Cooperative Learning and Interactive Techniques in Language Teaching

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This article briefly reviews key elements of cooperative learning and also presents some teaching skills such as working cooperatively in addition to creative thinking that can be introduced to the students to facilitate their language acquisition.

Cooperative learning is a teaching method that involves students working in teams to accomplish a common goal, under conditions that include the following elements: (Johnson and Smith, 1991)

1. **Positive interdependence:**
Team members are encouraged to rely on each other to achieve the goal. If any team members fail to do their part, everyone suffer the consequences.

2. **Individual accountability:**
All students in a group are held accountable for doing their share of the work to master all the material to be learned. The group is accountable for achieving its goals, and each member must be accountable in contributing a fair share of the work toward the group goal. The performance of each individual must be assessed and the results given back to the group.

3. **Face to face promotional interaction**.
This means that students promote each other's success by sharing resources. They help, support, encourage and praise each other's efforts to learn. Both, academic and personal supports are part of this common goal. Although some of the work may be parceled out and done individually, some of it must be done interactively, with the group. Members provide one another with feedback, challenging one another's conclusions and reasoning, and perhaps most importantly, teaching and encouraging one another. This means the group has a clear task or goal so everyone knows they sink or swim together. The efforts of each person benefit not only that individual, but everyone else in the group. The key to positive interdependence is having commitments made to personal success as well as the success of every member of the group.

4. **Appropriate use of collaborative skills**:
Students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision making, communication and conflict management skills. This means that each individual must develop team work skills to be able to function as part of a group. All members of a group must know how and be motivated to provide effective leadership, make decisions, build trust, communicate and manage conflict.

5. **Group processing.**
Team members set group goals, periodically assess what they are doing well as a team, and identify changes they will make to function more effectively in the future. They need to feel free to communicate openly with each other to express concern as well as to celebrate accomplishments. They should discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships.

Class Activities in the Cooperative Learning.

1. **Jigsaw-Groups** with five students are set up. Each group member is assigned some unique material to learn and then to teach to his group members. To help in the learning process students across the class working on the same sub-section get together to decide what is important and how to teach it. After practice in these "expert" groups the original groups, reform and children teach each other. (Wood p.17) Tests of assessments follow.

2. **Thinking-Pair-Share** involves a three steps cooperative structure. During the first step individuals think about a question posed by the instructor. Individuals pair up during the second step and exchange thoughts and ideas. In the third step the pairs share their responses with other pairs, other teams or the entire group.

3. **Three-Step Interview**-Each member of a team selects another member as a partner. During the first step individuals interview their partners by asking clarifying questions. During the second step partners reverse their roles. For the final step, members share their partner's responses with the team.

4. **Round Robin Brainstorming**-Class is divided into small groups (4 to 6) with one person appointed as the recorder. Question is posed with many answers and students are given time to think about answers. After the "think time", members of the team share responses with one another round robin style. The recorder writes down the answers of the group members. The person next to the recorder starts and each person in the group in order give an answer until time is called.

5. **Three minutes review**- Teachers stop any time during a lecture or discussion and gives team three minutes to review what has been said, ask clarifying questions or answer questions.

However, simply putting students in a group does not guaranty successful cooperative learning. Successful cooperative learning depends on teachers' choice of

suitable group structures (e.g. group size, group composition, rewards, problem type, resources).

The teacher introduces the activity to the students. In order to establish specific cooperative learning technique, the teacher must plan out in advance how groups will be formed, divide the class into learning groups and structure, how the members will interact with each other. The teacher also must explain the academic task and what the criteria for success are. Then he structures the cooperative aspects of their work with special attention to the components of positive interdependence and individual accountability. He teaches and helps students acquire skills in cooperation and in pro-social behavior such as information exchange, active thinking by exchanging ideas, effective communication, tolerance, openness, sensitivity and ability to admit mistakes .Time limits must be set up.

The teacher must monitor and intervene. He lets the groups run while he circulates through the room to collect observation data, see whether they understand the assignment (piece of work), give immediate feedback and praise for working together. If a group is having problems, the teacher can intervene to help them get back on the right track.

Some informal analysis is already done while the teacher monitors the groups during the exercise. The work should be evaluated by both, the instructor and the group.

Finally the teacher asks the groups to rate their own performance and sets goals for themselves to improve their cooperative work.

