themselves (see Appendix B).

6. Follow-up journal (only in LC)

Learners were also asked to evaluate the forum itself in a second homework journal: What did you think about the activities we did in class this week related to language learning and the language classroom? Did you find them to be relevant? Were they helpful? Why or why not? In the future, what other topics would you like to see discussed?

These various types of data provided multiple venues for capturing, comparing, and contrasting the participants' perspectives.

DATA ANALYSIS

Just as this study reflects concerns related to the morality of teaching, it also aligns itself with participatory action research in its emphasis on learners' involvement and social change within their own communities (Auerbach, 1994; Crookes, 1993, 1998; Giroux & McLaren, 1987; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). The traditional goal of instituting change is not an obligatory outcome of action research. Rather, as in this study, the "action" may be carried out at a more "intellectual and conceptual level" (Johnston, 2000, p. 160), such as seeking to understand the complex situation of what teachers and learners claim to believe regarding small group participation. This study is, however, participatory in that teachers and learners actively participated in the research.

The present qualitative study is very much rooted in its own setting and was inspired by the learners' observations and interests as well as mine as their teacher. While it is my position that these same beliefs are shared by many teachers and learners, I do not claim that the findings of this study are necessarily generalizable to other L2 classrooms.

Rather, this study recognizes that "local conditions, in short, make it impossible to generalize. If there is a 'true' generalization, it is that there can be no generalization" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). Moreover, since the findings of a study carried out in a particular context might not apply even to that same context later on, "it is surely an issue whether they apply in other, somewhat dissimilar contexts" (p. 217). Therefore, the goal of the present investigation was to aim for a degree of "transferability"; that is, my task as researcher was to conduct this study in "normal'"settings with "typical" participants (relevant to this particular context) and provide an adequate description of this "sending context" so that readers can evaluate the degree of transferability of the findings to their "receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For the analysis, I sought triangulation (Edwards & Westgate, 1994) in the transcribed data components (small and whole group discussions) and written responses (questionnaires, journals, scenario homework). That is, this clearly interpretive data analysis (Wolcott, 1994) is based on a process of multiple coding through which I identified participants' converging and diverging beliefs regarding participation in small group work in the various data types. Finally, I reconciled participants' transcriptions with the content of other data types and compared these findings with the perspectives of other participants. In this way, the conclusions of this study are supported by data that were gathered from various data sources and multiple participants.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE ASSUMPTION OF PARTICIPATION

As members of communicative L2 classrooms, these teachers and learners generally value small group participation. In response to questionnaire item #10

("Students like to work in small groups in Spanish class"), 12 of 14 teachers and 15 of 18 learners mostly agreed.[4] But, as with other concepts, their assumption of participation cannot be viewed as an uncomplicated entity (i.e., students should participate). It is influenced by issues such as students' personality and preparedness, the composition of the small groups, activity types, and so on (similar issues are discussed in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), and it is clearly affected by particular classroom contexts.

For example, in this study, students who described themselves as shy claimed to participate more when working with a friend in a paired setting than with two unfamiliar classmates in a group of three; self-described extroverts claimed that they often feel disinclined to participate when they arrive to class unprepared; and, students who reported that they typically do not participate believe they participate more when they like a particular topic or type of group task. The learners' assumption of participation is further influenced by their perceptions of their teacher's methods of evaluation and views of the goal of small group work.

Consequently, the issue at hand is not simply whether learners participate in groups nor even if teachers and learners view participation as necessary but rather, the complex nature of teachers' and learners' assumptions of participation. Previous studies within the morality of teaching framework have focused primarily on teachers and learners' shared beliefs. Similarly, in this study, the following groupings of beliefs were selected for specific analysis due to the frequency with which they were mentioned; as such, they represent areas in which the teachers' and learners' beliefs most closely coincided. Their multifaceted converging beliefs are reflected in the following set of three related issues: (1) the participation of all small group members, (2) collaborative interaction, and (3) knowing the 'right' answer. This study also responds to Johnston et al.'s (1998) suggestion to study those areas in which teachers' and learners' beliefs do not converge. Specifically, in this investigation, the learners' beliefs regarding two issues most clearly diverged from those of the teachers in the following two areas: the role of personality and the composition of small groups. All of these beliefs, converging and diverging, constitute these teachers' and learners' assumption of participation.

