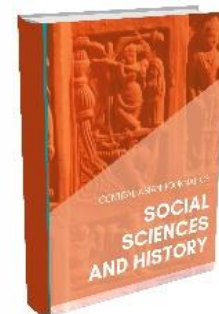




CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: <https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org>



Collaborative Learning in Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract:

This article is considered the problem of effective methods in teaching foreign language, such as collaborative learning. It very effective in the process of learning a language for both young and adult, as during the collaborate work the participants communicate more freely with each other. Many studies show that collaborative learning, as compared to working independently, results in deep information processing and more meaningful psychological connections among the participants.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18-Oct-22

Received in revised form 19-Nov-22

Accepted 18-Dec-22

Available online 19-Jan-2023

Key word: method, collaborative learning, communication, collaborative tasks, collaborative group work.

Nowadays teachers of foreign language have considerable independence in a choice of tutorials, creative judgment of the contents and ways of implementation of program requirements. It should be mention is that, leading position of training in a foreign language is held by the methods and technologies based on personally focused approach by recognizing existence of various methods in modern process, which has:

- To organize the atmosphere in which the learners feel themselves comfortable and free;
- To affect the learners' personality at all and involve their sense into training session, encourage their speaking, cognitive, creative abilities;
- To create situations in which the teacher is not the central figure
- To teach learners to work on language independently at the level of their physical, intellectual and emotional capacities;
- To provide various form of work in a class: the individual, pair, and group, collective.

The importance of considering the methods and techniques in teaching foreign languages is due to several reasons, such as:

1. in today's world of learning foreign languages need to be revised as a common methodology and specific methods and techniques to find the most effective methods and techniques;
2. the methods and techniques of foreign language teaching are important components of the educational process, as without the use of any of the methods is almost impossible to realize the goals and objectives of the decision of foreign language teaching, so each teacher must be able to competently use the necessary means for the educational process;
3. The most difficult is the search for such methods, which would be most fully consistent with its objectives. The problem of the correct choice of methods and techniques of teaching is quite complicated, since it is these problems cause some difficulties for many teachers.

But no one cannot say which method is the best or worst. As K.T.Henson mentioned, "usually the methods are better for some purpose, for example, understanding, transfer, but there is no method simply the best for everything"^{*}. And M.J.Wallace believes that "a central factor in the choice of methods is the learner's needs and characters; some method works one person well, but the same method might not work at all for another person"[†].

This article is highlighted the difference between cooperative work and collaborate work in language learning process. Researchers such as Dillenbourg et al. and Roschelle and Teasley agree that it is important to make a distinction between cooperation and collaboration. While cooperative learning can be defined as working together to accomplish shared goals, collaborative learning is "a method that implies working in a group of two or more to active a common goal, while respecting each individual's contribution to the whole"[‡]. The key difference between these approaches to group work is that cooperation is more focused on working together to create an end product, while successful collaboration requires participants to share in the process of knowledge creation.

According to Nelson, cooperation is "a protocol that allows you not to get in each other's way" as you work. He uses the example of an assembly line and reaches to conclusion that "a cooperative enterprise could in some way be done, as long as you had enough time or other resources, by a single person"[§].

Numerous studies show that collaborative learning, as compared to working independently, results in deep information processing and more meaningful psychological connections among the participants. The goal of collaboration is to create new insights during discussions and to move students close to an understanding of alternate perspectives.

As beneficial as these strengths seem, collaboration is not always easy to achieve. This is not surprising, as collaboration places more structural, interpersonal, and cognitive demands on individuals

^{*} Henson, Kenneth T. "Teaching Methods: History and Status." Teaching methods: Designs for learning. Vol.1, pp 2-5, of Theory into Practice. vol. 19. 1980. Jstor. 5 Mar 2008

[†] Wallace, Michael J. Training Foreign Language Teachers. Glasgow: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[‡] McInnerney, J., and T.S.Robert. 2004. Collaborative or cooperative learning?

