Using cooperative learning in college English classrooms

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In this workshop, we introduced several cooperative learning (CL) techniques that can be effectively applied to university English classrooms. Just employing a group work format does not necessarily guarantee much student-student interaction will occur. CL principles and techniques offer ways to make group work more effective and potentially make a difference in the quality and quantity of interaction in English. Based on the CL principles, we demonstrated several CL techniques that university English teachers can easily employ in their classrooms. Participants experienced CL group work hands-on throughout the workshop.

　このワークショップでは大学で行われる英語の授業に効果的に協同教育の技法を取り入れるための方法を紹介した。グループ活動をただ導入するだけでは、学習者間の相互交流を生み出すことにはなりえない。協同教育の原理と技法を取り入れることで、グループ活動をより活発で有効にすることが可能になり、また英語での言語活動の量と質をそれぞれ向上させることができる。英語の教員が実際に大学の授業でどのようにそれぞれの技法を活用していけるかを協同学習の理念と原理に基づいて解説し、参加者自身が体験的に学べる全員参加型ワークショップを工夫し行った。

The workshop was organized so that the participants could learn the basic principles and philosophy of cooperative learning (CL) along with practical techniques for CL. The techniques are building blocks for classroom activities and can be applied to any learning content. The principles and techniques were introduced in accordance with the book, *The Teacher's Sourcebook for Cooperative Learning* (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002). Some people might say, "CL is about group work, isn't it?" Roughly speaking it is, but what we refer to as such is a very special kind of group work. Good group work, even if it is not called CL, can have a lot in common with what CL principles emphasize. However,

just putting students together into small groups does not automatically create a learner-centered classroom or yield active interaction among students. CL is defined as "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, p. 5). CL offers many effective ways to prevent groups from malfunctioning, and provides teachers with various techniques that make group work more productive and successful.

The workshop was intended to introduce making good use of cooperation in small groups to facilitate the learning of individuals. Since it is essential to develop a comfortable learning community among participants in classrooms, we started out with class-building and team-building activities to create a climate of learning together. Then, we demonstrated how each of the principles was incorporated in the techniques which our participants actually experienced during the workshop so that they could gain ideas about how learners come to get actively involved in their own learning process through CL group work.

In the next section, we will define the principles of CL in order to provide a theoretical framework, and also present the techniques that the participants actually went through as learners. We will explain the step-by-step procedures that each technique features along with the essence of the principles specified. Also, in the closing section, we will discuss some important implications in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

Philosophy, principles, and techniques

Teachers are concerned about promoting students' learning and improving their well-being. Such goals are more attainable when teachers and students see the value of cooperation in learning and share the idea of mutual benefits. We learn together in groups aiming at reaching group goals as well as promoting each individual's learning. How do we encourage our students to work together to enhance each other's learning in second language classrooms? Now, we turn to eight principles of CL and some related techniques.

Cooperation as a value

Creating a cooperative atmosphere is the first step to learning together. We start with class-building because "students need to see mutual assistance as a goal to strive for, to view others as potential collaborators, and to cooperate as often as possible as a viable alternative to competition and individual work" (Jacobs et al., 2002, p. 4). Group work does not function well unless students are respectful to each other, and the classroom environment greatly affects the feeling of respect and trust.

The technique we demonstrated was "*Find Someone Who …*" (Jacobs et al., 2002) where each participant was given a "*Find Someone Who…*" sheet (Appendix A) and guided to follow this procedure:

1. Walk around the classroom and find a partner.

2. Ask three questions from the list. Choose the ones you like.

3. Write only the name of the person who said "yes."

4.   Find another partner. Repeat the steps 1 to 3.

5.   Try to get as many names as possible on your sheet.

This is a fun activity to do and a good way to get to know new people.

