

STUDY ON GROUP COOPERATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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## Abstract

### STUDY ON GROUP COOPERATION IN ENGLISH TEACHING

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Group cooperation is one of the most popular ways that educators have promoted for all subjects in education, which has a positive influence on our teaching. Group cooperation is the reflection based on our traditional teaching and the methods proposed by advanced teaching experts from other countries, which is refining and redeveloping of our traditional learning and teaching.

As Ellis A.E. (1997) have noted, “if someone ask me to make an example to meet the term 'reform', that is cooperation experts” (p. 165). Since the new curriculum was established, group cooperation was chosen by more and more teachers for its specific form as an important way to learn English. Many teachers began to use this way to improve the students' enthusiasm to increase the teaching efficiency. We should pass the age of the teacher-centered classroom and step into the student-centered education. So this topic is worthy of study.

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## Chapter I Introduction

Nowadays, with the development of our society and economy, higher education faces great challenges. Teachers must focus on fully improving the students' comprehension quality. The traditional teaching method, or the teacher-centered way of teaching, did have positive impacts on the students in the past which was at the time without multiple media teaching and resource assignment. However the teacher-centered mode is already appearing to be out – dated; this includes methods such as paying more attention to the cramming method of teaching, non-heuristic teaching, and uncreative and drilling of memorizing. In my class, I adopted a teacher-centered and textbook-centered approach rather than cultivating the initiative of the students. What I have mentioned above clearly has conflicts with the basic needs of quality-oriented education.

Group cooperation is one of the most popular ways that educators have promoted for all the subjects in education, which has positive influence on teaching. Group cooperation is the reflection based on our traditional teaching and the methods proposed by advanced teaching experts from other countries, which is the refining and redeveloping of our traditional learning and teaching.

"If someone ask me to make an example to meet the term 'reform', that is cooperation experts" (Ellis and Fouts, 1997, p.165). Since the new curriculum was established, group cooperation was chosen by more and more teachers for its specific form as an important way to learn English. Many teachers began to use this way to

improve the students' enthusiasm to increase the teaching efficiency. We should pass the age of the teacher-centered classroom and step into the student-centered education. So this topic is worthy of study.

Group cooperation is a method of student group work and activities to realize teachers' teaching goals. The dynamic factors of each individual make an effect on the group evaluation. During the cooperating progress, the learning process and goals are controlled by teachers. Openness and involvement is the essence of cooperative learning. What is presented by group cooperation is to develop the dominant role of the students. And to teach them in accordance of their aptitude meanwhile to emphasis the core of education which is to cultivate the students' ability.

Group cooperation is good for improving the competence and learning ability of the students. During the group cooperation, teachers are organizers, guiders, and observers, while students themselves are the participants and facilitators of learning. Learning cooperation combines the guidance of the teacher and the dominant role of the students as learners; combines the uniformity of teaching the whole class with the individual differences of the students.

Students can benefit a lot from group cooperation, such that the scope of knowledge and information is widen. Group cooperation injects motivation to the students during the learning process by improving the interactions of the teachers to the individual student, the teacher to the whole learning group, and between students and to other students. Since each member of the group can take part in the process

actively, the task is cooperated by everyone in the classroom, which means they can solve the difficulties together. Also, the students can gradually develop their learning abilities. With the scope of the knowledge, and the amount of the information growing bigger and bigger, the effects of teaching can be improved too.

Group cooperation is conducive to increasing the students' awareness of creative and practical abilities. It creates the learning atmosphere of thinking independently and inspiring others (Usually before discussing in groups, students are asked to think independently and then share). Through the learning process of observing, operating, discussing, communicating, assuming, summary and analyzing, students can understand the problems, make conclusions and apply the theories. Their ability for understanding and expressing can be improved according to Wang Panfeng (2008).

Group cooperation is also good in cultivating the students' self-confidence and strong will. The process of cooperative learning increases the opportunity for the success of the students, which helps the students get back their confidence. It also provides an excellent chance for the students to make progress, especially those who are not extrovert and have an anxiety of making mistakes. The interpersonal communication in the learning process makes students improve a lot. The students are able to express their own opinions properly, exactly and succinctly; they also learn to treat others equally and democratically; they learn to evaluate themselves and others

correctly and fairly; they learn to cooperate with other students and face success and failures.

