Creating Conditions for Collaborative Learning

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Context:

English for Special Purposes

Third-year students in the Department of Architecture

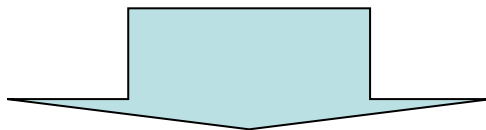## Students work in groups to:

Create an architectural design

Present the design to the class

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(2)

Puzzle: (Allwright, 1997)

Some groups worked well together, some didn't.

How to increase engagement, interaction and cooperation among group members?

Collaborative Learning Techniques

But, collaborative learning techniques **can't** succeed on their own…

To effectively employ collaborative learning in the classroom, it needs to be 'designed' to create the kinds of learning opportunities that make collaborative learning an effective pedagogical tool.

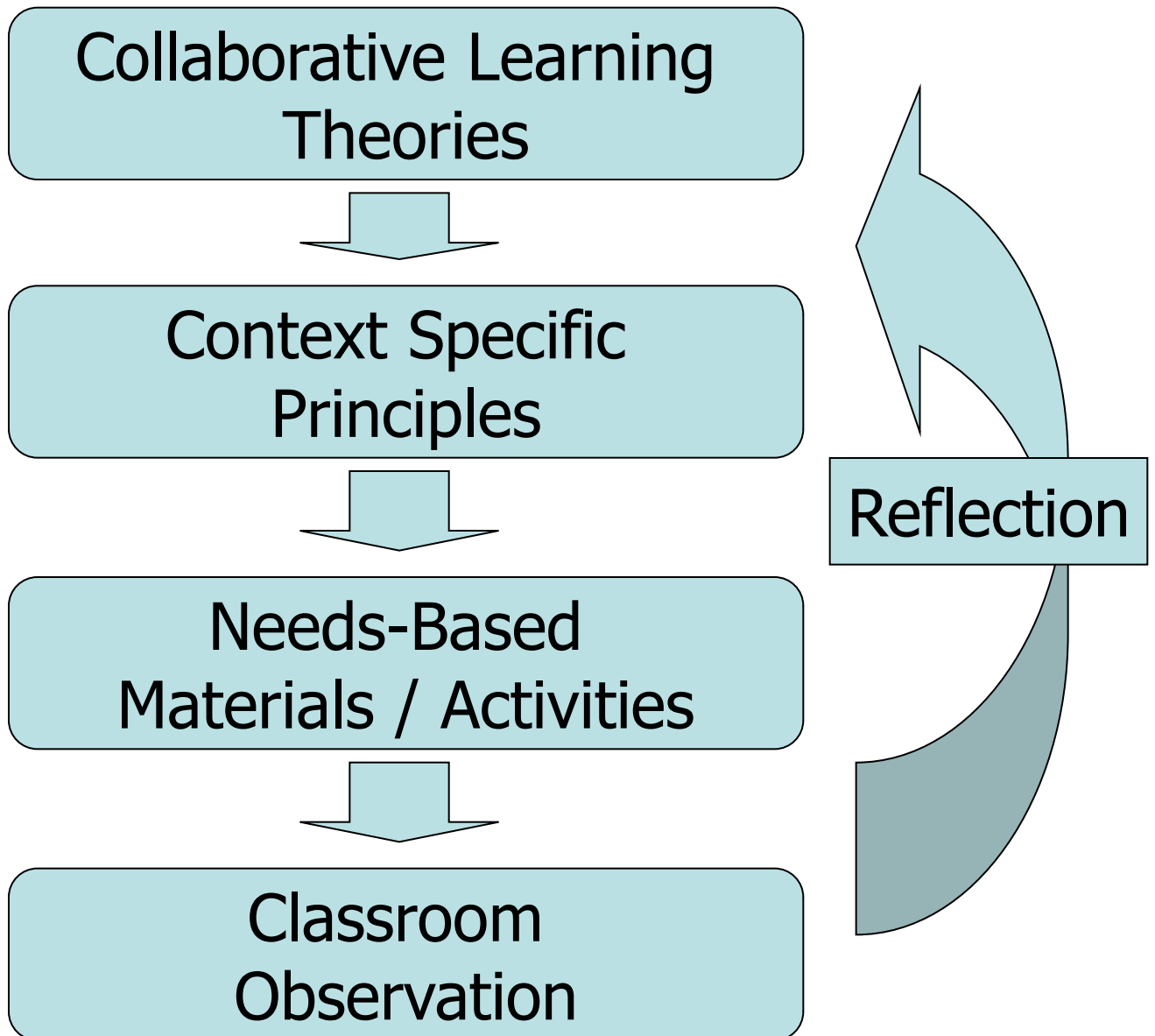(Berkeley, 2004; Oxford, 1997; Smith and MacGregor, 1992).