THE CURRICULAR SUBSTRUCTURE: CONVERGING BELIEFS

Participation of All Small Group Members

While none of the questionnaire statements dealt directly with this issue, several of these learners and teachers indicated that a small group is most successful when all of its members participate. For example, the learners claimed in their journals that small group work is helpful only if everyone participates:

> [Group work] doesn't really help unless everyone participates. (Lindsay, J2)

> There are certain things that must occur to make a group interaction successful. The most important thing is for everyone to participate. Each member must

take their turn listening and speaking. (Rob, J1)

The teachers expressed a similar expectation that small group work is "effective only if at least one of the members of the group is able to encourage the others to work" (Juan, Q). While about a third of the total respondents (11 of 32) mostly agreed with questionnaire statement #8 ("It's okay if one person in a small group talks more than everybody else"), none indicated that one person should entirely dominate the interaction; rather, all of their comments emphasized the importance of each member's collaborative participation.

Collaborative Interaction

These teachers and learners unanimously (32 of 32) responded 'mostly disagree' on questionnaire item #1 ("If a student doesn't know the right answers when working in a small group in class, the student shouldn't say anything"). Learners' comments made positive reference to the secure, collaborative environment of the small group context, a setting in which students can work through difficult material together and contribute even by acknowledging that they do not understand or asking questions. For instance:

The point of small groups is to help each other learn. (Beth, Q)

I find that when working in small groups and someone else knows and I don't, I have more of an opportunity to ask them to explain it to me. (Cathy, Q)

This same emphasis on the value of the collaboration was also confirmed in the homework component of the forum. As one example, confronted with the possible scenario of responding to an unprepared small group member, Dan wrote:

If one of my partners was not finished with the assignment I would go through it and help him or her do theirs. I would probably learn more about the assignment this way because it would be more like teaching the assignment and I would get more out of it. (Dan, HW)

Similarly, the teachers also highlighted the important opportunity for students to ask for help, teach each other and share their knowledge through collaborative small group interaction. To illustrate, two teachers discussed the impact of the common situation in which one student who is more naturally a leader and another student who is a follower are members of the same group:

Sally:	I mean, there's always been is, I think, many times I think a leader and then it's
Gonzalo:	No, it it's it's never
Sally:	It's very much like I mean in a sense, a human scenario, where you know, some are leaders and others are followers.
Gonzalo:	But, but you know it's a give and take. I know some of them

> are learning from the ones that know. And the other ones are practicing what they know and they're teaching it and they're learning it again because they're actually teaching it. So, it's a give and take, and [for] everybody it's a win/win thing. (SGD)

Like learner Dan above, teachers Sally and Gonzalo share the expectation that in these "unbalanced" groups, students' ability to collaborate and effectively teach each other is mutually beneficial.

Knowing the "Right" Answer

As indicated previously, for both learners and teachers, knowing the 'right' answer is not a required component of the assumption of participation. That is, they unanimously indicated in response to questionnaire item #1 that though students will not always know the right answer and will make mistakes, they should still participate in small group work. These two learners explained their view more fully:

> Classmates understand not knowing everything. (Amanda, Q)

> Learn from mistakes. It's too easy to not say anything. Trying to work through the answers is more helpful. (Anonymous, Q)

Similarly, an analysis of the teachers' explanatory comments revealed their agreement: Though learners do not always offer right answers, they are still expected to participate. For example:

> No, sometimes they do not have the right answer but can contribute something. (Fátima, Q)

> Beginners will rarely know the right answers, but they have to try to speak. (Vicky, Q)

These teachers and learners expressed the shared understanding that participation of all small group members is expected and valuable, regardless of students' being sure of "right" answers.

