"Coopertive Learning in ELT: A Literature Review"

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Abstract: Cooperative learning has received increased attention in recent years due to the movement through learner centred learning. This paper provides an overview of the use of cooperative learning (CL) and effects of it in second language instruction. After three brief definitions of CL, key areas are discussed in the paper. The first part of the article provides the theory of language and learning in CL while the second part introduces the objectives, syllabus, types of learning and teaching activities and the roles of teacher, learners and instructional materials in CL. The article concludes cooperative learning makes maximum use of cooperative activitites involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom. Moreover, it establishes a democratic form of teaching. It enhances both the individual and the community. Each student can share his/her ideas and learn to listen and respect each other. Furthermore, Cooperative learning influences collabarative spirit among students by minimizing competition leading to conflicts in today's world.

Keywords: Cooperative learning, English language teaching, group work, learner centred learning

1. Introduction

"Two heads learn better than one"
Roger T. & David W. Johnson

The cooperative learning method focuses on the integrated use of cooperative learning. It can be used in any lesson cooperatively, in any subject area, grade level or educational setting. Back to its history, it has its primary roots in social interdependence theory. Theoretically, it originates from the work of a few. One of whom is Kurt Koffka, one of the founders of the Gestalt School of Psychology. The other is, Kurt Lewin who is the founder of modern day social psychology. The third is, Morton Deutsch, one of Lewin's students, who formulated social interdependence theory in which cooperative, competitive and individualistic efforts are defined. (Johnson& Johnson, 2002).

There are some explicit definitions of cooperative learning:
1. The instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993).
2. Principles and techniques for helping students work together more effectively (Jacobs, Power& Loh, 2002).
3. Group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (Olsen& Kagan, 1992).

The point is that, cooperative learning requires more than just asking students to work together in groups. Instead, cooperation is discussing material with other learners, helping other learners, or sharing materials with other learners. (Putting students into groups to learn is not the same thing as structuring cooperation among them).

"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 language teachers is that, it is a good way of conducting interactive and communicative language teaching.
In language teaching its goals are:
- "To provide opportunities for naturalistic second language acquisition through the use of interactive pair and group activities.
- To provide teachers with a methodology to enable them to achieve this goal.
- To enable focused attention to particular lexical items, language structures, and communicative functions through the use of interactive tasks.
- To provide opportunities for learners to develop successful learning and communication strategies

- To enhance learner motivation and reduce learner stress and to create a positive affective classroom climate.

CLL is thus, an approach that crosses both mainstream education and second and foreign language teaching." (Richards &Rogers, 2008).

Using the Richards and Rogers' model for conceptualizing approaches and methods described in "Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching", 2008, Cambridge University Press, "Cooperative Language Learning" is analyzed at the level of approach and design.

2. Approach

2.1 Theory of Language

Cooperative language learning is founded on some basic premises about the cooperative nature of the language and language learning.

- Premise 1: Communication is considered to be the primary purpose of the language. (Weeks, 1979).
- Premise 2: Human beings spend a large part of their lives engaging in conversation and for most of them conversation is among their most significant and engrossing activities.(Richards and Schmidt, 1983).
- Premise 3: Conversation operates according to certain agreed-upon set of cooperative rules or "maxims" (Grice, 1975).
- Premise 4: One learns how these cooperative maxims are realized in one's native language through casual, everyday conversational interaction. (Richards &Rodgers, 2008).
- Premise 5: One learns how the maxims are realized in a second language through participation in cooperatively structured interactional activities. (Richards &Rodgers, 2008).

Practices that attempt to conduct second language learning according to these premises are called "Cooperative Language Learning".

2.2. Theory of Learning

Cooperative language learning underlines three main concepts in language learning;
developing communicative competence in language by conversing in socially or pedagogically structured situations, improving learners' critical thinking skills, and setting classrooms that foster cooperation rather than competition in learning.

3. Design

3.1. Objectives: CLL is an approach designed to promote cooperation rather than competition, to develop critical thinking skills, and to develop communicative competence through socially structured interaction activities, these can be regarded as the overall objectives of cooperative language learning.

3.2. The Syllabus: CLL does not assume any particular form of language syllabus. What defines CLL is the systematic and carefully planned use of group-based procedures in teaching as an alternative to teacher centred teaching.

3.3. Types of learning and teaching activities: Johnson describes three types of cooperative learning groups.(Johnson& Johnson 2002).

3.3.1 Formal Cooperative Learning Groups

These groups may last from one class period to several weeks. Any course requirement or assignment may be reformulated to be cooperative by the teacher. To set up formal cooperative learning groups, a teacher should decide on the objectives for the lesson, size of groups, the method of assigning students to groups, the roles students will be assigned, the materials needed to conduct the lesson and the way the room will be arranged. Also, the teacher clearly defines the assignment, teaches the required concepts and strategies, specifies the positive interdependence and individual accountability, gives the criteria for success and explains the targeted social skills students are to engage in and, monitor students'learning and gives them effective feedbacks.

3.3.2 Informal Cooperative Learning Groups

Informal cooperative learning groups are temporary, ad hoc groups that continue for only one discussion or one class period. They may be used at any time, but are especially useful during a lecture or direct teaching. Breaking up lectures with short cooperative processing times will give less lecture time, but it promotes interactive learning in classes. Students actively involve in processing what they are learning. It also provides time for the teacher to move around and monitor the students' progresses.