Teachers have to **re-conceptualize their classroom as a 'created' space.**

To do this, teachers need to develop their own principles to follow in designing their classrooms.

(Widdowson, 1980)

Designing a Collaborative Learning Environment:

Collaborative Learning Theories

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Context Specific Principles

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Needs-Based Materials / Activities

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Classroom Observation

Reflection

Theory can help teachers develop their own design principles by providing the basis for these principles.

(Model adapted from Widdowson, 1980)
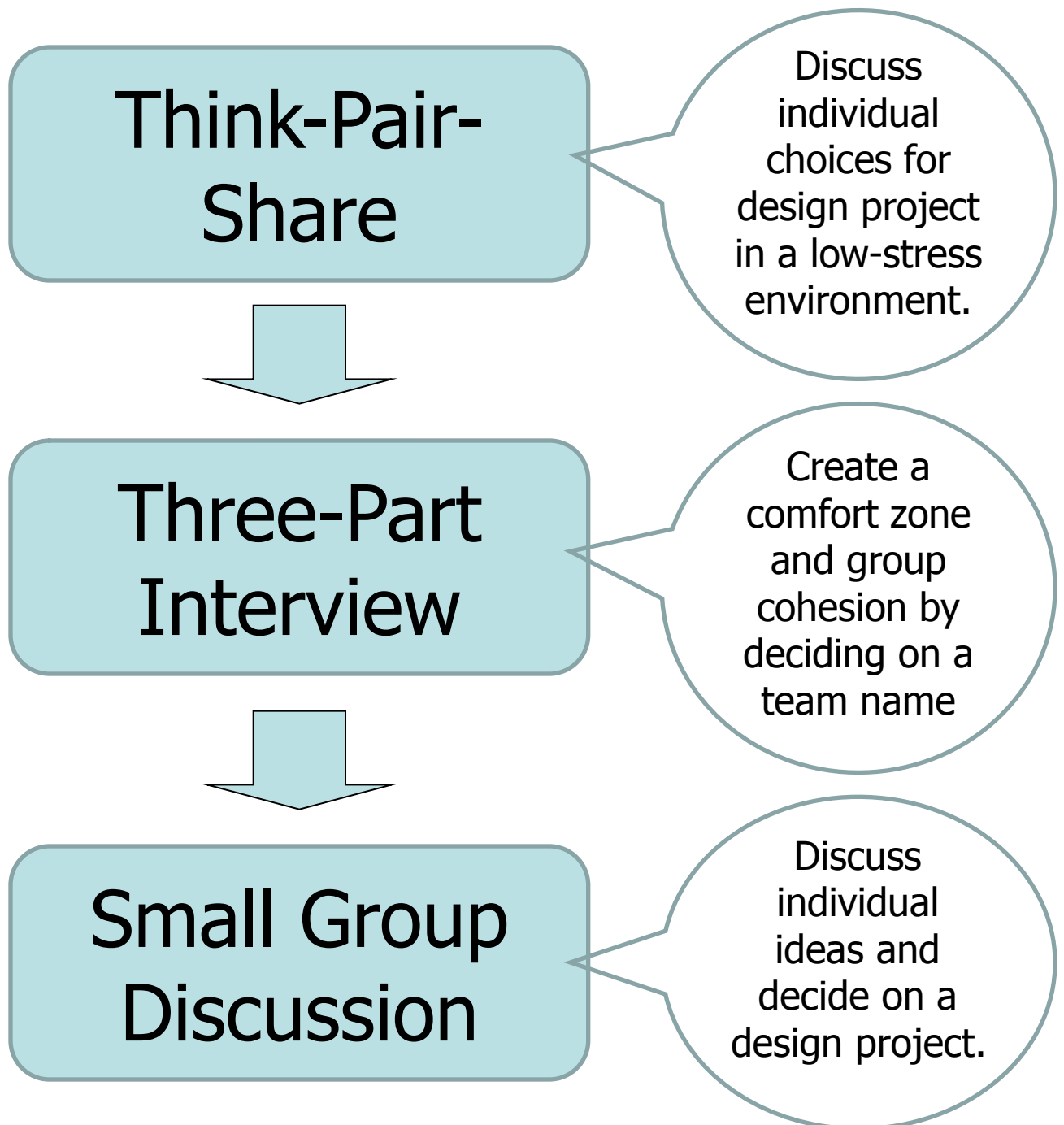
Context Specific Principles

