



On 13 February 1999, CDTL organised a seminar entitled, "*Small Group Work: Are We Doing All Right?*", that was led by Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Chong Chi Tat. In this issue of *CDTL Brief*, we are pleased to bring you the following summary of Professor Chong's speech and the subsequent Q & A session.

Small Group Work: Are We Doing All Right?

Professor Chong Chi Tat
Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Small group teaching is a long-standing issue in NUS that many feel has not yet been resolved. I don't pretend to have the answer here today and I don't expect we'll have all the answers by the end of the session here. My role here is to generate discussion. Most would agree that small group teaching needs to be further promoted in NUS. But somehow we have not quite succeeded in its implementation. There are five factors to consider:

1) Asian culture. Our students are not keen or trained to speak up. Most prefer to just stay quiet, let other people take the limelight, and be modest. When Professor Joseph Nile, Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, was in Singapore recently, he gave a talk followed by a discussion to about thirty of our Talent Development Programme students, and he was disappointed by the lack of student participation. There were only one or two students who spoke and one of them was from New Zealand. Most stayed quiet. Was it modesty, humility, or just plain lack of interest? It is hard to tell. But it is a fact that our students prefer not to interact in a classroom situation. I'm sure many of you can recount experiences like this where your enthusiasm to teach has been dampened by the students' lack of participation.

2) Discipline dependent. There are subjects in the humanities where it is easier to express views and opinions. This does not mean that the subjects are less sophisticated, but only that they are probably closer to the hearts or daily experiences of people. For these we expect more students to be prepared to engage in discussions, even if the points are not well-thought out. In contrast, if you are in Mathematics (an area that I'm more familiar with), say a Calculus class, if a student doesn't understand the concept of limits, then it is very difficult for him to discuss the topic. An Engineering student needs to know some technical background before he can say how an electrical circuit should work. If he is unprepared, he has to keep quiet.

3) Student quality. If you have good students in your class, the class usually has (or at least has the potential to have) more life. It is more interesting to teach these students as they often ask intelligent questions. But the quality of students varies, from class to class and from discipline to discipline.

However, every annual survey that we do on the reading habits of NUS students tells us that our students do not have good reading habits. Not enough are interested in current affairs. Most spend time reading lecture notes. And this is true across disciplines, and does not apparently seem to depend on the quality of students.

How is this behaviour reflected in the lack of participation in small group teaching? Because you are less informed, less interested in things other than those that will lead to the award of a degree, you are less inclined to think beyond examinations. The mind becomes dull.

4) Lecturers' attitudes. I think lecturers should encourage students to participate in discussions. However this does not always work. When I was teaching a First Year tutorial class of about 25 students in Mathematics, I wanted the students to take part in discussion. So I assigned students a week ahead of time to go to the board and give the solutions and lead discussions. Within two weeks, the size of my class shrunk by half. The students went to other classes whose lecturers were certainly friendlier. Obviously my approach was unpopular.

Now some people give up when seeing this. Some don't. Some people say, "Well, you have tried, but students' response is not really very good. If you're not careful, you may receive a very bad grading at the end of the semester." And students will say, "This lecturer can't teach. In fact, he made us do things that he should be doing himself." I think some lecturers worry about that. But as lecturers, we should take the initiative to get students to do what we think is right. If we give up, then small group teaching would fail. It's either you follow what students want to do, or you make them do what you want them to do, i.e. to think. This leads to a lot of frustration. Unless we break this vicious circle, we will be in this kind of situation for a long, long time.

5) Space/timetable problem. If we want small group teaching, we will need classrooms and a good timetable. But many people have pointed out that there are not enough classrooms. By definition, a small group, I suppose, has less than 20 students. If you do that, students should then be in smaller classes. Therefore in theory, lecturers' workload would go up. You need to find a place to house these small

groups of students, as well as the time and lecturers available. These are operational issues. Some staff offices in various departments are able to accommodate 6 to 8 students, 10 if you squeeze really hard. But of course, no office can take in 20 students. Maybe that's good – some people have observed that if you're in a really small group of 5 or 6 students, everyone will be forced to speak because people will take notice of the ones who don't. Unless of course everybody's quiet, then you will have a quiet one-hour session looking at one another.

