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**Current Trends of Cooperative Learning
in English Education: An Article Review**

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Abstract

This article reviews the research literature on cooperative learning in English education. Historical background, definition and models of this educational innovation are highlighted. The impact of cooperative learning on foreign language achievement, the sociocultural factors, and learners' perceptions are the core ideas around which this article is organized. It is recommended that students should be prepared for cooperative learning and that the social dimension should be paid attention equal to that of the cognitive dimension. The article calls for further research to explore how students' sociocultural backgrounds and past educational experiences contribute to the way they perceive and adapt to cooperative learning.

Introduction

In recent years, cooperative learning has emerged as a significant organizational concept advanced for changing the educational process, engaging the minds of students and connecting schooling to the world of work. A growing body of research has begun to focus on the benefits group work might have in second and foreign language context (Coelho, 1992, 1994; Holt, 1993; Fathman & Kessler, 1993; Cohen, 1994;

Liang et al., 1998). These studies maintain that cooperative learning is beneficial for students both intellectually and socially, stressing the maximization of academic achievement, fostering self-esteem, enhancing motivation and developing social skills.

In addition, studies have been conducted to examine, among other things, the impact of cooperative learning on foreign language achievement, cooperative learning and sociocultural factors and learners' perceptions of cooperative learning. This article provides a critical review of the research literature on cooperative learning in these three areas giving prominence to the historical background and models of this educational innovation.

Cooperative Learning: A Historical Background

Cooperative learning dates back to late 1700s, the time of Joseph Lancaster & Andrew Bell who extensively made use of this type of learning in England. The idea was transmitted to America when a Lancastarian school was opened in New York City in 1806. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, Francis Parker enthusiastically advocated the use of cooperative learning within the classroom environment. He believed that students would fully develop their capacities only if cooperative learning was encouraged and competition was eliminated as the main motive in school tasks. Parker's instructional methods of promoting cooperation among students dominated education through the turn of the century (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

Influenced by the philosophy of social aspects of learning, Dewey advocated the instructional use of cooperation in schools. He argued that classroom life should embody democracy in offering academic choices and establishing relations among students.

Definition of Cooperative Learning

It is a type of classroom environment in which students work together in heterogeneous groups to achieve certain tasks (Watson & Marshall, 1995). Johnson & Johnson, (1992) define it as the instructional use of small group so that students work together to increase their own and each others learning.

Models of Cooperative Learning

A number of cooperative learning methods have been developed and are currently used. A focus will be given to those cooperative learning methods that have been most widely adopted by educators and which have stimulated considerable research.

Jigsaw Methods

In original Jigsaw, developed by Aronson & colleagues, (1987) interdependence among students is promoted by giving each student in a learning group access to information comprising only one part of a lesson. Students are then accountable to their Jigsaw group for teaching that part of the lesson to the rest of the Jigsaw group members. In addition, the students from the different groups, each having the same material to learn, meet in counterpart groups to discuss and learn their part of the lesson before attempting to teach the material to the students in their Jigsaw groups. In this way, cooperation among students occurs not only within each Jigsaw group but also within the counterpart group.

Cooperative skills are emphasized and taught directly when using the Jigsaw method. In addition, students are encouraged constantly to evaluate group processes. The incentive structure in Jigsaw is individualistic:

students' grades are based on individual examination performance (Sharan, 1990).

Jigsaw II (Slavin, 1980) is an adaptation of the original Jigsaw in which there is competition among groups called learning teams. There are both cooperative and individualistic incentives in Jigsaw II. The group rewards are based on individual performance. Points are earned for one's team by improving performance relative to individual performance on previous quizzes.

Student Teams-Achievement Division (STAD)

An essential component of STAD, developed by Slavin, (1980) is competition among groups. Students work in their groups to drill and tutor each other to prepare for the competition. The competition factor has been advocated as a component of STAD that facilitates peer support and group norms for achievement. More recently, however, Slavin, (1983a) has suggested that a specific group reward given for individual learning is the crucial factor in facilitating peer norms and sanctions for achievement. Slavin's more current view is that group competition is no more effective in providing a group reward than are other ways of providing team recognition.