THE CURRICULAR SUBSTRUCTURE: DIVERGING BELIEFS

In contrast to the converging views summarized above, these teachers' and learners' assumptions of participation also differ. These diverging beliefs, however, are often reconcilable and can be better understood by considering an important principle from discourse analysis. The relevance of this principle to understanding teachers' and learners' classroom assumptions and behaviors was previously made by Johnston et al. (1998). According to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Prin-

ciple, participants' shared expectations in a given context are central to effective communication. This principle consists of four maxims which structure people's understandings of interaction: the shared assumptions on the part of interlocutors that what one says is true, relevant, well-ordered, and of an appropriate quantity. Of course, in reality, statements are regularly made in conversation that seem untrue, irrelevant, poorly ordered, and of inappropriate quantity and should, arguably, result in awkward, and even unsuccessful, communication. Grice's principle, however, applies both on the surface level of interaction as well as on the deeper level of expectations. That is, the Cooperative Principle places the responsibility on the interlocutor to interpret, for example, an apparently irrelevant statement as if it conformed to the maxim of relevance. In this way, the interlocutor creates relevance, and consequently, facilitates effective interaction.

Teachers' and learners' assumptions, convergent or divergent, which underlie the curricular substructure, function in much the same way to facilitate effective instruction (Johnston et al., 1998). For example, the assumption of student participation in the context of small group work cannot simply be understood on the surface; that is, whether or not the students participate. Superficially, students' lack of participation may suggest that their beliefs diverge from those of their teachers; that is, students who do not participate do not believe that participation is necessary or beneficial. However, the previous data show that while these learners do share the assumption of participation, they themselves admit that their own beliefs do not always correspond to their actual degree of involvement. For example, this learner clearly indicated on both her questionnaire and in her journals that she values participation but confessed:

> I know that I personally slack off a little during group work time. I try my best to try and stay on track but sometimes it's really easy to get off track. However, the group work we do in class has a lot of significance, and it's imperative in learning Spanish. (Lindsay, J2)

Thus, the perceptive and skilled teacher will recognize that even a student who believes participation to be "imperative" will not always behave accordingly. Furthermore, this teacher will uncover and balance the interrelated issues that function together to influence students' actual participation. In order to preserve this shared assumption and to avoid the erroneous conclusion that students who do not participate do not value participation, teachers must be sensitive to issues that students claim affect their beliefs and, ultimately, their behaviors. This study revealed two specific areas in which teachers' and learners' beliefs diverge. These issues might account for behaviors that seem to contradict students' expressed belief in the positive value of small group participation: the role of personality and the composition of small groups.

Personality

These learners expect, and allow for, a student's personality to influence participation, even in the context of small group work. Several of these learners identified quietness or timidity as natural traits related to a fear of speaking and in response to homework scenario #4 ("You are working in a small group in which one member tends to be quiet and doesn't participate much and another member is more extroverted and more actively completes the task"), they all reported that they would try to involve a more introverted person in order to make him/her feel comfortable during small group collaboration. Two illustrative examples of their responses follow:

> If someone is shy, you have to [do] your best to make that person feel comfortable so that they won't be afraid to speak. (Lindsay, HW)

> I would try to encourage the quiet member to give input or opinions according to the exercise—especially to explain things to me because it's likely that I'm confused or have questions that they might know the answers to. (Jen, HW)

However, along with other learners, Madeline believes that if a student is naturally quiet, participation, though worthwhile, should not be forced.