According to Chen Wenbin (2012), compared with the traditional teaching methods, group cooperation has more advantages. The application of group cooperation should be based on the actual situation of the class itself. Even in the same school, different courses have the different teaching objectives. As teachers, we should be able to decide which ways are more suitable for our own students. The teachers should choose the teaching methods according to the teaching content instead of pursuing the form of cooperation and ignoring the results of it.

In my own classroom, I found I needed to master some teaching skills while enjoying the operative methodology for group cooperation. As teachers, we must have the abilities of observing, adjusting, analyzing and judging while applying methodology. With a strong background of knowledge, teachers can decide which part of the knowledge they would like to have students explore in a group cooperative learning situation. From my point of view, teachers should also pay attention to each students and make use of the group leader to help him or her operate the whole group.

### **Statement of the Problem**

We have adapted the teacher-centered way for many years. The students cannot be creative from this way of learning. Cooperative learning needs the spirit of team work. It also advocates an efficient way to learn. So I will focus on the following questions. What is group cooperation? What activities do we have in group

cooperation? What problems do we have when we use it? What are the ways a teacher might use group cooperation in the classroom?

### **Definition of Terms**

I think cooperative learning means students do activities in groups.

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) pointed out that cooperative learning is to use groups while teaching. Make all the students take part in the learning activities together and improve their study to the largest extent.

Wang Hongyu (1993) believes cooperative learning refers to a form of group study.

Cooperative learning implies the use of cooperation groups as a basic form of teaching methodology and uses the interaction among the dynamic factors to improve the students' study. It considers the grades of the group as an evaluation standard.

Curriculum reform refers to the methodology that transform the past curriculum philosophy to a new type of one. A course is not unchangeable, it will change and transform with the development of society.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Cooperative learning not only means the creation of teaching methods and techniques, but also it means to change the basic mode of teaching. Through the process of teaching, the result is to break the traditional mode by carrying out the

curriculum reform. By doing this, the students can experience the success they made and the happiness they discovered from the activities of group cooperation.

During the process of group cooperation, teachers should cultivate the students to discover knowledge actively and their interests in study. Under the guidance of the teachers, all the students will have a desire to learn and explore new knowledge, criticize on the old ones, and communicate with peers constantly. During this process, students will be able to self-exam their effectiveness in learning and make a conclusion of what they have learnt. In this discovering progress, students will get the sense of achievement so that they will be interested in studying.

Due to group cooperation, students should be able to get some proper ways on learning. Methods are the key to improve the effectiveness of study, when there are problems it is usually due to existing problems of current teaching methods. However, everyone has a different way to learn. The only way to find the most appropriate teaching and learning method is to go through the practical activities. Cooperation communicating is the conclusion of learning methods. The communication of learning methods is to guide the students to reflect on the knowledge they have discovered. Students can get their own proper way of learning through the practice.

As a teacher in a school where cooperative learning was becoming the recommended teaching methodology, I choose to focus on this topic to improve my knowledge and to test whether I saw better results among the students with cooperative learning.

## **Significance of the Study**

The study of group cooperation is important to the practice of teaching . This work will make an impact on the type of teaching and should be of importance to others seeking information related to best practices.

During the group cooperation, the success and failure of the students' learning is usually depend on whether the members in the group can work together or not. To achieve the same learning goal, the members of the group must know others well, try to communicate and believe each other. Group cooperation has no conflict with the students' sense of competition. Though it emphasis cooperation more, it also cultivate their sense of competition. Only if the students have collectivism value, the possibility of reaching success can be realized. Group cooperation provides a kind of relaxed atmosphere. The peer's help is good for changing the attitude of individual competition to the collectivism. Cooperation methods provide a sense of relation for students which can make students be more active.

## **Methodology**

The research will be conducted in and through the Karrmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville using the University of Wisconsin system search tool beginning December 2015 through January 2016.

## Chapter II Review of Literature

With the development of science and technology, science and technology play a much more important role nowadays. This requires us to make a change in not only the teaching content itself but also the form of the activities. The form of teacher-centered education is out-dated and should be partly abandoned.

With reforms being enacted in education, group cooperation is being introduced in the classrooms across the country. We are more likely to pay attention to the form rather than the core of group cooperation. When teaching in a cooperative learning style, we may have questions like: How to divide the students into groups? How can the teacher adjust and control the groups effectively? How to deal with the arguments in groups? How much should the teacher pay attention to the students who have difficulties in studying? and so on. So this literature review will focus on these aspects.

1. What is the background of English education in the classroom and the history of reform of the new curriculum-design?
2. What are the factors in cooperative learning?
3. What are the principles of cooperative learning and how does the teacher conduct cooperative learning in the classroom?
4. How does the teacher evaluate students in cooperative learning?

