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COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AND GROUP METHOD TECHNIQUES

Данная статья посвящена рассмотрению коммуниктивно-направленного подхода при обучении иностранному языку и описанию осуществления этого подхода – групповой формы работы. В статье описывается такой организации работы в группах, которая позволяет достичь высокого уровня овладения речью на иностранном языке.

Knowledge of a language is one thing; its use in real life contexts is another. One does not automatically lead to the other. It is necessary to have an environment in which learners come to feel the need to use the language. In addition, learners need to be provided with opportunities to communicate. Hence it is necessary to focus on devices that would first of all arouse in the learners the urge to understand and to say something, i.e. the urge to use the language meaningfully.

Compared to the traditional lecture approach, "group" learning is the way to maximize students learning through student-student rather than direct teacher-student interaction. It increases mutual concern among students and develop positive peer relationships. Classroom techniques based on mechanical drilling or repetition of sentences has not been helpful. Effective learning depends not so much on imitation or repetition of correct forms or sentence structures as on the intensity of the need the learner experiences to communicate. In the act of communicating, language forms are absorbed incidentally. Teachers involved in language instruction, therefore, need lists and details of actual classroom activities or tasks like stories, games, problems, which create and intensify the urge to communicate.

In large classes it is not easy to create an environment in which every learner comes to experience the need to communicate. In some cases the teacher finds it difficult to reach every learner, particularly with a mixed-ability class. Individualization of instruction then becomes a remote possibility. Group learning has been devised to overcome this major problem. Their main objective is to provide a forum within the classroom situation so that every learner will join in, participate effectively, and become a potential player in the game of communication, thus ultimately leading to mastery over the language.

In order for peer-interactive sessions to be successful, students must make worthwhile individual contributions as well as benefit from contributions made by others.

Group or "cooperative" learning techniques a whole variety of practical classroom techniques brought together under this label, provide guided but unrestricted practice in using language in real and realistic situations. The technique is designed:

a) to encourage and facilitate learners' active participation throughout the academic year;

b) to enrich the curriculum and prevent it from becoming lop-sided;

c) to provide appropriate communicative activities for learners with different abilities, attainments, and interests;

d) to fight and overcome language inhibition;

e) and which is most important, to help students realize how they can learn English, French, or any other language, for that matter.

Group or "cooperative" learning opens up possibilities for meaningful, social interaction. Learners in their respective groups work on problems or tasks which they find interesting, relevant and useful. They help one another in groups, thereby lending a mutual support within the class. It is an acknowledged fact that students learn the language not only from their teacher but also from their fellow students.

While between or among the groups there may be a certain element of competition.

Group learning and performance depends on both individual accountability and group interdependence; group members sink or swim together- i.e., for anyone in the group to succeed, everyone in the group must succeed.

The feeling of isolation on the part of any learner is wiped out and language learning becomes a cooperative, collaborative endeavor. Peer inputs provide speech adjustments and create conditions for constant learning. Because of the urge to communicate, each member of the group experiences a need to contribute something. Each learner's contribution is recognized and valued. Feelings of difference in status or knowledge disappear and the groups become compact and function as a single unit. Communicative teaching and "cooperative" learning is undoubtedly an effective help to those students who keep silent during the class because they are afraid of making a mistake. The entire atmosphere in class becomes pleasant and non-intimidating. Groups and individual learners in turn come to be more confident and responsible.

Group formation.

Student interaction needs to be structured to match instructional goals. In the ESL/EFL classroom developing proficiency in reading, writing, listening, and speaking the target language, as well as acquiring knowledge of culture, are core instructional goals. Merely putting the students in groups isn't enough. Student interaction needs to be structured so that the many benefits of peer-interactive approaches can be realized.

Grouping should be flexible and may be done keeping in mind:

a) ability, language proficiency,

b) interest, personality,

c) individual learning needs.