> If someone did not participate much and someone participated more, then I would try to get the quiet person involved more. I would try talking to her more often outside the group so she would feel more comfortable doing group [work]. However, if he/she were just naturally a quiet person, then I would not try to push participation. (Madeline, HW)

Though learners clearly view the small group context as providing more opportunities to speak, they still recognize that personality traits influence their participation. The majority of these learners responded to scenario #4 with the phrase "I would try [to involve, draw out, encourage, etc.] quiet students to participate." In contrast, many of the teachers reported that they implement small group work as a specific context in which shy and quiet students will, or even, should, participate; several claimed that it is a setting that is both less stressful and more conducive to participation. For example:

Sonia:	The majority I believe are very timid, but when they are in groups, in pairs especially, they speak very well. There are some cases including guys that that are very good, but they don't talk in front of the whole class. They are not nonpartici patory, but in pairs, in pairs they do it very well, or in small groups.
Marisol:	Yeah, mmm, hmm.
Sonia:	Also, there are the others that of course, that are not very good. They don't understand ideas quickly, but neither do

they talk in front of the whole class.
Marisol: Mmm, hmm.
Sonia: And anyway in, when they are in groups yes, they do speak, they do try to understand, to participate. Especially if you are circulating with the groups ??? [laughing] what they are doing, then they keep each other
going, right?
(SGD)

These two teachers expect the small group environment to elicit participation from students who do not normally participate in front of the whole class. In contrast with the students who offered many suggestions to draw out shy classmates in the small group context, none of the teachers in this study indicated that they expect the participation of shy students to be affected in the small group context; in fact, Sonia and Marisol expect shy students to perform better in pair work than in other settings. Furthermore, Sonia's belief that students' participation improves as a result of the teacher's monitoring does not indicate that she expects students' participation to be affected by their personalities.

Interestingly, in response to questionnaire statement #2 ("It is better for students to work in small groups with the same people throughout the quarter"), Marisol circled neither mostly agree nor mostly disagree and explained:

> It will depend on the personality of the student. For a shy one, this could be true. (Marisol, Q2)

Thus, while Marisol does indicate that a shy student might benefit from a particular combination of group members, she does not claim that students' personality traits such as shyness affect her expectation that they will participate in small group contexts. In fact, the issue surfaces only once in the teachers' small group discussions; it is a brief reference as to why student participation in general will never be of equal quantity:

Mercedes: The participation is never going to be equal.
Fátima: No, because you have, there are your factors too, personality, etc., etc.
Mercedes: Exactly, exactly.
(SGD)

Finally, in response to teacher questionnaire item #12 ("Why do you (or don't you) use small group work in the classroom and in what situations?"), one teacher explained that he uses group work specifically:

> [b]ecause some students are publicly shy and others are situationally shy according to Phillip Zimbardo who has spent his life studying shyness. (Gonzalo, Q12)

Thus, as a group, these teachers did not take the issue of personality into account to the same extent as did the learners whose comments focused on how to "try" to encourage participation and on their belief that participation should not be forced. While these learners adjusted their assumption of small group participation to accommodate personality, there is no evidence that the teachers were willing to do the same. Though the teachers were not presented with the homework component of the forum and therefore did not respond specifically to situation #4, their own freely offered comments provided no evidence that, in their view, shyness affects students' participation in small group contexts. Rather, the teachers viewed the small group context as a way of providing all students with the opportunity to participate and, in fact, claimed to expect this context to improve the participation of timid students.

Composition of Small Groups

Several students highlighted potential benefits for participation that depended on working with familiar partners and positively evaluated working with the same group members (7 of 18 mostly agreed with questionnaire item #2, "It is better for students to work in small groups with the same people"). In general, the students were far more flexible about this issue than the teachers who, for the most part, believed that students should not always work with the same partners. (0 of 14 teachers mostly agreed with item #2.) Though a few teachers allowed for individual learner differences, they unanimously affirmed the benefits, and even necessity, of mixing up group members. The students' opinions were relatively moderate; while many students supported mixing up the groups, others favored working with familiar partners. For example, these students explained:

> It's good to know a variety of class[mates] because everyone can contribute to your learning. (Madeline, Q)

> You begin to feel more comfortable and are more likely to speak up if you don't know something or are confused than to feel stupid with someone you don't know. (Genie, Q)

Also addressing the issue of comfort, Ned expressed the following opinion during the whole group discussion:

> Well, what if you want to be comfortable, I mean, get to know, you want to get to know people, fine. But don't you want to have a good, you know, safe, personal, regular (?) conversations so you can be comfortable with at least with that person and there you can learn? (Ned, WGD)

Throughout these data, many students claimed that being familiar with group partners increased their comfort level, helped them understand each other's strengths and weaknesses and actually encouraged participation. A student's jour-

nal effectively summarizes the majority of students' flexible perspectives on the composition of small groups. She wrote:

> And even though I do agree with what some people have said about 'switching' partners, etc., I also think that there are some people who learn best with familiar people. (Terri, J2)

Students' open-minded perspectives contrast with teachers' more extreme opinions on small group composition. While many students maintained that social familiarity enabled them to learn better, most teachers disagreed. For instance, these teachers commented on questionnaire item #2:

> No, how horrible! (Fátima, Q)

> Students will have better interaction by working in ≠ groups. (Vicky, Q)

> [Working with different people] gives exposure to others with different backgrounds, knowledge, skills. (Norma, Q)

Thus, while students connected the importance of familiarity among peers to effective participation, the teachers attributed less value to familiarity than to contact with the diverse perspectives of a variety of classmates. Teachers' support for mixing group members seems based on the idea that when students become comfortable and familiar with each other, they are easily distracted and discuss topics that are not task-related. Additionally, these teachers believe that varying the composition of small groups leads to improved language ability, assists in classroom management, and is a positive, even necessary, element of small group participation.

In short, these data reveal that these learners' assumption of participation is affected by students' personalities and the composition of small groups. The teachers, however, did not show a similar willingness to take these issues into account and their expectation that students' participation is improved by varying group members remained a central element of their assumption of participation.

LIMITATIONS

As in all studies, this investigation has certain limitations, a few of which will be explored briefly here. Again, these students did not "belong" to these teachers and had not shared classroom time together. Thus, this study, unlike some other qualitative studies that focus on one particular classroom context and its respective participants, is not able to compare their views as participants, both teacher and learners, in the same classroom(s). Also, the findings of this study reflect only these particular participants in their own context at one point in time. Certainly it is possible that other teachers' and learners' views could be different, and even

these same teachers and learners could have different views on these topics after the passing of time.

This study reported specifically on only three areas in which the participants' views converged and only two areas in which they diverged. Certainly other issues could have been explored more fully in the data. Finally, different or additional data collection techniques and/or forum components could have resulted in other findings. For example, only the learners responded to the scenario homework; the teachers did not.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the present data, the extent to which these teachers and learners share a common understanding of participation is impressive. Overall, they expect and value student participation in small group contexts and many of their specific beliefs regarding participation clearly converge. As with the other assumptions (truthfulness, fair play, etc.) made explicit by previously mentioned studies on the morality of teaching, the assumption of participation is comprised of many sets of overlapping beliefs including the understanding that, regardless of knowing "right" answers, participation by all small group members is generally beneficial and expected in L2 classrooms.

Nevertheless, this study has paid special attention to two issues in which these teachers' and learners' beliefs diverged. Given the fact that students, admittedly, do not always participate as teachers believe they ought, one might conclude that they do not share a belief in the value of participation. However, these data have shown that while these learners do indeed value collaborative interaction, their assumption of participation is influenced by personality and the composition of small groups, issues that do not equally alter these teachers' expectations.