The major steps of this strategy consist in class presentation followed by organizing students in learning teams, usually composed of four or five heterogeneous students in terms of ability and sex. After studying the lesson, group members are exposed to individual quizzes. Students' average past performance on similar quizzes is considered a "base score". Students earn points for their teams if their scores exceeds their base

score. Then the teams receive recognition for the sum of improvement scores (Nesbit & Rogers, 1997).

Teams-Games-Tournaments

It is similar to STAD in class presentation and team work but instead of quizzes, students of comparable ability from different teams compete face to face in tournaments. Winners compete with students of higher ability in the next tournament, while tournament losers compete with students of lower ability in the next tournament (Hauserman, 1992).

Team-Assisted Individualization

This strategy was designed to combine the motivational incentive of group rewards with an individualized instructional program appropriate for the level of skills possessed by each student. The unique aspect of this method is that each student works on individualized instruction. Team members use answer sheets to check each other's worksheets and practice tests, and are responsible for making sure that their teammates are prepared to take the final test for each unit. Discussion and peer tutoring occur because students are required to ask their team members for help before they ask for help from the teacher. The teacher, besides acting as a resource person for the cooperative learning groups, takes students out of their teams for five to six minutes daily to give instruction to students of the same level in the curriculum. Based on the students' scores on the placement test and those of the units covered, the teams are classified into super team, a great team, and a good team to be given certificates and concrete rewards (Slavin, 1995).

Group Investigation

This strategy (Sharan, 1990; Slavin, 1995) attempts to combine the form and dynamics of the democratic process and the process of the academic inquiry. Group investigation is a highly structured method with six specific stages of implementation. Student involvement occurs in every stage, from selection of the topics for study to evaluation of student learning.

The stages are as follows:

1. The teacher delineates a general topic, and subtopics are identified through class discussion. Instructional, organizational and social goals are considered.
2. Students collaborate in planning how to carry out the investigation of their subtopic. There is an emphasis on application as well as on what, who, why and how to study.
3. Students implement their plans. The teacher arranges a wide variety of informational sources, both within and outside of school. Students analyze and evaluate the data gathered to reach conclusions.
4. Preparing a final report. This stage serves as a transition from data gathering to the presentation of the most significant results of the inquiry. Each group members prepare the report they are going to present at the class.
5. Groups present a summary of their investigation to the rest of the class using audio-visual material, dramatization, displays and other creative ways.

6. Reports and individual learning are evaluated. Peers may participate in the evaluation. Teachers assess the collaborative and investigative skills used by the students throughout the project.

Cooperative Learning and Foreign Language Achievement

The current emphasis in language teaching has shifted from purely structural competence to communicative competence, i.e. from the ability to merely manipulate the linguistic structures correctly to the ability to use language appropriately in real communicative situations. Theorists concur that there should be a balance between grammaticality and communicative effectiveness (Littlewood, 1981, cited in Bejarano, 1987), between what Widdowson called “usage” and “use” (Widdowson, 1978). The focus is on the communicative function of the language: how to use the language in order to apologize, persuade, classify or compare. Cooperative learning is believed to achieve this purpose since there are many parallels between the linguistic functions and cooperative group skills (Coelho, 1992).

Cooperative learning provides increased interactions among students for language practice especially listening and speaking. The results of Pica et al., (1987) indicate that classroom interaction increases learners comprehension of words and grammatical structures beyond their current level of competence and ultimately incorporate them in their own language production.

The purpose of cooperative language classroom is to provide opportunities for learners to work cooperatively to master all language skills. Students converse because they truly want to hear one another, they read intentionally for getting the meaning, they speak to discuss what they

have read and they write to make a group report to convey their thoughts to other groups (Bassano & Christisan, 1988).

A commonly held belief is that the quick “right” answers are valued in the traditional method. As a result, students depend on the “faster” classmate to provide answers and on the teacher for validating their thinking. Focusing on completing assignments quickly, students rarely stop to question the reasonableness of their response or the meaning behind it (Adams et al., 1990).

In contrast, the literature available on cooperative learning (Augustine et al., 1989; Slavin, 1990; McGroarty, 1993; Adams, 1995; Romney, 1997) has shown such a strategy to yield consistently positive results in offering foreign and second language learners more opportunities for interaction and helping them improve language proficiency.