Related issues: recognition. There are other related problems: e.g. people worry about student rating, feedback etc. They wonder whether the extra effort put into small group teaching will be properly rewarded and recognised – promotion, salary adjustment etc. To many people these ought to be linked somehow. I think this is fair. If we want to encourage good teaching, we should give good teachers the proper recognition. Then, the next delicate question people want answered is what is the relative weight between teaching and research. Clearly, we want both. The person has to be good in both, and hopefully also good in administration. We want everybody to be perfect, but the world is not perfect. It's difficult for us for example at this point to say that the weight given to teaching will be 50.5%, and then research will be 49.5% or something like that. It is difficult to give a quantitative value to this kind of thing. But I would like to say that independent of recognition or rewards, it is our duty as teachers in the university to do the best we can. We have the responsibility to educate our students to be creative. Indeed we have to be true to the profession of scholarship to which we have dedicated our lives.

The need for peer review. Nevertheless, the university has already given recognition to people known to be good teachers, e.g. the Teaching Awards. But some have pointed out that winning the Teaching Award is not necessarily a true reflection of good teaching, that it is a popularity contest. I

absolutely agree that to depend solely on student feedback to give teaching awards is not right. It has to be balanced with the review of lecturers' teaching by colleagues. It's vital that lecturers don't just pander to students' wishes for recipe-type teaching. We don't want this – which is why peer review is important.

Small group teaching vs. large student population.

I have digressed from the key issue of small group teaching. But I hope you have some idea of the complex issues that surround this topic. I think there is a task force on small group teaching with representatives from faculties. What we want to do is first bring the concept of small group teaching to the awareness of our colleagues in NUS. It is a contradiction in terms – we have close to 20,000 students now on campus. Many classes are big classes. We have lecture theatres that can take in 500, 600 students. We have seminar rooms in the new Engineering block that can hold 50 to 60 people – hardly what one would call small group teaching. Yet here we are discussing the need to achieve small group teaching as if we are unaware of what's happening outside. So how do we strike a compromise between these 2 contending forces?

Clearly, small group teaching is preferable. It is the better way of teaching if we want to give more than just a piece of paper to our students at the end of three, four or five years. We want our graduates to get more than just a job. If we are serious about life-long education, we should get students to understand that acquiring a skill is not as important as acquiring a habit of life-long learning. A skill is outdated before long. A habit of learning will allow him to continue to update himself, to be always relevant and able to adapt to changes. If that is the objective we want to achieve, then small group teaching is indeed a very urgent matter that we should look into very seriously. We will then have to see how we can resolve this in the face of large classes and large number of students. ■

Q & A

Chong Chi Tat (CCT): You were suggesting getting new students to come in for some kind of orientation on learning in a university environment. For how long?

Participant: For a day.

CCT: A day – we can certainly look into that. Of course one day will not change a person. But at least they will be informed of what's expected of them. But subsequently, there is a need for constant reminder through action or lecturers' teaching. That attitudinal change has got to be there. When we implement a new university admission system in about 2½ years' time, I believe it will have an impact on the way students learn and are taught in junior college and secondary school. So even if we don't see an immediate change, in a generation, there's light at the end of the tunnel. But a one-day seminar is something that we can think about. I remember CDTL had previously prepared a brochure for students on how to learn...

Daphne Pan (DP), CDTL Director: We still have that. We were hoping that this will be promoted at faculty level, that at the orientation, students will be alerted to the fact. But if not much is really going to happen in a day, the idea really is to spell out the rules of game, so they are aware of our expectations of them at the university.

Participant: The way we assess our students – if we don't emphasise their participation in small group tutorial, there's no way we can get all of them to participate. We ought to have a penalty system to prevent them from keeping quiet throughout the whole semester.

CCT: That can be done and has been done in many courses as part of a student's continuous assessment. Instead of quizzes for example, lecturers rate students' participation in tutorials and give marks accordingly. If you tell students that continuous assessment will be 40, 50% of the final grade, they take it more seriously. It's up to each lecturer. We now encourage continuous assessment in as many courses as possible to glean the student's level of understanding of the course from tutorial participation. A lot depends on what you do with the students when you ask them to take part, depending on the nature of the course. In a Maths course, I asked a student to

give solutions on the blackboard. Later on I found out he had copied from his friend. But he participated – he went to the blackboard. The only thing is he had difficulty explaining the solution. When you want a student to participate, you need to look into how to evaluate whether the student understands and really did his work. I believe the lecturer should have a lot of liberty in deciding how and what to measure.

Participant: There should be even more flexibility for lecturers than what we have now to determine what percentage goes to participation, quizzes, or to small group work within the schedule.

