

PAIR AND GROUP WORK AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF LEARNING

Collaborative and cooperative learning is the way of working together in pairs or groups on a learning task or problem and benefiting from this interaction. Different approaches (social-psychological, sociocultural, cognitive-developmental, and cognitive-elaboration) show the effectiveness of group work: individuals learn more and better when they interact with each other, share their ideas and thoughts, create a mutual product, etc. [1]. Collaborative and cooperative work develops not only language skills but communication skills, leading potential, organizational skills, etc. Collaborative and cooperative learning is often combined with problem-based and project-based learning.

Several **cooperative pair techniques** can be used while teaching a foreign language such as *scripted cooperation*, *reciprocal peer tutoring*, and *guided peer questioning* [1]. In *scripted cooperation* students work together to learn a text. They divide the text into parts, read one part at the same time; then one partner retells the part, another partner should listen, help, correct. I personally don't find this technique to be very effective. Students are often not interested in simple text retelling so I try to modify retelling tasks to make them interesting for learners.

In *reciprocal peer tutoring* students work together to teach one another. They are supposed to change their roles of a student and a teacher. I tried using this technique but a teacher's role is usually suitable for a smarter student who will explain to his/her partner the material, or be able to correct his/her partner's language mistakes.

Guided peer questioning technique means asking and answering questions in pairs (or groups). This technique is very useful because it doesn't only help to understand and remember the material but it also develops students' critical thinking because they have to think what to ask and how to ask.

No one will argue today that group work is an effective tool of teaching. But is it always successful? What problems do teachers encounter when they try to involve their students into group work? In her article Judith A. Rance-Roney tries to enumerate the potential **problems of grouping students** and suggests **solutions** how to solve them.

1. How many students must be in one group? Minimum – 3, maximum – 7. Besides, it's not necessary that all groups have the same number of participants.

2. Fixed or flexible groups? Both. You can make a fixed group for one month, for example, and then make other groups.

3. Group membership: should we group students with the same or different level of English in one group? If you want your students to participate in a group discussion equally, the students in the group must have similar proficiency level of English. You can also group students with different knowledge of English and give them different tasks to think about and present later as a whole group.

4. Personality grouping: active students with passive? Not always. If the activity is problem-solving or decision-making, shy and quiet students probably

won't be heard in a mixed group. Moreover, choose a leader or ask who wants to be a leader in the group to stimulate and to control the working process.

5. Controlled affiliation grouping: friends in one group or different? Girls vs. boys? It depends on the content of the task and on the assigned outcome.

6. Assigning roles. Choose a leader or ask who wants to be a leader in the group to stimulate and to control the working process. Appoint a writer, a reporter, a time monitor, a vocabulary and grammar monitor, etc. [2].

One of the problems was not mentioned in the article: sometimes students don't want to work in groups or even pairs. They want to speak English only when the teacher listens to them and corrects their mistakes. They are not interested in sharing ideas with each other, they don't understand all the values of collaborative and cooperative learning. Sometimes I have to spend some time explaining to the students the effectiveness of group or pair work. Unfortunately, they don't always seem to share my opinion and I still have to force them to work in pairs or groups.

I personally try to use group activities as often as possible. I teach English to university students aged 17-23. For example, when the task is to create and write a story, I usually divide students into groups of 3 or 4. To save class time I often tell them to make groups with their neighbours. When the task is to discuss a problem or several problems, I prefer to make heterogeneous groups (boys with girls, no friends in a group) to provide an interesting discussion full of different thoughts and ideas. With my linguistic students, when the task demands lots of academic knowledge for each group I prefer to assign a leader among the best students. Sometimes I allow leaders to make their own team.

There are also different **grouping techniques** which help teachers to divide students into accidental groups. For example, you can use cards of different colours to make groups: students which choose the same colour card make one group. Real play cards (with four aces, kings, queens, etc.) can also be used by teachers to make groups of 3 or 4. Students can count from one till 3, 4 or 5 depending on how many learners there should be in one group: students of number 1 are put in group 1, etc. You can also divide students in groups if you have a list of their names: the first 3-4 students, then the next 3-4, etc.

In general, cooperative and collaborative work (in pairs, groups, teams) appears to be very effective for developing language skills as well as for developing learners' communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills, for increasing students' motivation in studying and promotes students' involvement in class activities.

References:

1. O'Donnell, A.M. Cooperative and Collaborative Learning // The StateUniversity.com Education Encyclopedia, 2016: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1885/Cooperative-Collaborative-Learning.html>

2. Rance-Roney, J. A. (2010). Reconceptualizing interactional groups: Grouping schemes for maximizing language learning // English Teaching Forum, 10(1), 2010. – pp. 20-26: http://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/10-48-1-d.pdf