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English teaching methods

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AS GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTING A LEARNER-ORIENTED TEACHING

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Key words: cooperative learning, learner-oriented teaching, teacher-oriented teaching, academic content, interaction, communicative language teaching, individual accountability, team members, pair discussions, intergroup relations, educational research, academic achievement results, collective teaching experience, peer review and evaluations, cooperative learning strategies.

Ключевые слова: групповое обучение, принцип личностной направленности, принцип коллективного взаимодействия, коммуникативный подход, обсуждение парами,

Բանալի բառեր: համատեղ ուսուցում, աշակերտակենտրոն ուսուցում, ուսուցչակենտրոն ուսուցում, գիտուսուցման ծավալ, հաղորդակցում, լեզվի հաղորդակցական ուսուցում, անհատական պատասխանատվություն, թիմի անդամներ, քննարկումներ գույգերով, միջխմբային հարաբերություններ, կրթական հետազոտություն, գիտաուսուցման արդյունքներ, միատեղ ուսուցման փորձ, վերանայում և գնահատում համադասարանցիների կողմից, համագործակցային ուսուցման մարտավարություն:

Դ. Պետրոսյան

Համագործակցային ուսուցումը որպես ուղեցույց աշակերտների ուսուցման համար

Սույն հոդվածում քննարկվում և ներկայացվում են տարբեր հեղինակների մոտեցումներ դասապրոցեսում համատեղ ուսուցման կարևորության մասին: Հոդվածում կրկին անգամ շեշտվում է անգլերենի ուսուցչի կողմից աշակերտ/աշակերտ, ուսանող/ուսանող փոխադարձ կապի կազմակերպման անհրաժեշտությունը: Այն նույնպես կարող է խթան հանդիսանալ ուսման որակի բարձրացմանը, նյութի ավելի լավ տիրապետմանը: Համատեղ ուսուցումը հնարավորություն է տալիս կենտրոնանալ լեզվի վրա և ոչ թե նրա ձևի կամ տեքստի՝ զարգացնելով դատողական մոտեցում, որն ապահովում է աշակերտի ինքնուրույնությունը, փոխարեն նրա կախվածությանը ուսուցչից:

Д.Петросян

Обучение в сотрудничестве как руководство по осуществлению личностно-ориентированного обучения

Практическая реализация коммуникативного подхода к развитию умений и навыков иноязычного общения вытекает из таких основополагающих принципов данного подхода обучения, как принцип личностной направленности обучения (personal involvement), и принцип коллективного взаимодействия обучаемых в процессе учебной деятельности (interaction). Организация работы небольшими группами даёт хороший эффект, так как общение осуществляется более непринужденно. Кроме того, воспитывается чувство коллективизма, ответственности, развивается способность сориентироваться в создавшейся ситуации. Постепенно исчезает боязнь говорить у учащихся, которые ранее испытывали робость, неуверенность в себе, застенчивость. А главное – групповая работа учит учащихся самостоятельности.

It is our task here to present some considerations concerning cooperative learning hold by various authors due to which cooperative arrangements are found superior to either competitive or individualistic structures. The information regarding cooperative learning would appear to be a necessary accomplishment for a teacher of English (at what-ever-sort of school he/she may be teaching) who acts to ensure and facilitate student –student interaction. Cooperative learning suggests possible activities focusing on the “whole language” and not only on form and text, as well as developing critical thinking which entails learner-autonomy instead of learner-dependence and teacher-centered learning instead of learner-oriented.

Cooperative learning methods which refer to methods teachers use to organize students into small groups, in which students work together to help one another learn academic content, are extensively researched, and under certain well-specified conditions they are known to substantially improve student's achievement in most subjects and grade levels.