## **What is the Background of English Education in the Classroom and the History of Reform of the New Curriculum-design?**

There is a long history in the study and practice of cooperative learning, Quintilian proposed that students can benefit from teaching each other in ancient Rome. As mentioned above, they have found that under the circumstance of adding the team goal and individual responsibility, cooperative learning is an effective way to improve the students' grades. In the application of cooperative learning, someone who I failed to cite, found that the students who learn in a cooperative way can do better in reading comprehension, language expression and spelling than those who learn in a traditional way. Nowadays, cooperative learning has become a basic way of teaching in the developed countries. There exists lots of differences in different countries in the study and practice of cooperative learning, but most of them can be summarized as the same concept: the students study together and they should be responsible not only for themselves but also for others.

There is no clear demarcation line of the proper conditions in cooperative learning. Students are individuals with different personalities, and different subjects have different learning rules. Cooperative learning is not the universal method while learning under every learning conditions. Also, there is a shortage in evaluation in cooperative learning. Under different circumstances, the ways that students cooperate with each other are not the same, which means there should be ways to evaluate them properly.

In the past, most of the teachers operated in the teacher-centered way of teaching. The teachers keep talking, writing on the blackboard, ordering the students to finish some sorts of tasks and so on. I think most of this type of teaching can be defined as spoon-feeding. The students themselves were not willing to learn, they were forced to do so. With the development of the technology and the economy, the way of educating should be changed too. Nowadays, I prefer a student-centered mode in classrooms. Only if we activate the students, can we improve their learning quality.

With us stepping into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our society is being changed with the great power of the science and technology. Meanwhile it also greatly changes the concept of traditional education, which is to pass the teachers' knowledge to the students. Our education is facing great challenges now. We must know how to deal with the tense relationship of the students competitions to make sure that it is fair to everyone.

From 1901 to 1972, among the 286 scientists who achieved the Nobel Prize, there were 185 scientists who achieved their success by cooperating with others. And it is becoming more and more, (it has already become 79% now). This can surely prove that cooperative learning is a way to success. If someone can achieve the Nobel Prize alone in the past, without cooperation, it appears that no one will ever achieve it alone again after the 80s, especially with the development of the science and technology. The consciousness and ability of cooperating with others have become a necessity for people. (Guo Chuangxing, 2003)

By looking through the educational reform recently, many educators have already discovered things that can benefit the classroom. In all, the direction of educational reform is mainly about how to apply quality-oriented education and how to cultivate the students' creativity. It mainly regards the topic of teachers and teaching as the key to achieve the success of relationships. There are varieties of opinions of student quality-oriented education. It focuses not only on the knowledge the students mastered, but also on the ability that the students apply it.

As an English teacher, we applied the 3P modes (which means pre, while, post) and the five-step teaching methods for a long time. (I didn't find these in books, as English major students, we were taught to use these ways while teaching). While the traditional classroom teaching usually applies the 5-step teaching methods which is review, teach the students new lessons, consolidate the knowledge, get new knowledge through reviewing, homework. This only makes the students learn in a passive, negative and repressed way. There is no doubt that cooperative learning is an effective way to help students have an integrated development.

### **What are the Factors in Cooperative Learning?**

Group is also a kind of organization that is formed by many factors: people, work, and balance. The factors that are important are people and culture.

The learning group is built for the development of the students that are the most important part of the factors. So we should especially be careful to deal with the students in groups. Students have the potential to get involved in their learning.

Students are also individuals who can take part in the learning activities in their own ways. So students in learning groups can learn from the advantages of others to make up their shortcomings through sharing out the work or cooperating with others (Jiang Lan, 2008).

The content, which can show the culture character most includes the value, rules and spirit of the group (Yu Kaicheng, 2002). The group-value and collectivism are the general principles of the group activity, which is carried out by every member of the group. The group rules means rules that every member should obey in order to make the group operate normally. The group spirit is the common tending of mental health and value, which are formed through working together and cultivating the group for a long term. Group spirit is the brace of the whole group and the core of the group culture, which reflects the understanding and the acknowledgment of the characters and images of the group.