Heterogeneous grouping

Heterogeneous grouping is a recommended way to form CL groups (Cohen, 1994; Jacobs et al., 2002; Kagan, 1994; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). We need to work with and learn from a variety of people, and this is what makes human relationships both rewarding and challenging. There are many ways to make groups heterogeneous. Students can be put into groups based on English proficiency, personality, gender, experience of group work, or learning style preference to name a few. Take an academically heterogeneous grouping as an example. We can put academically stronger students and weaker students into a group. This enhances learning of both: Stronger students learn more by being pushed to produce output (Swain, 1985) due to the necessity of explaining to and teaching their academically weaker groupmates, and weaker students have more chances to receive "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1985) or interactionally modified input (Long, 1983). Also, with the help of the stronger students, the task is likely to become within the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978) of weaker students. Donato (1994) even claims that students provide collective scaffolding, thus by working together, they can do what they cannot achieve alone. Storch (2004) reports that pairs that showed collaborative interactional patterns and those which showed expert-novice patterns both learned more than dominant-dominant or dominant-passive pairs did.

Once we have made heterogeneous groups, the next step is team-building. We need to help promote mutual understanding and friendship within the groups, too. Small groups can produce a low-pressure environment when members understand the importance and values of cooperation and feel comfortable learning together with the other members of the group. The activity chosen for this purpose is "*Circle of Interviewers*" (Jacobs et al., 2002). The participants were put into groups of four and assigned numbers from one to four with the following directions:

1.   In your group, students 1 and 2, and students 3 and 4 form pairs.

2.   Use the "*Find Someone Who…*" sheet.

3.   Choose any question.

4.   Student 1 (3) interviews Student 2 (4) using the question.

5.   Add at least one *wh*-question that is related to the original one.

6.   Reverse roles.

7.   The interviewers take turns to report to the other pair what they learned in the interview.

This technique is also called "*Three-Step-Interview*" (Kagan, 1994)*,* and is useful for developing team spirit while having fun.

Positive interdependence

This principle is based on "the perception that you are linked with others in a way so that you cannot succeed unless they do (and vice versa), that is, their work benefits you and your work benefits them" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 238). This is the most important principle of CL, and some other slogans expressing the same underlying philosophy are *All for one and one for all* and *We all sink or swim together*. So our question is how can we promote this spirit in our classroom. Positive interdependence is believed to be fostered especially when we have common goals to attain or resources to share.

The technique which inevitably requires collaboration is "*Jigsaw*" and we used the story, *A Hat Seller and Monkeys* (Appendix B, adapted from McCafferty, 1994) for this activity. The story was divided into four pieces. Each participant was given only one piece of the story and each member of a group had a different piece, A, B, C, or D with these steps to be followed:

1. In your group (home group), read the assigned part silently.

2. Get together with the students who read the same part (expert group), and help each other to understand the story.

3. Return to your home group.

4. Take turns teaching your piece.

5. Everyone must understand the story.

Everyone has to work hard to become an expert of their piece to teach it later in the home group. At the same time, learners all have to depend on each other to achieve the goal of understanding the story. In other words, the story is shared as a resource for learning. To make the task easier, the order of the original story can be given. Alternatively, as a more challenging activity, the students could be asked to identify the correct order of the pieces. This would bring about more discussion and negotiation among the group members.

As a follow-up activity to Jigsaw, we introduced "*Quiz-Quiz-Trade*" (Kagan, 2005). The participants were given a question card which had a comprehension question about the story written on one side and the answer on the other and were provided these directions:

1. Stand up with a question card, walk around, and find a partner.

2. Ask the question to each other.

3. Check the answer.

4. Trade the cards.

5. Find a new partner and repeat steps through 1 to 4.

This activity is helpful to reinforce content learning. Through this procedure, each student repeats the same question, once as a person who answers and once as the one who questions. It would be a good idea to let students create questions about the story or about the academic content. This way everybody takes the part of being taught and also teaching, which necessitates better understanding. Students will learn that the very act of helping others to learn actually helps themselves to learn more. Their learning is reciprocal, and therefore they are interdependent in a positive sense.

Individual accountability

Group work often fails when group members do not fulfill their share of work. The principle of individual accountability indicates that everyone "is responsible for contributing to the learning and success of the group" (Jacobs et al., 2002, p. 46). Simply put, each group member is responsible to do his or her share of work. Nobody should be hitch-hiking in group work or taking advantage of the work of their groupmates. Kagan (1994) goes one step further and explains that individual accountability will be promoted by making public performance by each of the members a requirement. The performance does not have to be speaking, but can be writing, too. And the audience could be just one person. To make public what students have learned or thought puts pressure on them so that they can become active participants and work more diligently to achieve group goals.

