

perform. It is noteworthy that the instructions should be so clear that students have no difficulty in understanding what to do and how to do the task. In the process phase while the students are working in groups, the teacher should go from group to group and provide general approval and support. Definitely in all classes there are students who need more help. The teacher's responsibility is to care for them, solve their problems, and persuade them to have more group interaction and participation. During the ending phase, the role of the teacher is to provide feedback to students' performances. Teachers might give the right solution to the problem, listen to students' suggestions and evaluate them, or collect their papers and correct them.

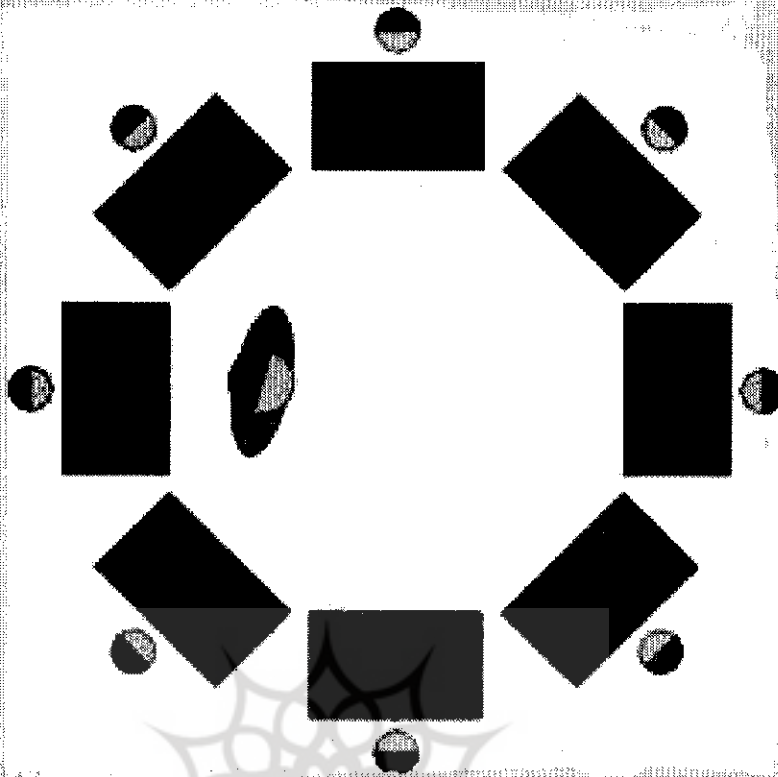
Conclusion

From a psycholinguistic viewpoint since output is important for second language learning, situations which promote only one or two-word responses are less desirable than those which allow more complex speech, or more risk taking in terms of the use of unfamiliar as yet unautomatized language. Therefore, it can be concluded that working with small groups provides several different sources of input, output, and correction and increases face-to-face interaction, which is almost impossible in traditional teacher-fronted classes. Cooperative group work provides a unique context for students in which they can learn and demonstrate social skills. Through cooperative group work learning students can develop skills of interaction such as active listening, turn taking, communicating, tolerating others' ideas, and encouraging others.

Cognitive skills such as problem solving, discovery learning, and creativity can also be fostered through cooperative group work activities.

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friendship, streaming, and chance. Friendship refers to putting friends with friends in a group. It is believed that this criterion in grouping students can provide opportunities for social development (Pollard, 2003). Streaming refers to dividing students into small groups through considering special criteria such as personality factors or level of knowledge. For example, students in a class who are more sociable can be matched with students who are usually silent in class or those students who have a better knowledge of language can be put in the same group with those who possess a lower language competence. In chance grouping, students can be grouped randomly in order to enhance friendship and altruistic relationships. It should be noted that teachers can form groups and as the class develops

rearrange them.

There are a variety of factors based on which grouping decisions are made. If the teacher is concerned about the atmosphere of the class, s/he can make friendship groups. If the teacher is dealing with a non-homogeneous class, students can be streamed so that stronger students can help weaker ones. If the teachers face a homogeneous class with a friendly atmosphere, class grouping may be left to chance (Harmer, 2001).

Group Work Organization

Ur (1995) argues that cooperative group work activities can be organized in three phases of presentation, process, and ending. Through presentation phase students get familiar with the task they are required to



in classes. In large classes where there is not enough time for participation, student participation can be maximized. Besides, in such classes teachers can enlist the help of a few group leaders to hand out copies, collect the assignments, and check if everyone has understood what to do during a task.