Ability grouping is desirable to avoid boredom or the feeling of being lost. It may be useful for learners to move from one group to another, but they should remain in the same group for a certain period of time to enable them to become a close-knit part of their group and to work effectively. Any such arrangement, however, should facilitate interaction between a) learner and learner, b) group and group, c) learner and teacher, and d) group and teacher. Rearrangement of groups should be done only to facilitate inter-group communication and should not be very frequent, as the groups already formed may become unsettled.

Procedures for groups.

Students are taught to use four skills during cooperative learning sessions: sharing information, directing the group to stay on task, praising and encouraging task-related contributions, and checking to make sure that everyone in the group understood what was being taught. The use of these skills help students work with each other effectively.

Once the groups are formed, the teacher explains the task of group work. All instructions should be clear and understood properly by everyone before giving the "start" signal for group activity. It is desirable to have groups working on different tasks simultaneously both in and outside the classroom. If the main problem is split up into different activities, groups can complement each other. Group or "cooperative" work should be a regular feature in language classes and could be undertaken at various stages during the progress of the lesson, e.g. after the presentation of new language material or at the practice stage where the new material can be used in realistic communicative situations. When the teacher finds the learners are losing interest, or when they show their desire for group activity, group work may be resorted. In addition the teacher may use as an exercise before tests or other important activities during the final parts of the lesson to ensure reflexion, consolidation, review, etc.

Normally classes can spend about 15-20minutes on group activities; anything longer may lead to monotony or frustration; anything shorter may not be adequate for effective communications. Selection of tasks should correspond to the learners' intellectual level, but the problem must be attractive and challenging.

Tasks may lead to different activities with certain specific aims: a) to produce background work by way of preparation, b) to fix course materials in the minds of the learners, c) to lead to the production of learning materials, d) to lead to the solution of given problems, e) to make the learners more resourceful and self-dependent. Total emphasis is on communicative efficiency, on the "use" of the language.

"Group" learning and the Teacher.

When learners work in groups, the teacher should act as a mediator, as a person to be referred to in a difficulty. Teachers should not do what the learners can do for themselves, but should adopt the role of advisor encouraging and assisting them. As group work progresses, they should come to realize and accept each learner's personality, his interest, his individual attitudes, and his linguistic competence. These may be accepted as a positive basis, certain actually known qualities, strengths or potentials for building upon rather than as handicaps to learning or drawbacks in classroom management. The teachers' attitude should therefore be one of assurance, acceptance, warmth and affection, and enthusiasm and encouragement. They should also be non-critical. During group work sessions they need to be tolerant towards a) incomplete sentences, b) incorrect utterances, c) intrusion of the first language, d) non-verbal responses like gestures and head nods. They are evidence that learning is taking place, but communication needs have been created beyond the learner's linguistic resources. Solving the problem or completing the task is the product, and attention to language is vital; but during group activity the discussion of the problem or task should not be replaced by linguistic discussion alone. In this way teachers will succeed in building up the learner's confidence in his ability to cope with a whole variety of problems.

What do teachers need to do? They select group tasks carefully, using their knowledge of the class; design and adapt suitable materials, coordinate group activity, regroup when necessary; cultivate sensitivity to each learner's needs and interests.

Language is a vital means of communication and performs a variety of social functions. "Cooperative" learning techniques provide opportunities for profitable give and take and usher in both peer teaching and peer learning, which lead to some kind of peer interdependence. It increases academic achievement, helps create friendships between all students, and of particular interest, provides the socially withdrawn students with the opportunity to learn and use the collaborative skills they need to interact with others in positive and constructive ways. This in turn increases their self –confidence so they should use the skills acquired during collaborative learning activities spontaneously and voluntarily during other classroom activities.

In summary, then, even though students are not as good as teachers in providing a correct language model and feedback, during cooperative learning activities students can participate more actively and provide each other with authentic communication practice. In this case, the lack of target-level modeling and feedback may be considered to be an acceptable trade-off for increased student participation and productivity.

By carefully structuring the activity, teachers can reduce the possible effects of students' English deficiencies. For example, by linking the cooperative activity with the reading passage, teachers can provide students with vocabulary they can use while talking with their group mates.

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