CCT: But aren't you given that flexibility? Actually, we don't really mind. We believe in this matter the lecturer-in-charge knows best and should have the liberty to decide on the award of points. When I was Head of the Department of Information Systems and Computer Science, I interfered very little with how lecturers tested their students, except for insisting that moderation of exam papers be done. Lecturers were expected to do their best in teaching. Beyond that, they had complete freedom in deciding how many questions to set, the percentage of continual assessment, and the mode of examination. Bearing in mind that different subjects have different requirements, and different lecturers have different preferences, the department or faculty should not dictate, for example, that every exam paper shall have 5 questions, 3 of which are to be compulsory, 2 are optional and every one shall have 17.5 points.

DP: May I say something to clarify? There're policies governing weightage – there're very different practices in different faculties. We've the impression that certain things are sacred...

CCT: Society changes – nowadays many things are no longer sacred. Certainly in examination matters lecturers-in-charge should have a big say in how their students are to be examined. But when they do this, it will be important to bear in mind one of the objectives of a university education is to produce thinking people. Approval has been given to courses for 100% continuous assessment. There's a general guideline that a course shouldn't have more than 40% continuous assessment. But the Senate has the power to grant deviation from this guideline. Departments just have to submit a recommendation for waiver to the Senate that continuous assessment be given X percentage for a particular course. The merits of the recommendation will be considered.

Participant: To make the students participate, it depends most importantly on the teacher's own attitude to the student. Does he classify the student as good or bad? Does he classify the questions that come as good or bad? I guess the goal of small group teaching is how do you make the student speak?

CCT: Obviously we feel that if a student speaks up and asks questions, it's good for the student. Confucius said thousands of years ago that if you know what you know, and you know what you don't know, then you really know. Many of us, including students, do not have this attitude – it's a loss of face to declare your ignorance. It's difficult to change the culture, but we have to continue our efforts in making sure students see the light while they are here studying in the university.

Participant from Mathematics: Continuous assessment is a productive way to increase participation; but we must also be aware of its problems. One was mentioned by Prof Chong – in which people copy their friends' solutions and present it on the board. How much does that count? Personally, I often do the problems myself on the board, and while I'm doing it, I go along the rows, ask questions: why am I doing this, what should I do next etc. I think this is more productive than having somebody do something on the board without explanation. So there are the questions of how to assess; subjectivity; and if continuous assessment is emphasised too much, does it create such pressure in class that people don't dare speak up?

There is also the gender issue. Last semester, I taught a class with about 80% girls and looked at the continuous assessment of my tutors: it was clear the guys were getting significantly better scores on their CA components than the girls. Yet at the start of the semester, I did a survey on my students and knew statistically that the girls actually had higher A-level Maths scores than the boys. So there isn't any clear reason why the boys should get higher scores. I had 3 tutors, 2 of whom were girls – the female tutors especially were giving very high grades.

What are we trying to do in tutorial? I aim to ensure that everybody says something at least two, three times during a class, depending on the class size. I do that by asking very easy questions row by row and I will help them along so that being silent is going to be a loss of face. But really, can we get some active learning done during lectures? I do try: sometimes I start with mini-quizzes; then I ask them to swap with the person next to them and mark it. However, their performances are all so different. I also give little handouts on the first day of class, an academic orientation found on my web page too. I try to teach them that how well you perform at university depends a lot on whether you quickly realise this isn't JC anymore.

CCT: Well, I didn't mention this gender factor. According to your survey it's a big difference. Maybe it's discipline-based? Would Arts & Social Science people care to comment on this?

Participant from Arts: The gender difference probably depends on the discipline because in Arts, overwhelming majority are women. If the women don't talk, you actually have silence. On encouraging the students to speak, we should take care not to trivialise speech in small group setting. By allowing people to say a few words, are we really achieving the aims in small group teaching? The attitude of lecturers is also critical. In Arts Faculty, my colleagues often teach ten hours of tutorial a week. We can tire out when we go into a session, nothing happens and we've to dictate the whole fifty minutes, ten times a week. Eventually it's a Catch-22 situation where the lecturer is discouraged, the tutorial becomes unpleasant for the students, and they come to dread the tutorials. But one good thing that I've learnt since I've been teaching here from Daphne during teaching orientation – if the task of the tutorial is set right, you can go straight away from information dissemination towards critical digestion of facts. Then each tutorial becomes a new session, depending on the group dynamics. This way, I can move along the week looking forward to seeing different groups of students and learning from their discussion of lecture material.