Consequently, what students judge to be necessary and worthwhile is not always what they actually do, a situation that has several implications for teaching. In short, students who do not participate in small groups should not be judged as unwilling or unable. Their lack of participation does not nullify the assumption of participation on their part but rather points to the importance of understanding the issues which affect their participation in order to preserve the shared assumption and negotiate classroom instruction more smoothly. This study supports Jackson et al.'s (1993) claim that for instruction to proceed effectively, shared assumptions are necessary. But, as Johnston et al. (1998) suggested, it is valuable to consider the areas in which teachers' and students' beliefs diverge in order to better understand classroom interactions.

For example, in response to the issue of personality, rather than assuming or even insisting that the small group context provides an opportunity for more introverted students to participate, teachers need to recognize that some students claim not to participate in small groups due, precisely, to their shy personalities. Instead of being discouraged or frustrated by students' lack of participation or feeling

tempted to forsake student collaboration altogether, teachers should be aware that certain students have acceptable reasons for which they are not involving themselves in ways their teachers would like. Teachers might explore why particular students do not participate and consider addressing issues related to participation in their classrooms with their own students or perhaps through interactive student-teacher journals.

Regarding the composition of small groups, teachers need to be open to students' expressed needs and desires. The students in this study who claimed that they prefer to work with familiar partners offered reasonable explanations for their perspectives. While teachers often believe they know best regarding issues of pedagogical practice, they actually can hinder some students' ability to work effectively in the classroom by not paying heed to the learners' views, perceptions which shed valuable light on teaching and learning (SooHoo, 1993).

Thus, as predicted by Johnston, et al. (1998), this study did reveal the curricular substructure as a site of potential contention and as a place for both converging and diverging beliefs. As such, it also highlights many areas yet to be explored. For instance, one might investigate the concrete effects this type of exploratory, in-class forum has on students' and teachers' behavior (i.e., as a result, does students' participation change or do teachers alter their expectations of student behavior?). Additionally, much is still unknown regarding specific aspects of participation in small group work including the relationship between teachers' and students' expressed beliefs and actual behaviors, group members' level of interaction, students' use of the L1 and the L2, the frequency with which teachers and students change the composition of small groups, whether and how students keep each other on task, what effects teacher monitoring has on small group interaction, and so on. The exploration of teachers' and students' behaviors and perspectives offers virtually limitless possibilities.

Finally, this investigation confirms the importance and the benefits of involving students in analyzing the issues that underlie pedagogy. When students play a significant role in the research process, they develop a sense of control over their own learning (Auerbach, 1993). Furthermore, their essential perspectives (Bailey & Nunan, 1996) provide us with valuable information about our pedagogical practices and inform L2 research.

NOTES

[1] For the purposes of this study, small groups are defined as 2-4 students working together in a collaborative setting in the classroom.

[2] One teaching specialist who was not an official class member but was a well-known colleague of the Methods students attended this particular class session (and others) and chose to participate in this study.

[3] The activities comprising the forum were presented in English. Though participants had the option of responding in English or Spanish, all data were translated into English for this study.

[4] Only 14 of the 15 teachers and 18 of the 21 students submitted their questionnaires to be included in this study.

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APPENDIX A: LC/MC QUESTIONNAIRES

Questionnaire for the LC

Indicate whether you mostly agree (MA) or mostly disagree (MD) with the following statements by circling the appropriate letters. Comment to clarify your position.

MA MD 1. If I don't know the right answers when working in a small group in class, I shouldn't say anything.
Comments:

MA MD 2. It is better to work in small groups with the same people throughout the quarter.
Comments:

MA MD 3. If someone in a small group doesn't participate, the others should complete the task.
Comments:

MA MD 4. If you don't understand the group activity, you should ask the instructor for clarification in English.
Comments:

MA MD 5. When a group has completed an activity, members should wait for further instructions.
Comments:

MA MD 6. It's preferable to direct questions to the instructor than to your partner(s).
Comments:

MA MD 7. When a group finishes an activity early, the group members should use the extra time to work on homework.
Comments:

MA MD 8. It's okay if one person in a small group talks more than everybody else.
Comments:

MA MD 9. It is better to work in small groups with different people throughout the quarter.