The technique which we used to embody this principle was "*Circle of Writers*" (Jacobs et al., 2002) where the participants worked on writing up a sequel to *A Hat Seller and Monkeys*. The audio-recording of the first section of the sequel was played and shown on a PowerPoint slide (Appendix C). After that, the participants continued the story to create an original as a group product. The procedure of this task is as follows:

1. A piece of paper is given to each group.

2. Everyone takes turns adding a sentence to continue the story.

3. The teacher says, "Stop!"

4. The person who is writing must complete the story in some way or another.

This is a creative activity and shows that public performance could be in writing. Adding a sentence to complete the original story for the benefits of the group requires individual accountability. Another name for this technique is "*RoundTable*" (Kagan, 1994) where as the name suggests, a sheet of paper, shared by all the group members, actually moves around on the table.

Equal participation

In traditional classrooms, whether group work is used or not, it is not unusual to have both active and inactive students. However, ideally speaking, if participation in learning activities is fundamental for learning, everybody should take part equally in group work. Kagan (1994) and Kagan and Kagan (1999) claim that everybody should be guaranteed to have an equal opportunity to participate. The question of how equal the participation is should be kept in mind.

The participation style might be different from student to student: some are more active and others are less active. However, even less active participants can learn by observing and listening to what more active participants do and say (Ohta, 2001), and eventually they can increase their participation within the supportive environment that CL group work creates.

One useful technique to promote equal participation is "*Talking Chips*" (Kagan, 1994). In our workshop, the technique was used to edit the participant-made sequel of the story. The members were given the same number of chips.

The steps to take are as follows:

1. One student reads aloud the whole story to the other group members.

2. Edit the story and correct the mistakes in the following manner.

3. Use one chip when you say something.

4. When you have used up your chips, you cannot talk until all the other members have also used all of their chips.

5. When no one has any chips left, everyone gets back their chips, and the process begins again.

This technique can be used as a reminder activity for students to realize that equal rates of participation do not occur easily but that conscious effort is required.

Another possible activity to make students aware of the challenge of equal participation is "*Paired Drawing*" or "*Group Drawing*." Students take turns to draw a picture of the story or the sequel. Each one uses a pen of a different color. If equal participation does not occur, the final product will visually show an unequal degree of participation or contribution to the group work.

In our workshop, however, we gave away cut-out pictures of the characters and the necessary materials for the setting so that the participants could glue them on a sheet of paper to easily complete one of the scenes of the story within the time constraint.

Simultaneous interaction

Kagan (1994) and Kagan and Kagan (1999) are very concerned about increasing the amount of overt activities for the students. One major concern is how to give students more chances to participate in classroom activities, which would consequently improve the chances of learning for many of the learners. In pair work, 50% of the students can be overtly active at any moment and in groups of four, 25% can. The numbers are large compared to the teacher-student interaction in a class of 40, where only 2.5% of the students are performing at one time. That is why "the active participation time per student" (Kagan & Kagan, 1999) is crucial in the success of CL activities.

This is not just a game of numbers, though. Speaking or writing, output is considered significant and possibly necessary for language learning (Swain, 1985), and the importance of interaction in SLA will be discussed again in the last section.

The technique we used in the workshop was "*Traveling Heads Together*" (Jacobs et al., 2002)*.* One student from the pair or the group travels to another pair or group to explain the group's story (a sequel to *The Hat Seller and Monkeys*) using the drawing. The directions we provided are:

1. With the picture you draw, one member moves to visit another pair or group. Showing the picture, explain your group's story to the new students.

2. The students who are left get a visitor and listen to the story.

3. Give comments on the original stories and praise their work and efforts.

4.   Take turns to visit other groups.

The students who are sent to another group are representatives. They are pushed to present the ideas of their own groups to the other groups. Traveling to another group to report can be done either as a surprise or with advance notice. Either way, the activity can also be used to promote individual accountability.