Unlike individual learning, which can be competitive in nature, students learning cooperatively capitalize on one another's resources and skills (asking one another for information, evaluating one another's ideas,

monitoring one another's work, etc.). Yet, from the works of some researchers it may be concluded that the structured forms of cooperative learning that have proven to be effective are not used as often as other forms. Further, there remain considerable debates about the theoretical basis for achievement outcomes of cooperative learning. Furthermore, the teacher's role changes from giving information to facilitating students' learning.

A few words may not be out of place here concerning reports and views on cooperative learning held by various authors in terms of its: historical development, concept, basic elements, the role of teacher and students in accordance with its strategy and advantages. There have been hundreds of studies of cooperative learning focusing on a wide variety of outcomes, including academic achievement in many subjects, second language learning, attendance, behaviour, intergroup relations, social cohesion, acceptance of classmates with handicaps, attitudes toward subjects, and more.

Prior to World War II, social theorists such as Allport, Watson, Shaw, and Mead began establishing cooperative learning theory after finding that group work was more effective and efficient in quantity, quality, and overall productivity when compared to working alone. However, it wasn't until 1937 when researchers May and Doob found that people who cooperate and work together to achieve shared goals, were more successful in attaining outcomes, than those who strived independently to complete the same goals. Furthermore, they found that independent achievers had a greater likelihood of displaying competitive behaviours.¹

Philosophers and psychologists in the 1930s and 40's such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Morton Deutsch also influenced the cooperative learning theory practiced today. Dewey believed it was important that students develop knowledge and social skills that could be used outside of the classroom, and in the democratic society. This theory portrayed students as active recipients of knowledge by discussing information and answers in groups, engaging in the learning process together rather than being passive receivers of information e.g., teacher talking, students listening. Lewin's contributions to cooperative learning were based on the ideas of establishing relationships between group members in order to successfully carry out and achieve the learning goal. Deutsch's contribution to cooperative learning was positive social interdependence, the idea that the student is responsible for contributing to group knowledge.²

Since then, David and Roger Johnson have been actively contributing to the cooperative learning theory. In 1975, they identified that cooperative learning promoted mutual liking, better communication, high acceptance and support, as well as demonstrated an increase in a variety of thinking strategies among individuals in the group. Students who showed to be more competitive lacked in their interaction and trust with others, as well as in their emotional involvement with other students.³

Cooperative learning methods share the idea that students work together to learn and are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Student Team Learning methods also emphasize the use of team goals and team success, which can only be achieved if all members of the team learn the objectives being taught.

According to Slavin, three concepts are central to all Student Team Learning methods: team rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success. Using Student Team Learning techniques, teams earn certificates or other team rewards if they achieve above a designated criterion. Individual accountability means that the team's success depends on the individual learning of all team members. This focuses the activity of the team members on explaining concepts to one another and making sure that everyone in the team is ready for a quiz or other assessment that they will take without teammate help. Equal opportunities for success mean that students contribute to their teams by improving over their past performances. This ensures that high, average, and low achievers are equally challenged to do their best and that the contributions of all team members are valued.⁴

A word is necessary here about the role of teachers. The teacher's role for using cooperative learning to keep students more actively engaged intellectually entails having focused discussions and interspersing pair discussions throughout the lesson. Two important aspects of using cooperative learning groups are to make

¹ May, M. and Doob L. *Cooperation and Competition*. Social Sciences Research Council. New York: (1937), p.30-51.

² Deutsch, M. . *A theory of cooperation and competition*. Human Relations, 2, (1949), p.129-152.

³ Johnson, D., Johnson, R. *Learning together and alone, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning*. Needham Heights, MA: Prentice-Hall. (1994), p.114-175.

⁴ Slavin, Robert E. , *Research on cooperative learning and achievement: what we know, what we need to know: Contemporary Educational Psychology*, v. 21, 1996, p.43-69.

the task and the instructions explicit and precise and require the groups to produce a specific product (such as a written answer).