3.3.3 Cooperative Base Groups

Cooperative base groups are long-term, heterogeneous groups with stable membership. The underlying responsibility of members is to provide each other with the support, encouragement and assistance they need to succeeed academically. Base groups last for at least a semester or year and preferably for several years.

The success of the CL is dependent on the five basic elements according to Olsen and Kagan(1992):

Positive Interdependence

Positive interdependence is the heart of cooperative learning. It is the perception that you are linked with others so that you cannot suceed unless they do. (vice versa) In order to strengthen positive interdependence, the following methods could be applied (Johnson &Johnson, 2002).
(a) give rewards (if all members of your group score 85 percent correct or better on the test, each will receive extra bonus points)
(b) divided resources (giving each group member a part of the total information required to complete an assignment)
(c) complementary roles such as, reader, checker, encourager, elaborator may also be used.

In addition, positive interdependence may be created through a joint identity (identity interdependence), asking group members to imagine they are in a specific set of circumstances, such as being shipwrecked on a desert island.

A series of research studies was carried out to clarify the impact of positive interdependence on achievement and other outcomes, and it is inferred that positive interdepence is required to produce higher achievement.(Johnson &Johnson, 2002).

Individual Accountability

Individual accountability is the one of the most motivating factor in cooperative learning, because everyone likes to feel that they know something that others can use.

Practical ways to structure individual accountability are : (Johnson &Johnson, 2002)
(a) giving an individual test to each student
(b) having each student explain what they have learned to a classmate
(c) observing each group and collecting data on participation
(d) randomly selecting one student's product to represent the entire group

Social Skills

Putting socially unskilled students in a group and asking them to cooperate will not be successful. Students should be taught the interpersonal and small group skills that is neccessary for cooperation, and also they should be motivated to use these skills in learning environment.

Group Processing

Effective cooperation is provided if the followings are taken into consideration:
(a) determine what member actions were helpful and unhelpful to achieving goals and maintaining effective working relationships and
(b) make decisions about what actions to continue or change. When difficulties in working with each other arise, students engage in group processing to identify, define and solve the problems they are having working together. (Johnson & Johnson, 2002).

Structuring and Structures

It refers to ways of organizing student interactions and different ways student are to interact.

In order to use cooperative learning effectively, teachers must recognize the nature of positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills and group processing and develop skills in structuring them.

Numerous descriptions exist of activity types that can be used with CLL. Coelho (1992 b: 132) describes three major types of cooperative learning tasks and their learning focus, each of which has many variations. (Richards &Rodgers, 2008).

Cooperative Learning Tasks

"Team practice from common input-skills development and mastery of facts:
- All students work on the same material.
- The task is to make sure that everyone in the group knows the answer to a question and can explain how the answer was obtained.
- This technique is good for review and for practice tests; The group takes the practice test together, but each student will eventually do an assignment or take a test individually.
- This technique is effective in situations where the composition of the groups is unstable. Students can form new groups every day."

Jigsaw: differentiated but predetermined imput- evaluation and synthesis of facts and opinions:
- Each group member receives a different piece of the information.
- Students regroup in topic groups (expert groups) composed of people with the same piece to master the material and prepare to teach it.
- Students synthesize the information through discussion.
- Each student produces an assignment of part of a group project.
- This method of organization may require team-building activities for both home groups and topic groups, long term group involvement, and rehearsal of presentation methods.
- This method is very useful in the multilevel class, allowing for both homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping in terms of English proficiency."

Coopertive projects: topics/resources selected by students- discovery learning:
- Topics may be different for each group.
- Students identify subtopics for each member.
- Steering commitee may coordinate the work of the class as a whole.
- Students research the information using resources such as library reference, interviews, visual media, and internet.
- Students synthesize their information for a group presentation, each group member plays a role in presentation.
- Each group presents to the whole class."

3.5. Learner Roles
- The primary role of the learner is as a member of a group who must work collaboratively on tasks with other group members.
- Learners are also directors of their own learning.

(They are taught to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning). (Richards & Rodgers, 2008).

3.6. Teacher Roles
The teacher not only teach the language, they teach cooperation as well. (Freeman, 2003). She/he has to create a highly structured and well-organized learning environment in the classroom, setting goals, planning and structuring tasks, establishing the physical arrangement of the classroom, assigning students to groups and roles, selecting materials and time. The teacher serves as a faciliator.

3.7. The role of instructional materials
Materials play an important part in creating opportunities for students to work cooperatively. The same materials can be used as are used in other types of lessons. Besides, materials may be specially designed for CLL learning (information-gap activities etc.).

4. Conclusion

Cooperative learning, according to the research (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Slavin, 1995) promotes many benefits beyond enhanced L2 acquisition. These benefits include increased self-esteem, greater liking for school, enhanced inter-ethnic ties, and improved critical thinking. (Jacobs, 2004). Moreover, cooperative learning influences collabarative spirit among students by minimizing competition leading to conflicts in today's world. Moreover, it establishes a democratic form of teaching. It enhances both the individual and the community. Each student can share his/her ideas and learn to listen and respect each other.

However, using CL may be a challenging task for teachers and learners. It requires some struggle to succeed. Often, students may not be familiar with or skilled at working together. And for teachers, cooperative learning activities require more preparation. But apart from all these, the rewards and benefits of cooperative learning for teachers and students go a long way.

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