Collaborative skills

So far we have covered six of the eight principles. However, they still do not cover enough to promote groups to function optimally. While specific benefits have been outlined, some limitations still remain. First of all, we need to teach the social skills which are necessary to work with other people. Those social skills which should be developed are "the interpersonal and small group skills needed to interact effectively with other people" (Johnson & Johnson, 1998, p.239). Listening attentively, for example, may be one of the most crucial skills to be taught. Praising others and encouraging others to participate are some other important skills.

   Jacobs et al. (2002) call them collaborative skills and introduce them with set phrases in relation to the specific skills. This is especially crucial in EFL settings where students often lack appropriate expressions for cooperation. Here are some of the example phrases to be used in interaction:

   Disagreeing politely

   1.   My opinion is a little different. I think …

   2.   That's an interesting idea, but I think …

   3.   I guess you have a point, but …

   Asking for clarification

   4.   I think you mean …

   5.   I understood you say …

   6.   You said …?

(Ohtake & Kimura, 2005, p. 12)

Here language learning and social skills learning are integrated. This aspect of CL activities will be discussed in the last section on implications.

Group autonomy

This last principle of CL is about how to make groups more independent of the teachers. To put it another way, teachers need to "refine the learning environment so that students can be more self-directive" (Jacobs et al., 2002, p. 92). Group autonomy can be encouraged, for example, when students are allowed to choose topics to discuss, to engage in plans and projects, or in the face of solving problems among group members. This increased autonomy, together with sense of self-efficacy, will enhance students' intrinsic motivation, which leads to mental health and promotes higher quality leaning and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

   However, it is not easy to promote group autonomy in EFL. First of all, students must be proficient enough in English to exert their autonomy. Planning and structuring their own learning in L2 requires a much higher level of cognitive ability. Thus, teachers have to keep in mind that

although group autonomy is the ultimate goal, it takes time and patience to develop. Because of this reason, we were unable to introduce activities to promote group autonomy within the workshop. What we would like to emphasize is that students should be led to develop group autonomy through various small activities.

Implications for SLA classroom activities

Past research in SLA shows the importance of student-student interaction in the second language (L2) (cf. Pica, 1996; Swain, 1985). The significance inevitably gets larger in a foreign language learning context (Jacobs & Kimura, 2003). It is believed that comprehensible input encourages learners to get involved in meaningful communication (Pica, 1996) and that pushed output in the course of meaning making fosters acquisition of L2 (Swain, 1985) and helps enact mental processes (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Researchers have conducted studies on learner language in interaction using a variety of methods (see Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005 for an overview). Although peer-interaction is thought to be effective in SLA, how effective it can be when it comes to the quality and quantity of interaction, and accordingly the quality and quantity of learner language produced is virtually unknown.

CL techniques seem to be able to provide learners with opportunities to use the language in actual communication in the classroom and what we have called techniques can supply structured frameworks for interaction. These are the tools teachers should make wise use of. Once these frameworks have become part of a classroom routine, any learning materials can be incorporated into CL activities.

Then, the next question we should ask is how effective the activities using CL techniques can be to make peer-interaction more meaningful and to develop L2 proficiency. For example, it is often observed that students can work cooperatively and use such formulaic expressions as listed in the section of *Collaborative Skills* quite effectively when the tasks are rather rigidly structured. However, they seem to struggle in transferring these skills into more unstructured, spontaneous interactions, and have difficulty in using those expressions appropriately on the spot. When the cognitive load is high, students seem to forget to use the expressions they have learned. When communicative needs win over learning needs, they do not seem to be able to keep using their L2 (Kimura & Ohtake, 2006). Gobel (2004) reported from the results of interview data that his students "felt their English was not up to" (p. 9) interactive CL tasks. He also pointed out "misfits" (p. 10) between the objectives and goals teachers set and the learning style preference students had carried over from high school days: His students were reluctant to engage actively in oral communication in L2. A challenge for English teachers who wish to help students develop their communicative language abilities is bridging these cognitive and behavioral gaps. In practice, this is still unexplored, and research and practice should go hand in hand in this field.