Participant from Biochemistry: I came to NUS having taught in London and California at Davis. What worried me coming to NUS was the concept that if you want the student to know something, you have to lecture on it and supply lecture notes. With the growth of computer-based learning, we're actually going to tell the students: a lot of information will not be taught in formal lectures, the information and your self-assessment is on the web, you do multiple choice questions on the computer. You prepare yourself and then you come for small group learning. This automatically helps to improve the status of small group learning in the students' minds. In London, we have a scheme now where we give topics to second and final year students that they research themselves and are examined on it. We are trying to build that up and get away from formal lecture structures. It's proving painful, as students don't want you to do that. But they go away and do it because they are examined on it. Then they come to the small group tutorials with real points that you have to explore with them.

CCT: The two previous comments are related: you want students to be really discussing issues in tutorials, and not just talking because there is continuous assessment. So for a productive tutorial, you expect students to be prepared when they come in. The final objective of small group teaching is that you facilitate active learning. Students learn from one another and the lecturer. Even lecturers, as mentioned, can benefit from student discussion. With the proliferation of information technology, we certainly encourage lecturers to get students to do their own reading on the web or whatever, so that more focus can be given to small group teaching. This is why we launched this live TV multi-cast on campus so that large classes that do not benefit from close interaction between lecturers and students can be replaced by lectures-on-demand. Then students who need factual information can get it from there, while at the same time, read a lot and attend small group tutorials where they can learn the most. After watching the programme on the computer, if they have issues that they want to raise, they can go to tutorials and then ask their questions and contribute their ideas. So IT can be a very powerful tool if we use it correctly. But at the same time, we don't want to become a distance-learning campus where everything is done through IT.

Participant from Architecture: I want to share this idea of small and larger group – we divide students into a number of groups, I set them all different problems, they go away to prepare. We eventually get together at the year's end when all the groups make their presentations. Through this exercise, everyone learns. Of course all this is backed up by lectures. Because they've done some background work, they're more able to contribute. Even then, it takes a bit more to get them going by asking them questions about their presentation. At least you get a kind of dialogue going, and through it, a kind of learning that benefits both the group and the whole year. We've a lot of small group teaching in Architecture – so I wonder if everything has to be tied up with the carrot and the stick. Must you always say this is evaluated, this is given a weightage, to motivate them to contribute?

Participant from Computing: When getting people to speak up in a small group situation, should we concentrate on those who are naturally shy, who may have good ideas but

are afraid to speak up? If we get these people to speak up, maybe the rest will also join in. Does anyone have any experience with this?

Participant from Chemical Engineering: Is making students speak the objective of small group teaching, or something else? To me, the purpose is to make them think, more than what you can achieve in a big lecture setting. If you really want them to speak, then teach them the art of speaking. The important thing is to ask questions and reply to questions, essentially drawing their attention to the finer details of whatever we convey in lectures, to make them think continuously and crystallise their understanding.

CCT: Of course the ultimate objective of small group teaching is to get students to think and learn. To achieve that, you need interaction. It will be difficult to gauge the level of understanding that the student has acquired from attending lectures unless he is able to ask questions, answer questions and comment on what others say. Maybe through quizzes and small examinations he gets straight A's so that you know he is a very good student, but if he keeps quiet himself throughout you may not even be aware of his presence. However, I look at the broader picture of a student's future. When a quiet person like that joins the job market, can he interact effectively with society? He cannot be an island all by himself. So to participate in discussions is also a form of training in communication – how to interact with people, listen, react, express ideas, function more effectively with superiors and colleagues. The worst is to have a quiet colleague who doesn't let you know his thoughts. If you ask him an engineering question, I suppose he'll just write down the answer – 35.6 m, that's it. That won't be a very effective worker. So I think communication skill is useful as a tool for societal interaction.

Participant from Centre for English Language Communication (CELC): I teach communication at Engineering Faculty and students should participate in order to learn and to communicate. Over the years we've asked our students why they have so much difficulty with saying their thoughts. They often answer: this subject is not given the same recognition as other courses, e.g. only like 1.5 marginal credits, so they don't care so much and therefore just do the minimum. It's also a matter of attitude. While the lecturers support this participation, they don't see the faculty actively endorsing this skill. In the first lecture on communication at Temasek Poly, the Dean actually talks to the students about how important communication is. So can we have more endorsement for this need to participate from higher authorities?

CCT: This was suggested just now by Dr Chee Yam San: at the beginning of every year, devote a day when the Dean, or Head of Department, has a session with new students to make them understand this point. Again constant reminder on the purpose of education will be useful.