Five principles were developed out of the literature on collaborative learning:

1) Creating an atmosphere where students feel comfortable being in and contributing to their groups will encourage interaction, use of English and better cooperation among group members.

2) Working on a project related to their major will help the students learn by taking their attention off language and putting it on contextualized content that is interesting and relevant to them.

3) The structure of the activities will help increase interaction as well provide support for the student in their project. Structured collaboration will create better interaction in the pair-work and group tasks. Moving from this structured collaboration to the 'ill-structured problem' of the group project task will set-up the problem and suggest procedures, and this will create better interaction in this task.

4) Working in a group will help the students engage in their own learning and provide opportunities for interaction that will lead to L2 development.

5) Interactions between members of the group will provide opportunities for peer scaffolding and other forms of positive interaction that will lead to L2 development.

All the principles are grounded in collaborative learning theory, but adapted to fit my context and purpose.

(6) Needs-Based Materials and Activities (Example 1)

Goal: members are a team, "working together in a coherent group." (Scrivener, 2012)
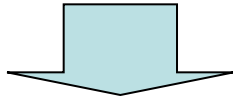
Think-Pair-Share

> Discuss individual choices for design project in a low-stress environment.

⬇

Three-Part Interview

> Create a comfort zone and group cohesion by deciding on a team name

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Small Group Discussion

> Discuss individual ideas and decide on a design project.

Needs-Based Materials and Activities (Example 2)

Goal: Plan the layout of the design.

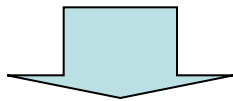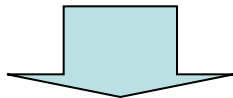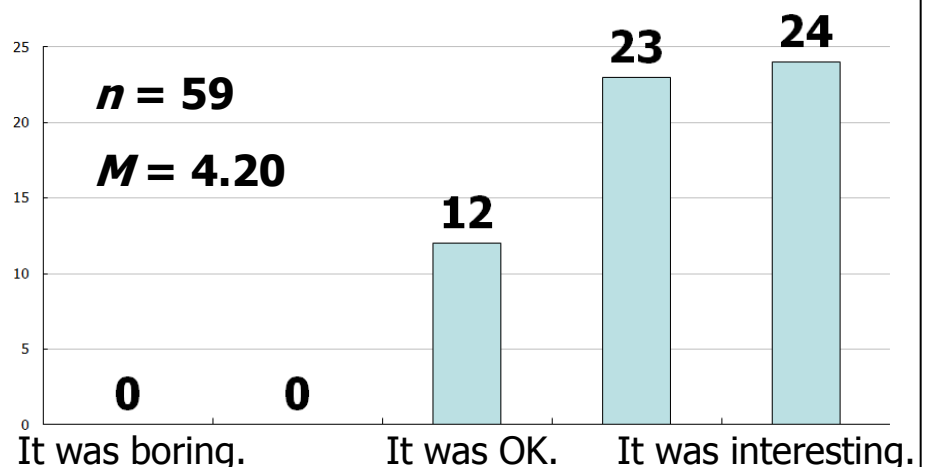|	
Pair Shapes	Structured collaborative task to review prepositions
Draw my House	Structured collaborative task to practice locations
Jigsaw Activity	Members piece together the layout of an example design
Small Group Discussion	Discuss individual ideas and decide on a design project.