In general, factors can both influence and restrict each other. Students are the most important factors among all of them. Other factors are organized and arranged according to the students, so the students are the start and foothold of the whole group. In the group structure, the students take the central part. Cooperative learning also needs to follow certain rules. The relationship among the students in groups are interdependent, which means every member in the group should not only be responsible for their own grades, but also for the grades of others. "In other words, they are connected in this way of learning, otherwise they all achieve success or the

individual success is not the real success, vice versa. They need to finish a certain task through working together with others” (Wang Tan, 2002, p. 18?) .

The members should rely on each other, through helping and working together, every one of the students could learn a lot from each other.

### **Principles of Cooperative Learning and Ways to Conduct Cooperative Learning**

To apply the cooperative learning strategy, we need to build up learning groups so that we can combine group teaching and individual teaching. We can follow rules that there are differences in the group and similarities among groups. We can divide the students into groups, which includes four to five people according to their knowledge basis, learning attitudes, abilities to accept the knowledge and nonintellectual factors. Which means the levels of students are usually not the same. We should match the group members properly according to their gender, interests, abilities and their grade levels. To reach similarities in the group, we should group the students like A, B, C, D. It is necessary to have a group leader in each group who is responsible for his or her group and has the ability to make the whole group progress. This can help the competition among groups be fair and reasonable.

To make full use of the learning group, to reflect upon the purpose of the learning group, the teachers should arrange the members of the group rather than letting the students choose by themselves. This will avoid similarities in one group. For boys like staying with boys, girls like studying with girls, students with learning difficulties may like to choose the students like them, which is not good for the group.

Every member in the group has an identity and responsibility. They are the group leader, the recorder, the reporter and the inspector. Each one of them has the different responsibility while doing the activities of the group. The group leader should be in charge of the whole group, assign the opportunities to speak and coordinate the progress of the whole group. These roles should be changed regularly.

For me, as the head teacher of the class, I usually arrange the seats and make a summary each Tuesday. The students can choose where to sit as they like; of course, the higher score they get, the more opportunities they will have to choose the place. Adjusting the members of each group should be done after a monthly exam.

In cooperative learning, the task of the group members is to reach the learning goals that are designed by the teachers and to help other members to reach and master what they have learned. They can use the handout that is assigned by the teachers to practice and evaluate themselves and others. Teachers should make sure that every student knows that: each one in the group has the responsibility to make sure others have already achieved the learning goals; that only if all the group members achieved the learning goals, can they finish the task; that they should ask for help from the members of the group before they ask for help from the teachers; that members of the group can discuss with each other only if they are sure they will not disturb others (Wang Tan, 2002).

## **How to Evaluate in Cooperative Learning?**

The key to reaching the ideal goal in cooperative learning is to reach a benignant state where one cannot only supervise individuals to make progress but also is happy to help others. We should adapt a way that combines personal evaluation with collective evaluation. And teachers should mainly focus on the collective evaluation, but also encourage competitions among groups. To give proper evaluation during the learning process teachers must know the students' learning situations and also can adjust the teaching strategy, which can promote that the students are cooperating smoothly and effectively. On the other hand, this can also help the learners in the group reflect on their effectiveness of cooperating.

During the cooperating process, we need to give proper evaluations in a timely fashion. Before placing students in groups, we should focus on the students' ability of finding out problems, proposing the problems, solving the problems and predicting. During the cooperating process, we should focus on checking their abilities of finding out, solving and predicting problems. And after the cooperating process, we need to evaluate the effectiveness and performance of it (Li Weisheng, 2006).

We should consider individual differences while evaluating, criticizing and praising the students. To the students who are not good at English or have a lack of confidence, we should mainly find out the process they have made, and praise them. Especially for the students who are shy and inward, they may feel extremely happy

when being praised by the teachers. And of course, for the students who are good at English, we should help them find out their weak points.

### **Chapter III Conclusions and Recommendations**

Cooperative learning creates truly an atmosphere that respect the students' subjectivity, explore the students' capacity, and multi-direction learning of teachers and students. In this way, we can achieve the purpose of cultivating the students' ability and promoting their process.

Cooperative learning is good for increasing the knowledge and learning ability of students. During the learning cooperation, teachers are the organizer, instructor, and, also participant; while the students are the main part of the study. Cooperative learning combines the leadership of the teachers and the dominant role of the students together. It also combines collective learning and individual differences.

Cooperative learning is also good for the students to increase their knowledge and widen their information. Because all the members need to take part in the learning and share the tasks together.

It is also good to cultivate the students' confidence and fine qualities. The process of cooperative learning increases their opportunities to reach success and get back their confidence. Each student can get a lot through this process, not only mentally but also physically. After applying the group cooperation, lots of students really are successful.

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