[§] Nelson, R. 2008. Learning and working in the collaborative age; A new model for the work-place. Video of presentation at Apple Education Leadership Summit, San Francisco, www.edutopia.org/randy-nelson-school-to-career-video.

than more passive cooperative activities do. Think about it, we grade our students based on their individual effort and results, so when we ask learners to work in groups, it may contradict the structure they are used to and become a major challenge, both emotionally and cognitively.

The sobering news is that teachers cannot possibly have complete control over all the factors that could potentially influence collaboration; students come to our classes with their own backgrounds, personal relationships, and personality, all of which affect the way learners interact. The good news is that teachers do play an important role in shaping students' experiences.

Since individual achievement is the top priority in many educational settings, collaboration is often something that our students are not used to. Therefore, it might take time for students to accept collaborative tasks and learn how to perform them successfully. However, obstacles to collaboration can be overcome by being consistent and cultivating a positive environment.

Being consistent in the design, application, and assessment of collaborative work ensures that students have a clear understanding of the objectives and procedures of the task they will accomplish and greatly increases the potential for success. The following general suggestions can help establish consistency in collaborative group work:

1. During a pre-collaboration period, make sure students are motivated to participate.
2. Lay clear ground rules: everybody must participate, and all ideas should be accommodated.
3. Be available as a resource for students, but do not offer any judgments on the work in progress and assure them that tensions are natural.
4. Do not get discouraged when a collaborative task results in some emotional responses from students-keep creating opportunities for learning to work collaboratively.

The following questions are critical to effective planning of collaborative tasks, which also produces consistency and increases the chance for success:

1. What are the specific language objectives of the task?
2. How many of the four language skills will be used?
3. Will the task require pairs, triads, small groups, large groups, the whole class, or a combination of these?
4. Will the task be introduced with brainstorming, discussion, or some other short activity?
5. What is a reasonable time period for the task to be completed?
6. Will each group make a final oral or written presentation to another group or to the whole class?
7. Will there be a presentation of the final project to parents, the community, or even a large audience?

As mentioned previously, a key criterion for collaboration is equal participation. However, as we all know, strong students often take the initiative in group work and drive the whole task, while weaker students contribute less, it is important to create a chance for students with less-developed language skills to express themselves and contribute to the overall success of the group. It is true that some students are not good at vocabulary or grammar; however, they might be great at drawing or be good athletes. Such students often make excellent "designers" or "messengers" for the team.

The teacher should refrain from assigning students absolute roles for group work. It is important for students to learn to negotiate and work together. Students themselves should be the ones to decide who will be the scribe or the presenter, or who will do the physical and the creative parts of a task. However, if students are very young or new to collaboration, support them by arranging an activity that will demonstrate different roles. For instance, during a brainstorming activity assign one student to keep track of the vocabulary as other students go around the classroom gathering words from their classmates.

Be prepared for emotional reactions. Therefore, instructors need to prepare for emotional reactions from students and consider ways to handle the situation. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Stay calm and positive, and be careful about getting involved.
2. Remind students that are learning a new skill-negotiating the work-and that it is important to offer their expertise and respect the expertise of others.
3. Use metaphors like learning to ride a bike, falling when trying to roller-skate, or typing slowly when first using a computer.
4. Assure students that tensions are natural and will soon go away. Students take a lot of social referencing from their teachers, and they will most likely adopt such an attitude and continue collaborating with the group.
5. Introduce micro-collaboration by having students work on smaller projects that are easier to manage.

Generally, all methods have at least two things in common: their belief to be the best one and a set of prescriptions that teachers have to follow necessarily.

Basically teaching must include two major components sending and receiving information. Indefinitely, a teacher tries to do his/her best to impart knowledge as the way he/she understood it.

So every teacher chooses his/her method of teaching foreign language himself/herself. He/she might use the both, traditional and modern method, in the teaching process completely and effectively. It depends on teacher's professionalism and knowledge of using methods.

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