Comments:

MA MD 10. I like to work in small groups in Spanish class.
Comments:

Questionnaire for the MC

Date: _____ Name: _____
Native Language: _____
2nd / 3rd languages: _____
How many years have you taught Spanish? _____
What level have you taught and for how long? _____
Do you as a teacher regularly incorporate
small group work in the class(es) you teach? YES NO
Did you work in small groups as a student
when you took language courses? YES NO

Indicate whether you mostly agree (MA) or mostly disagree (MD) with the following statements by circling the appropriate letters. Comment to clarify your position.

MA MD 1. If a student doesn't know the right answers when working in a small group in class, the student shouldn't say anything.
Comments:

MA MD 2. It is better for students to work in small groups with the same people throughout the quarter.
Comments:

MA MD 3. If someone in a small group doesn't participate, other members should complete the task.
Comments:

MA MD 4. If a student doesn't understand the group activity, the student should ask the instructor for clarification in English.
Comments:

MA MD 5. When a group has completed an activity, members should wait for further instructions.
Comments:

MA MD 6. It's preferable for a student to direct questions to the instructor than to fellow group members.
Comments:

MA MD 7. When a group finishes an activity early, the group members should use the extra time to work on homework.
Comments:

MA MD 8. It's okay if one person in a small group talks more than ev-

		erybody else. Comments:
MA	MD	9. It is better to work in small groups with different people throughout the quarter. Comments:
MA	MD	10. Students like to work in small groups in Spanish class. Comments:
MA	MD	11. As an instructor, I like to incorporate small group work in my Spanish class. Comments:
Short Answer:		12. Why do you (or don't you) use small group work in the classroom and in what situations? 13. Do you think small group work is effective in a language classroom? For what? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B: SCENARIO HOMEWORK HANDOUT

Tarea [homework]: Given the following scenarios, how would you react / respond as a member of the group? Write a short paragraph for each (type it).

Scenario #1: You arrive to class without having completed homework from the manual. Your instructor asks you to review this exercise/activity in a small group but you are not prepared.

Scenario #2: One of your group members arrives to class without having completed homework from the manual. Your instructor asks you to review this exercise/activity in a small group but one of your partners is not prepared.

Scenario #3: You are given an activity to complete in a small group in class and you finish it before other groups are done.

Scenario #4: You are working in a small group in which one member tends to be quiet and doesn't participate much and another member is more extroverted and more actively completes the task.

Scenario #5: You are given instructions in Spanish for a task to be completed in a small group but when the teacher stops talking and you are supposed to start to work, you don't know what it is that you have been asked to do.

APPENDIX C:
TEACHER (T) AND LEARNER (L) QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Teacher and Learner Questionnaire Statements	Mostly Agree		Mostly Dis-agree		Neither or both response(s) circled	
	T	L	T	L	T	L
1. If a student doesn't know the right answers when working in a small group in class, the student shouldn't say anything.	0	0	14	18	0	0
2. It is better for students to work in small groups with the same people.	0	7	11	10	3	1
3. If someone in a small group doesn't participate, other members should complete the task.	7	12	4	5	3	1
4. If a student doesn't understand the group activity, the student should ask the instructor for clarification in English.	10	10	2	6	2	2
5. When a group has completed an activity, members should wait for further instructions.	6	11	5	4	3	3
6. It's preferable for a student to direct questions to the instructor than to fellow group members.	3	3	7	12	4	3
7. When a group finishes an activity early, the group members should use the extra time to work on homework.	3	7	10	7	1	4
8. It's okay if one person in a small group talks more than everybody else.	7	4	6	12	1	2
9. It is better to work in small groups with different people throughout the quarter.	12	10	0	4	2	4
10. Students like to work in small groups in Spanish class.	12	15	0	2	2	1

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