Last but not least, the crucial point that teachers must keep in mind is that it is the spirit and principles of CL which underpin the techniques. Collaborative skills are taught and used through CL activities in classrooms, but they are after all interpersonal skills. CL is not just working in groups or efficient group-tutoring. The philosophy of collaborative

learning lies in promoting good relationships among members in pairs, groups, and classrooms so that students can enjoy learning together while pursuing learning goals. Learning in groups produces stimulus and excitement. In other words, CL takes not only students' cognitive growth but also their psychological growth as human beings into consideration. In this sense, we believe that CL embodies a humanistic approach to education, which goes one step beyond communicative language teaching.

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Appendix A

Handout 1

Find someone who…

read through the last issue of *TLT* journal	visited a museum in the last 6 months	knows the formula for standard deviation	has a relative or neighbor who is a racing driver
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
knows Kumiko's website	takes public transportation to school	can spell a word with more than 14 letters	plays soccer
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
is a vegetarian or would like to be one someday	is good at growing plants	built a website this month	did a presentation abroad this year
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
has met Bae, Yong Joon	sent a love letter last week	has at least one living grandparent	did volunteer work this year
Name:			
prefers eating junk food	prefers learning in groups	likes many kinds of music	runs to school every morning
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
got up early to attend this workshop	has a suggestion for improving JALT conferences	knows the expression, cooperative learning	knows which continent Gabon is on
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
knows the stages in a butterfly's life cycle	can play a musical instrument	has participated in a band, chorus, or other musical group	can stand on her/his shoulders or head
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
is thinking of quitting work as a teacher	likes to eat sandwiches made of weird combinations	slept ten hours or more last Sunday	can juggle
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:

Adapted from Jacobs, G. M., Power, M. A., & Loh, W. I. (2002). The teacher's sourcebook for cooperative learning. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

<div style="text-align:center">**Appendix B**</div>

Handout 2

Story for Student A

On a hot summer day, a hat seller was walking along a narrow road. He was on his way to the town to sell the hats he made. He was wearing his hat on his head, yet it did not give him enough shade. He had been walking for many hours by the time he found a big tree which gave him good shade. He was so tired that he decided to sit beneath the tree for a while. Then, he heard some squeaking sounds in the tree. He looked up and found five monkeys in the tree. They were shaking the branches and jumping from branch to branch.

Story for Student B

The hat seller didn't intend to stay there long because he still had a long way to go. However, the shade was so cool and comfortable that he couldn't keep his eyes open any more. Within a minute he fell asleep. In the tree above him, the monkeys were looking down at him. They found that the man was fast asleep. They came down from the tree and tiptoed around him. And they found two baskets by the man. They approached one of the baskets, opened it and found a lot of hats in it. The playful monkeys were so curious that they each took a hat from the basket and put it on their heads. Finally they climbed back in the tree with the hats.

Story for Student C

One hour later, the hat seller awakened. He sensed that something strange had happened while he was sleeping. At first, he couldn't understand what had happened. But soon, he found one of the baskets empty. He looked around and opened the other basket. But all the hats were gone. Then, he heard a familiar squeaking sound in the tree. He looked up in the tree and was startled to see his hats on the heads of the monkeys, now back up in the tree. The hat seller got so angry at them that he shook his fist at the monkeys. They imitated him.

Story for Student D

The hat seller thought that the monkeys were making a fool of him. The hats were his merchandise and he desperately wanted to get them back. He held his hat in his hand and scratched his head, thinking about what to do. The monkeys were gazing at him in the tree, squeaking as if they were laughing. Then, they imitated him. As the hat seller saw it, an idea came to him. He smiled and threw his hat downward. As he expected, the stupid monkeys did the same. He picked up the hats off the ground and put them back in the basket. He looked up at the monkeys and shouted at them, "Hey, stupid monkeys! I'm smarter than you." Then he headed for the town.

Adapted from McCafferty, S. G. (1994). The use of private speech by adult ESL learners at different levels of proficiency. In J. P. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotskian approaches to second language research* (pp. 117-134). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Appendix C

PowerPoint slide content for Circle of Writers technique

Two days later, the hat seller rested under the same tree. It was a hot day again. The monkeys were still playing in the tree. But the hat seller heard something different. The sound was not from the monkeys. It was a much lower and deeper sound…