Classroom Observation Student Survey Results

These survey questions were based on the context specific principles and aimed at getting the students' point of view on the materials and activities used in the class.

Did today's class help you to enjoy working with your group?

$n = 39$

$M = 3.95$

No, not at all.		It helped some.		Yes, a lot.
0	1	11	16	11
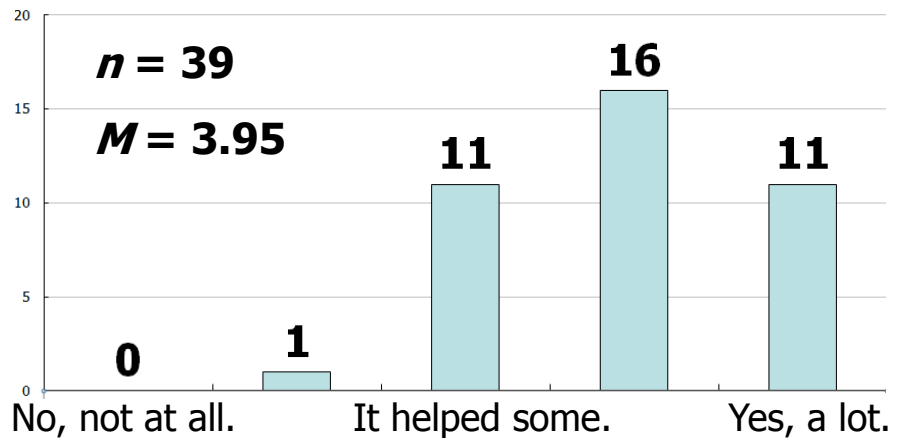
Was the design project interesting or boring?

$n = 59$

$M = 4.20$

It was boring.		It was OK.		It was interesting.
0	0	12	23	24

Did working on the project help you to learn English?

$n = 60$

$M = 3.78$

No, not at all.		It helped some.		Yes, a lot.
1	2	21	21	15
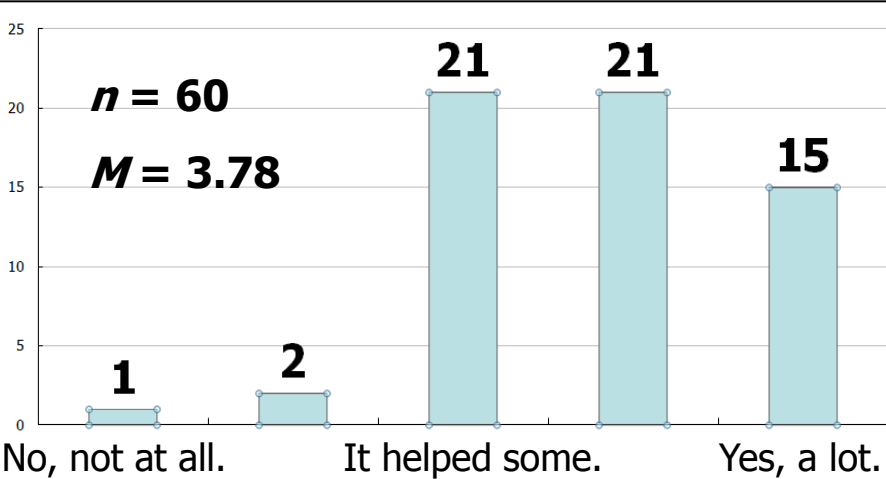
Did the pair work and group activities we did help you do your project?