The optimal conditions for language learning are very similar to the recommendations made in cooperative learning methodologies. The communicative approach to language teaching holds that acquisition occurs when there is intensive engagement in discourse in real communicative contexts (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Ellis, 1985; Krashen, 1982; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). There is substantial evidence that the more “comprehensible input” language learners receive (Krashen, 1982), and the more opportunities they have for “comprehensible output” (Swain, 1985), the faster they learn. Group work in language learning settings offers both of these opportunities.

Pica & Doughty, (1985a, 1985b) attempted to compare teacher-fronted discussions and small-group discussions in a classroom setting involving low-intermediate level students. They found that individual

students had more opportunities to practise English and engage in direct interaction in groups than in teacher-fronted discussions through taking more turns, producing more samples of the target language, and receiving more feedback from other group members. In another study, (Bejarano, 1987) junior high school students learning English as a foreign language in Israel, who participated in programmes involving STAD (Student Teams Achievement Division) in which students work cooperatively on tasks within their groups while each group competes with others for being on the top of the class. Results indicated that the cooperative learning group students have significantly outperformed students utilizing whole-class methods in EFL achievement.

McGroarty, (1989) suggests that cooperative learning arrangements offer linguistically heterogeneous learners a range of benefits. Linguistic benefits include the opportunity for practice and negotiation of meaning through talk using a greater range of verbal skills. In cooperative learning groups, students speak more and put more effort into trying to make their meaning clear to other students without the teachers' help (Kagan, 1986).

Recent research suggests that group rewards and individual accountability enhance academic achievement by creating peer norms and sanctions that encourage students to learn (Jacob et al., 1996; Dorwick, 1993). It maintains that collaborative work motivate students to take an active role in the learning process. The latitude students are given in selecting and approaching a learning opportunity in methods like Group Investigation would intuitively appear to stimulate interest. In a similar vein, Johnson & Johnson, (1985a) have suggested that active support from peers motivates students to become and remain engaged in learning tasks; a sense of cohesiveness and mutual involvement encourages students to

risk volunteering their ideas; students who feel accepted and supported are more willing to help others in the group when they need help and reciprocal assistance becomes the norm.

Along with this view, Kagan, (1986) states that the cognitive activity involved in cooperative learning improves understanding and retention, controversy leads to higher levels of understanding, and drill and practice among teammates result in repeated exposure to learning material.

The academic task structure influences involve processes through which the rules and procedures are followed in the cooperative learning classrooms. Johnson & Johnson, (1985a) have suggested that cooperative learning increases time on task; the diversity of abilities among students within groups may benefit students of low and moderate ability through their interactions with students of high ability; and the grading system allows all students an equal chance for success and motivates students to strive for success.

The consultative role of the teacher, Kagan, (1986) claims, and the lesser need for discipline allow the teacher to spend more time teaching academic content and helping those students who need help beyond what can be given by the group; and the students' active engagement in learning, self-direction, and peer tutoring establishes norms for achievement and development of equal status among group members.

Cooperative Learning and Sociocultural Factors

Cooperative learning involves powerful sociocultural aspects that can affect its outcome. Awareness of them and reflection about them may be as essential to successful learning as is conscious reflection about the

cognitive aspects of learning. In describing native English-Speaking students being introduced to cooperative learning in North American classrooms, Janda, (1990) wrote:

When collaboration enters the typical classroom it does not enter a vacuum where no social, linguistic or rhetorical activity has taken place previously. Even as we are persuaded that collaboration is an effective practice, we must keep in mind that traditional social and linguistic behaviors are well entrenched in the minds, behaviors and expectations of students and teachers (p. 292).

The entrenchment of traditional social behaviours Janda talks about is even more relevant for ESL/EFL students coming from a traditional educational background.

In a study by Swain & Miccoli, (1994) the attempt was made to explore the emotions an adult Japanese woman experienced as she participated in a content-based collaboratively organized course. Two different ways in which her cultural background affected her learning became apparent. First, the prevailing procedures of working in school and classroom assignments in Japan is individually-based. In her first entry in her journal, she mused: "Can I be collaborative?". She felt her background had not prepared her to participate in small group class discussion. Second, her beliefs about language learning and teaching were strongly influenced by her EFL experiences in Japan. She believed that learning is a goal-oriented activity and is highly dependent on the teacher.

Her overriding emotions were anxiety and depression due to her responsibility for her classmates' understanding of the articles she read and

lowered self-esteem. She managed to adjust to the cultural demands of cooperative learning resulting in enhanced second language learning.