Group work arrangement creates a completely different atmosphere from that of a traditional teacher-centered class; instead of strictly controlling the students, the teacher coordinates their work. According to Brown (1994), group work creates a favorable climate for communication by relieving the students of the anxiety of having to talk in front of the whole class. Brown reports miraculous changes in students who had been too shy to talk until they worked in groups. In addition group work makes students more responsible and autonomous-they have equal responsibility for performing a task

Group and pair work also increase the speaking time for each student in a class. According to Byrne (1998, 31), "unless you have a very small class, you will never be able to give your students enough oral practice through whole class work. For example, if you have 30 students and 30 minutes of oral work, each student will at most have only one minute to talk; " on the other hand, if you divide your students into pairs for just five minutes, each student will get more talking time during those five minutes than during the rest of the lesson" (Byrne 1988, 31).

There are many possibilities of interactive techniques for preparing students for real-world language use taking into account the six tasks categorized by Willis (1996) that form a chain in advanced order of complexity.

Interactive Techniques

1. **Listing**. Students work individually or in groups to collect facts about a topic by brainstorming, researching, and interviewing. This provides plentiful data and activates their background knowledge and experience of the topic.
2. **Ordering and sorting**. Students sequence or rank the facts, vocabulary, or ideas about a topic in a meaningful order.
3. **Comparing and contrasting.** Student's points out the similarities and differences in the information they have gathered.
4. **Problem- solving**. Students create and evaluate a hypothesis related to a problem and analyze possible solutions.
5. Sharing personal experiences. Students engage in conversations and discussions about topics that have personal relevance.
6. **Creative tasks and projects**. Students collaborate to produce a written, oral, or multimedia project that summarizes the important things they have learned from task-based work.

These techniques are especially valuable for organizing group or pair work, and they can be based on almost any text, adapted on almost any topic, and used in any class.

Lesson Plan-Technological Progress and society

Task 1: Listing and ordering

The first task is listing and ordering, which allows students to review and activate what they know about the topic and related vocabulary. First, students brainstorm about the words they need to talk about the ecological and social consequences of cars, computers and cell phones, products that are part of our everyday lives. This task is especially suitable for making words and phrases available that the students will need to discuss and write about the environmental and social consequences of technology. As students brainstorm and volunteer words, the teacher writes them on the board. Students are then allowed to ask the teacher or other students the meaning of words they do not know or understand.

Then, the class chooses the most essential vocabulary and the teacher circles the words. Students then form groups and organize the chosen words into three columns labeled Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives as shown in table 1

Table 1

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
Environment	Cause	Dangerous
Diseases	Pollution	Electromagnetic
Waves	Waste	Uneconomical

Finally, the students create phrases by combining adjectives and verbs in different ways with the nouns. Some examples are: "pollute the environment," "cause diseases," "dangerous diseases," and "dangerous electromagnetic waves" The teacher writes these word combinations on the board.

Task 2: Problem solving

In groups: Students record two problems each generated via computers, cars and cell phones. Then they suggest a solution for each one of the problems. Next, a representative of each group reports to the whole class what problems and solutions they have recorded, and the teacher compiles the list, as is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Identifying problems and solutions

PRODUCT	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
A. Cars	1.pollute the air	1. use filters, ecological fuel, Solar batteries and electric
Engines	2.waste energy- 2.Engines that work on mixture of petrol and biomass	2.make economical hybrid
B. Computers	1. Ruin people's eyes 2. Cause carpal tunnel syndrome	1. Use modern LCD monitors and glasses with filters 2. Improve design of computer keyboard and mouse
C. Cell Phones	1. Emit microwaves Influences the brain 2. Produce chemical wasted batteries are thrown away	1. Use Bluetooth earphones. 1.improve recycling technology,

Task 3: Sharing personal experiences

In task 3 students individually write a short paragraph (110 to 140 words) explaining why they have chosen the profession of an engineer, why they are attending this particular university, what they would like to do after graduation, and how English will help them in their future career.
Then, in pairs, they read their paragraphs to their partner. Finally, students exchange papers and report their partners' information to the class.

Task 4: Comparing and contrasting

In pairs, students exchange the paragraphs and write down three similarities and/or differences between their paragraphs and their partner's. They then report the differences to the whole class.

Task 5: Creative task and project

Students are directed to write a paragraph (140 to 160 words) about three new things that they think will occur in engineering over the next fifty years. These paragraphs are then displayed in the classroom for the benefit of all the students.

Conclusion

Using cooperative learning and task-based activities in my classes have really helped my students to communicate in English .I would like also to mention that because the students' communication in groups is much like real communication between people outside of class , they now feel more confident.

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