Teachers should ensure that students are seeking to reach an agreement on the answers to the questions (i.e., ensure positive goal interdependence is established), not just share their ideas with each other. Randomly two or three students should be chosen to give 30 second summaries of their discussions. Such individual accountability ensures that the pairs take the tasks seriously and check each other to ensure that both are prepared to answer. Periodically, the teacher should structure a discussion of how effectively the pairs are working together.

Cooperative learning ensures students are actively involved in understanding what is being presented. It also provides time for teachers to move around the class listening to what students are saying. Listening to student discussions can give instructors direction and insight into how well students understand the concepts and material being as well as increase the individual accountability of participating in the discussions

Cooperative learning methods vary widely in their details. Group sizes may be from two to several. Group members may have individual roles or tasks, or they may all have the same task. Groups may be evaluated or rewarded based on group performance or the average of individual performances, or they may simply be asked to work together.

In one form or another, cooperative learning has been used and studied in every major subject, with students from preschool to college, and in all types of schools. Cooperative learning is used at some level by hundreds of thousands of teachers. According to one national U.S. survey in the 1990s found many of elementary teachers and middle school teachers reported regularly use cooperative learning. Antil, Jenkins, Wayne, and Vadasy (1998) found of a sample of U.S. teachers reported using cooperative learning, with reporting daily use.¹

Nevertheless scholars mark that cooperative learning occupies a strange place in educational research and practice. On one hand, it is universally known and almost universally admired. Most researchers and educators have positive attitudes toward cooperative learning and believe it to be effective for many outcomes. Yet the forms of cooperative learning that have been found to be effective, especially for academic achievement outcomes, remain at the edge of practice, perhaps in a state of permanent innovation. That is, cooperative learning has never disappeared but has never become common practice.

There are suggested several developments that could cause cooperative learning to be more widely and effectively used. One is the movement toward evidence-based reform in education, in which government policies increasingly favor the use of programs and practices proven to be effective in rigorous evaluations.²

As scientists also mark a second possible factor in increasing use of cooperative learning could be advances in technology. To date, technology in schools has generally worked against cooperative learning by isolating students on individualized computers. However, the rise in the use of interactive whiteboards and other technological aids for whole-class and small-group lessons creates possibilities to enhance the use of cooperative learning. Teachers are increasingly using (or adapting) prepared lessons on their whiteboards, and these could build in support to teachers in using cooperative methods. For example, students could view a series of brief videos modeling cooperative learning skills, and then try them out in their groups right away.

It is considered that more research is needed on how and why cooperative learning works and how it may be made to work better. Much more needs to be known about specific means of helping students learn and use effective group work strategies and metacognitive learning strategies. Further explorations are needed to understand how and under what conditions group goals and individual accountability affect learning outcomes of cooperative learning. There is a need to develop approaches integrating cooperative learning activities with various types of technology, both classroom technologies such as interactive whiteboards, mentioned earlier, and traditional computers.³

The method, which was developed in USA, arose among other things out of concern that the traditional school was creating far too many losers, destroying the spontaneous joy of learning in many young people and failing to develop one of the most important things one will need in later life, i.e. the ability to cooperate with others. It can be used at all age levels, from kindergarten to university.

¹ Antil, L. R., Jenkins, J. R., Wayne, S., & Vadasy, P.F. Cooperative learning: Prevalence, conceptualizations, and the relation between research and practice. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35 (3), (1998), p. 419-454.

² Slavin, R. E. *Cooperative Learning*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. (1990), p.54-70.

³ Harris K., & Graham S. *Making the writing process work: Strategies for composition and self-regulation*. Cambridge, MA: brookline. (1996. p.23-83)

Cooperative learning has not been specially developed for foreign language teaching, but can be used with advantage in all subjects. The reason why the method is relevant for us as foreign language teachers is that - apart from everything else it can do - it is an excellent way of conducting communicative language teaching.