Participant/Dentistry Dean: Although the general objective of tutorials is there, different faculties have different reasons. We know what we want to achieve, but do the students actually know what they should achieve? Are we preparing them in tutorial to pass exams, or are you actually preparing them to think on their own? If you ask them that

question, there are no answers. In other faculties, if they are unprepared and know nothing about the subject they're being taught, they will only fail the exams. But the consequence for us is not just failing the exams. All my students in their third year are actually treating patients – they must know how to manage the patient. It is very critical. Some of us here want students to speak up because you want to communicate. But for us, we want them to obtain knowledge and critical-think through the whole process of patient management.

Participant from Engineering: In Engineering, the problem is critical, but not as immediate as Dentistry. An Engineering student should be able to participate in discussion. However, can he understand the concepts? Does he understand how a conductor amplifier works, what it does? The tutorial then becomes an opportunity for the tutor to clarify these concepts.

Participant from CELC: I teach communications at the School of Computing. Because ours is an application-based course, our tutorials are based on the assignments that are related to the lectures. We do a lot of group work with the students. If I just go in and ask for comments, most times the students are quiet. But after they've done their group work, they tend to have more views to share. Perhaps this is something that we can promote.

Participant from Dentistry: I don't know what the university definition of a small group is. For me, 6 or 10 is small group. But for you it might not be. When we're talking about things like that, it's not coming from a common place. I think in a big group, you may miss some people in there when you're discussing things; they get away with it because they are such a big group. Whereas in a small group, if you don't talk, my eyes are there looking at you.

CCT: Small group ideally should be 1:1. Unfortunately things are not ideal. When I mentioned 25, it's clearly undesirable. What we could do, because of the lack of space, is to have tutorial classes conducted in staff offices, which means 6 to 8 at most. But there are operational issues involved. If you have a course with 500, 600 students taking it, how many tutorial classes do you need to conduct to cope? We need to think about these practical problems carefully. So 25, 30 is an unsatisfactory compromise – I would be the first to agree.

Participant from Science: For maths students, class size doesn't matter. There are many ways to conduct meaningful tutorials whether you are in a big or small group. It's an art. When we talk about communication, the relationship is also vital. If I care for the students, they will know that I care for them and want them to learn, then they will respond. So we should build up the relationship in tutorial groups. We should know their names, call them by name and get to know them so as to draw them out, and bring out the passion in them to learn.

Participant: I agree. What other possibilities are there to draw students out? People are usually very responsive if the whole exercise is made exciting. You talk to a group of people – if you know exactly what he likes, and you talk about that topic, this makes his day, he can really give you a good tutorial. And I've tried many things in a tutorial. Sometimes, I tell the student that I'm going to bring my

brain into your brain. So let's start off with that new problem on the board. I ask him, at every second, what am I thinking now? What am I going to do? At times I make a mistake, re-correct myself, do it this way and finally get the solution. Then he can see the thinking process. This kind of tutorial is not easy to carry out by novice staff members, because you've to be ready for anything. So SGT involves critical thinking, good students, excellent teachers who can perform such tasks.

Student participation very much hinges on how the tutor conducts himself. I can attend a lecture, one, two hours, and still be awake if the lecturer is really exciting. Some people speak for half an hour, they repeat themselves and I switch off. It's not a matter of time – it's the dynamics. Size also becomes irrelevant if you can lecture to 250 people and 3 people (which I've done before). How do you flow with the people, grab their attention, make it exciting for 3 to 250 people? Of course smaller size you get closer attention. But it's not the only thing. If you have a big size, you have 6 people in front, continually participating with you, the others as observer. And next week, we do the same, just rotate it. You can do all kinds of novel ways of tackling this big area, and yet getting participation. Besides that, you must have quality lecturers; otherwise, this whole thing collapses.

Participant from Architecture: We do a lot of small group tutoring. When we take the students to very exciting buildings downtown, we do so to make students understand what goes behind the mind of the building's architect as a vehicle for their own personal design method, and understand everything from building systems to architectural control concepts. This doesn't seem to be too problematic, until you get the traffic noise, the rain, and interested strangers who think you are a tourist guide. The thing about teaching architecture students – we can impart knowledge, understanding, critical thinking wonderfully – the students can speak very well, but they cannot translate a concept into form, synthesise a solution, and relate space, form and idea. To do that, we have studio groups that range from 5 final year students to 20 first year students. Size does matter when each student has very different levels of ability and perception. Then it's a 1:1 to cue in to know what each is able to do and what he needs to understand more. If you do that, it's a lot of time. I find that from a 1:1, 1 architect tutor to 9 students, you can get quality stuff. Anything beyond that is a struggle.