Despite the advantages mentioned, some teachers may not feel positive toward employing group work activities in their classes. They may think that it is time consuming and can end up in chaos or that they may lose control over the class. Besides, helping the students to recognize that the purpose of being in a group is for work rather than a chance to chat may seem difficult. However, research findings within the L2 domain (Holt, 1993; Kessler, 1992 cited by Qxford 1997) show that cooperative learning techniques are very useful. Teachers can easily practice group work activities in their EFL classes and experience the ease with which their classes will be managed as compared to individualistic or competitive classes. In cooperative classes, not

only students have higher motivation, enjoy the class time, and are quite active in performing a task but also it provides a better use of class time.

Different activities that students can be required to carry on within groups can be listed as follows:

- Reading a passage and answering the related comprehension questions
- Reading a story and making questions
- Checking the meaning of new vocabulary and discussing their meaning in the context of occurrence
- Writing a summary or a composition
- Discussing an issue, finding solutions, sharing, ideas before beginning the discussion in a whole-class grouping
- Role playing and practicing a dialog orally
- Preparing an outline
- Completing grammatical exercises

Creating Groups

According to Harmer (2001) three criteria can be considered in creating groups in a class:

In traditional teacher-fronted classes teachers usually complain about large classes, inattentiveness of students, unsatisfactory output of the class as compared to the given input, and low scores students get despite the effort teachers make for promoting language learning. In such classes, the teacher speaks most of the time, leads activities, and passes judgments on student performance while trying to attract their attention to what is being done in the classroom. However, it is not exactly known whether the students being addressed by the teacher are receiving appropriate input as compared to their current level of language development. Moreover, students know that the questions asked by the teacher are only for checking their knowledge rather than really wanting a proper and complete answer to a real question. The result is a boring atmosphere both for the teacher and students.

One solution is reducing student dependence on teacher through cooperative group work learning, which gets all students involved in the process of language learning simultaneously. Cooperative learning, according to Olsen and Kagan (1992), is "group learning activity" in which learning occurs through exchange of information between learners in groups. It is argued that in this type of learning, learners are responsible for their own learning and are "motivated to increase the learning of others" (see Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Thus, "cooperative learning refers to a set of highly structured, psychologically and sociologically based techniques" that contribute to the process of learning and achieving a learning goal (Oxford, 1997).

Advantages of Cooperative Group Work Activities

In Cooperative learning students who are divided into small groups experience working

together, and learn to cooperate rather than compete with each other. The face-to-face interaction among group members brings about positive interdependence for achieving their common goals and enhances friendly atmosphere in classroom (Le Francois, 1991). In classes conducted through cooperative learning, students are seated in small groups of four to six and the teacher while walking around, checks the students' work and helps them with their difficulties. In this way, it is much easier for the teacher to work with one group while others are getting with their own work. Through this procedure, The teacher's attitude toward the students is like a group of adults who feel responsibility for the process of learning in class. When a group completes the required task, the members can be encouraged to help members of other groups.

Cooperative learning is often recommended for developing social and language skills and as a means by which learners can extend their learning together (Pollard et al., 2003). It can establish positive interdependence among students in such a way that through structuring the goals, materials, and rules gains for one person are associated with gains for others (Oxford, 1997). Experience shows that students feel less anxiety when they ask questions from their peers than from their teachers. Therefore, students in small groups work together or ask what they do not know without the pressure of the whole class listening to them. Another advantage of cooperative learning is that students with different strengths and weaknesses can work with each other. This can help teachers to solve the problem of heterogeneity in EFL classes. Additionally, teachers get the opportunity to work with individual students specially those who need special attention. Utilizing cooperative group work activities in classes can also help teachers to elucidate the problem of participation



Cooperative Group Work : A Useful Technique in EFL Classes

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چکیده

این مقاله سعی دارد نشان دهد، بسیاری از مشکلاتی که معمولاً معلمان در کلاس های آموزش زبان انگلیسی با آن ها مواجهند، ناشی از کلاس های مرسوم معلم محور هستند. اگر بتوان در کلاس های آموزش زبان از فعالیت های مشارکتی و گروهی استفاده کرد، بسیاری از این مشکلات را می توان حل کرد. این مقاله به امتیازات فعالیت های مشارکتی و گروهی، نحوه تقسیم بندی کلاس به چند گروه، وظایف معلم در برخورد با گروه ها، و فعالیت های کلاسی که می توان در گروه ها انجام شود، اشاره کرده است. کلید واژه ها: فعالیت های گروهی، آموزش مشارکتی، کلاس های معلم محور.

Abstract

English teachers usually complain about some problems in their classes that slacken the process of language learning. In this article it has been argued that a shift from traditional teacher-fronted classes to cooperative group work activities can solve many of these problems. Therefore, the advantages of cooperative learning have been pointed out; the activities which can be carried out through cooperative group work activities have been suggested, and different ways of forming groups have been discussed.

Key Words : cooperative learning, group work activities, teacher-fronted classes