The majority of students come from traditional educational backgrounds where the teacher dominates the discussion in the class, transmits knowledge and students record, memorize and recall what is being transmitted. Having seldom experienced other teaching approaches, they tend to take it for granted that it is the only (or at least the best) way to learn. When they are placed in cooperative learning settings, their past experience may come into conflict with their new experience, and their old beliefs with the beliefs of the educators of this new innovation (Liang et al., 1998).

According to Sharan & Shaulov, (1990) the satisfaction students obtain from social interaction leads to increased persistence in those tasks that permit social interaction. Kagan, (1986) has suggested that the enjoyment of social interaction with peers directs students toward learning tasks; there are social rewards obtained from achievement when group members are dependent upon each other for the success of the group. Among the social benefits reported is the chance cooperative learning offers to students in taking a more active role in their learning and acting as resources for each other, and for teachers in mastering new skills and assuming new roles (Nunan, 1992).

Learners' Perceptions of Cooperative Learning

Although cooperative learning is among the most extensively evaluated alternatives to traditional instruction today, its benefits have been discussed either from the researcher's or the teacher's point of view. What are the foreign/second language learners' perceptions when working

with cooperative tasks? How do they like their experiences when working in groups? Although the researchers' and teachers' perceptions are important, it is learners who live the experience with their counterparts. Insights into what they think and believe about cooperative learning can contribute to an understanding of whether, how and why it benefits them affectively, cognitively or linguistically. Learners' beliefs and attitudes will influence the implementation and success of cooperative learning.

Improved attitudes and behaviours toward classmates have been reported by Sharan & Shachar, (1988) nonetheless, troubling findings have been reported about students' negative attitudes toward cooperative learning. In a study on student's learning style preferences, Reid, (1987) reported that virtually none of her participants chose group learning as a major learning preference. In fact many EFL/ESL students indicated that group learning was actually a highly negative format for them. In the description of her students' reaction to this educational practice, Kinsella, (1996) noted:

Despite the merits of pairing and grouping strategies my varied high school and university teaching experiences with the linguistically and culturally diverse student population of San Francisco have made me very aware that not all ESL students embrace collaborative classroom learning with the same zeal as do their instructors. In fact, some immigrant students are more likely to react with raised eyebrows and sighs at the prospect of a semester of ongoing participation in peer working groups. In my own classes and those of colleagues, I have observed that well-intended instructional effects to create more democratic and varied contexts for second language use and growth can

he met with reluctance and disorientation on the part of some ESL students (p. 24).

How do these reports relate to the positive findings on cooperative learning presented in the studies reviewed above? What are the reasons for students' negative responses to cooperative learning? Research is needed to answer these questions.

Conclusion

Research in the foreign and second language classroom indicates that cooperative learning is potentially beneficial for FL/ESL students in a number of ways. It can maximize foreign language achievement by offering opportunities for both language input and output. It can be an effective classroom management approach for helping students develop social skills, gain better knowledge of concepts and become more proficient in language and communication.

The learners' adjustment to the culture of cooperative learning suggests that an important element for adults may be consciousness-raising about what the group is accomplishing, how it is being accomplished and whether it could be accomplished in more satisfactory ways. Raising Japanese woman awareness about her feelings and their sources provided her with the opportunity to act on them. As a result she became more assertive in interacting with peers and expressing her ideas and opinions. In effect, she began to take responsibility for her own learning, which in turn, had a positive effect on her understanding of the role of cooperation in language learning.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the above studies reviewed, the following recommendations seem pertinent:

1. The attempt should be made to prepare students for cooperative learning. This may include developing students' planning skills, encouraging them to interact with each other and take the responsibility for their own learning.
2. Social dimension should be paid attention equal to that of cognitive dimension so that students would experience success as foreign language learners.
3. Research indicates that group learning is actually a highly negative format for students. Research needs to be pursued to understand better the possible sources for students' disapproval toward this educational innovation that is supposed to be to their benefit.
4. In spite of acknowledging the reported potential benefits of cooperative learning for FL/SL learners, future investigators are called to explore whether the foreign language achievement gained through cooperative learning methods relate to academic language or basic conversation.
5. Studies are needed to investigate how students' sociocultural backgrounds and past educational experiences contribute to the way they approach and adapt to cooperative learning.

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