Participant from Science: Besides tutorials, other opportunities for small group interaction should occur. Tutorials are useful, but there are limits because of constraints, facilities. Even the 1-hour slot, and effectively you know it's only 40, 45 minutes – because we give them time to rush off to another session, and sometimes they are also late from the previous one. How much can you do? So we have to promote more interaction outside of tutorials. There should be some flexibility, whether I have a once-a-week tutorial or I actually have it once a fortnight with each tutorial being one-and-a-half hours. I'm also wondering with the core curriculum and the new admission requirements coming in, how will things change?

CCT: Not necessarily. I think with Core Curriculum, yes. With the rest, probably not, because our student population

is about 20,000 and still increasing. It's unlikely that we will be able, for example, to do away with large lecture theatres, large groups of students taking courses, and replace them with small group teaching. Let's say even with 25 per group, the number of staff members you need to increase to meet that demand is going to be tremendous, 30, 40% over current figures I think. If we increase the number suddenly, the quality of teaching staff will go down – which we must avoid at all costs. In fact the quality of teaching staff has to improve. So because of that, a huge increase in the number is unlikely, at least not immediately. We'll probably have to start with the model of many state universities in the US and see how it can be modified. If you look at Berkeley, it has more than 30,000 undergraduate students, and maybe 10,000, 12,000 graduate students who teach a lot of its lower level undergraduate courses.

Core Curriculum, however, is different. It will be a special programme, catering to a relatively small number of students, maybe 1000. With 1000 students, I think we can cope with small group teaching for Core Curriculum. But if we are talking about 20,000 students, all taught in the way that Core Curriculum will do, then the pressure on the teaching staff will be too great to handle. So we will probably have to take in more graduate students and then get CDTL to train these students on the art of teaching. Of course it is a tremendous task. We know many people have voiced complaints on how professors at big state universities teach. Many of them teach only upper level undergraduate or graduate level courses and forget about the freshmen, and leave the teaching to the graduate assistants who do a marvellously bad job – maybe language problem, lack of experience etc. We will have to tackle that. To be realistic, there does not seem to me to be other ways. At this point, we're talking about upgrading the quality of the university, competing in the first league. To do that, the first step is to keep on increasing the quality of the teaching staff. You cannot have size and quality – very difficult.

Participant: Can I just add to that? I think small group learning or teaching is a means to get students into that kind of learning mode that to us at the university is important. Basically, we're worried about students not being able to get into that learning mode. So maybe at the First Year level, more resources and energy should be devoted to make them unlearn old habits and get them into that kind of learning mode you desire. Then once we get that going, then in the Second, Third Year onwards, they would have been used to that stuff and we can lessen off. So we don't have to have the same amount of resources for every year.

CCT: I think it is a good point. Actually, some universities make it a policy that the best teachers shall teach the first year students. This is something we ought to do here as well. In other words, get students set in the right direction from the first day they enter university, give them a pep talk, right? And then second day, it's small group teaching etc. I think currently many upper level courses, the honours level for Science and Arts Faculties, are already conducted in small groups. But the question is, suppose we concentrate our energy on the First Year, what do we do with the subsequent years? Do we just say that OK, after that, you just do whatever you want to do? Will the culture that the students acquire in the First Year, somehow dissipate from Second Year onwards? By the time they graduate, they're back to square one – the whole purpose is then defeated. So ideally we want small group teaching in as many years as possible. Can we achieve this? Maybe not for every course, but hopefully, for a sufficient number courses, the core of courses, we can do that – I think it will be good.

Participant from CELC: Something discussed a lot in big universities like Harvard and Princeton is that the teaching of writing across the curriculum as writing is not just the prerogative of the English Department. It's a means to learning, to discovering new ideas, for students to learn to organise ideas and put it into his own words. Now CELC has been associated mainly with small group teaching all along. One of the methods that my colleagues and I have found effective in small group teaching is the use of Dialogue Journal, which is especially good for quiet students. After each small group session, they go back and reflect on the teaching; they either discuss their impressions or write them down in the Dialogue Journal. Through this writing, the ability of the students to write, to organise ideas, and to think improves. The rapport between the teacher and the students also becomes very close. They are then more forthcoming in the discussions because they feel that the teacher knows exactly where their strengths and weaknesses are. ■



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