It is not much to say that the communicative approach is used differently in different teaching cultures. "Teaching culture" is the collective teaching experience, beliefs and practices, which are typical of a certain community or society. Communicative approach is not universally relevant for different teaching cultures. In many countries including local teaching languages are mainly taught in the typically teacher-fronted and teacher-centered classrooms. A typical lesson consists of the teachers checking the learners' sentence by sentence translations of a text. Students can be unwilling to ask questions during a communicative lesson because they do not want to interrupt other students or the teacher, it is better to ask after the lesson, etc. A lesson often includes homework check up, presentation of the new material and reinforcement of the new material. The teacher, who signals when a particular learner is invited to speak, will regulate learners' participation in the lesson.

Cooperative learning is based on a social-constructivist view of learning: One builds up one's own understanding of the world through communication. Via the formulation and re-formulation that often occurs in interaction the material becomes one's own in a way that it can never do if one simply 'receives' the material in the form the teacher or the text supplies it. One formulates, explains and negotiates one's way to an understanding of the material.

To ensure optimum opportunities for interaction, cooperative learning takes place in small teams, often of four students. This makes pair work possible within the team, and this face-to-face interaction is a very important element. It is recommended that the teams work together for a while and team-building exercises are used to induce a team spirit that contributes to motivating students to help each other.

When the group's task is to ensure that every group member learns something, it is in the interests of every group member to spend time explaining concepts to his or her group mates, and to ask group mates for explanations and help in understanding the topic of study. Studies of student behavior within cooperative groups have found that the students who gain most from cooperative work are those who give and receive elaborated explanations. In contrast, giving and receiving answers without explanations were negatively related to achievement gain. Group goals and individual accountability motivate students to give elaborated explanations and to take one another's learning seriously, instead of simply giving answers.¹

This way of teaching is believed to have many limitations that could cause the process to be more complicated than first perceived. Sharan describes the constant evolution of cooperative learning as a threat. Because cooperative learning is constantly changing, there is a possibility that teachers may become confused and lack complete understanding of the method.

Teachers implementing cooperative learning may also be challenged with resistance and hostility from students who believe that they are being held back by their slower teammates or by students who are less confident and feel that they are being ignored or demeaned by their team. In this connection that will be the task of the teacher to find and determine the right way to deal with them.²

Students often provide feedback in the success of the teamwork experienced during cooperative learning experiences. Peer review and evaluations may not reflect true experiences due to perceived competition among peers. A confidential evaluation process may help to increase evaluation strength.

There are a great number of cooperative learning techniques available. Some cooperative learning techniques utilize student pairing, while others utilize small groups of four or five students. Hundreds of techniques have been created into structures to use in any content area. There exists an opinion that among the easy to implement structures are Think-Pair-Share, Think-Pair-Write, variations of Round Robin, and the Reciprocal Teaching Technique. A well known cooperative learning technique is the Jigsaw which is thought by many teachers as the most effective and acceptable.

A number of numerous communicative language exercises suggested by various scholars are very close to cooperative learning in their construction and an English teacher can determine the most appropriate

¹ Slavin, R.E., & Madden, N.A. (Eds.), Stevens, R. J., Madden, N. A., Slavin, R. E., & Farnish, A. M. (1987). *Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition: Two field experiments. Reading Research Quarterly*, 22 (4), (2009) p. 433-454.

² Sharan, Y. *Cooperative Learning for Academic and Social Gains: valued pedagogy, problematic practice. European Journal of Education*, 45, (2), (2010), p. 300-313.

exercises with slight adaptations that best suit to his or her educational purposes and according to facilities provided.

Cooperative learning suggests possible activities focusing on the "whole language" and not only on form and text, as well as developing critical thinking which entails learner-autonomy instead of learner-dependence and teacher-centered learning instead of learner-oriented.

It need hardly be emphasized that without the cooperation of its members society cannot survive, and the society of man has survived because the cooperativeness of its members made survival possible. It was not an advantageous individual here and there who did so, but the group. In human societies the individuals who are most likely to survive are those who are best enabled to do so by their group.¹

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