$n = 60$

$M = 3.97$

No, not at all.		They helped some.		Yes, a lot.
0	2	17	22	19
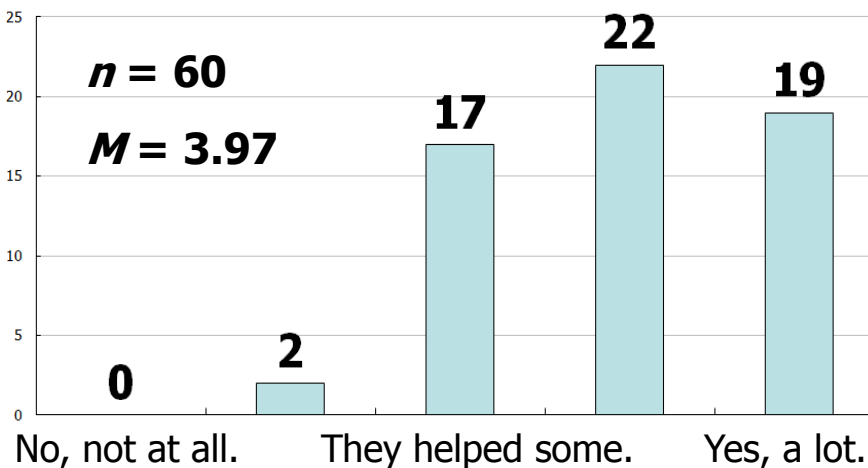
Did working in a group help you to learn English?

$n = 60$

$M = 3.95$

No, not at all.		It helped some.		Yes, a lot.
0	1	18	24	17
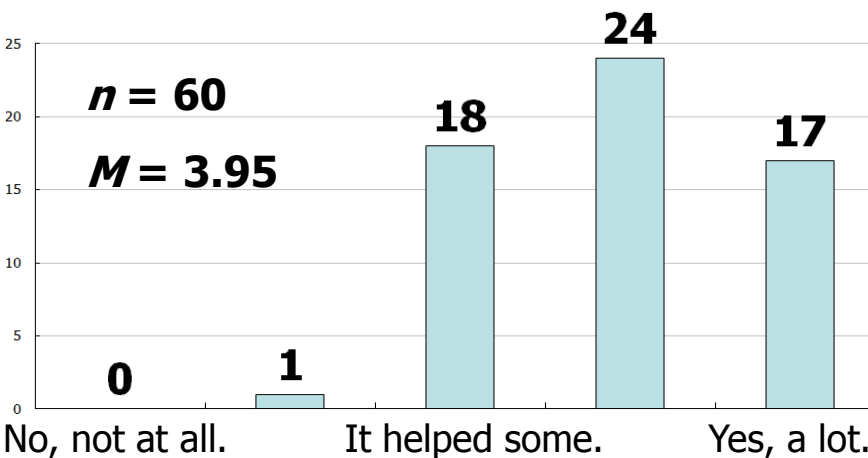
Did talking with the members of you group help you to learn English?

$n = 60$

$M = 3.87$

No, not at all.		It helped some.		Yes, a lot.
1	1	17	27	14
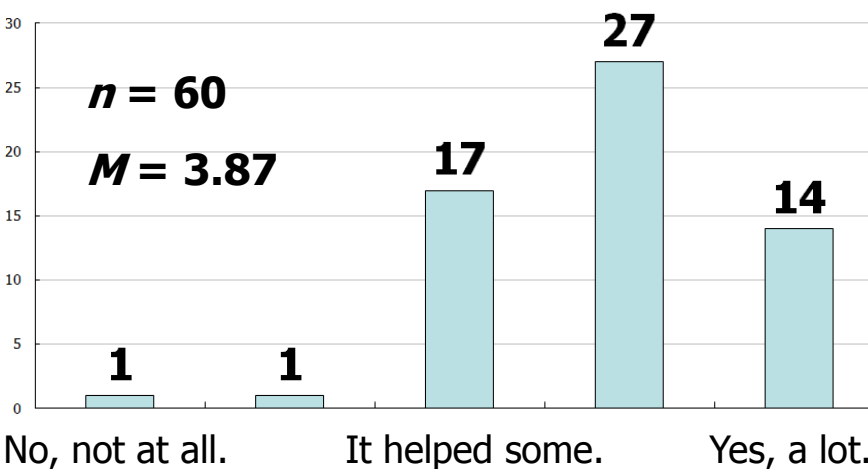
(8)
Conclusion:

Using theory based principles to design a collaborative learning environment led to greater interaction and cooperation among group members as well as higher levels of engagement and a better learning experience overall.

It also allowed me to see more distinctly how the techniques and materials I designed were affecting student learning, giving me clearer perception of classroom events.

Thank you!

References:

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