

KEYS TO SUCCESS IN COOPERATIVE LEARNING CLASSROOM

Today's demand for proficient language teachers makes higher educational establishments look for effective ways to implement innovative techniques and methods of learning into university environment. One of the most complex innovative method of learning is cooperative learning (CL). CL not only improves knowledge of English but also affects interpersonal relationships within the group. The usage of the various CL techniques let students feel what it is like to be a part of a group and share responsibility with the others. While working in cooperative learning setting future teachers have a great chance to experience cooperative learning from within and this may help them in future career. The usage of CL in the language teacher training process is in the sphere of the main objectives for our investigation. Different cooperative learning methods and techniques have been investigated to implement into the educational process of language teacher training at the Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University.

While implementing some CL techniques we kept in mind that not all group work can be considered cooperative. American scholars R. Johnson and D. Johnson underline that cooperative learning is successful and, in fact, is cooperative learning only when it is structured with the help of its key elements (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993). The basic elements according to Johnson and Johnson are positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills and group processing. We structured our classes with these basic elements when we used Learning Together technique developed by Johnson & Johnson (1975/1999). Basic elements are keys to success in cooperative classroom.

1. Positive Interdependence is a feeling that you are linked with others and their work benefits you and your work benefits them. Scholars state that within every cooperative lesson positive goal interdependence must be established through mutual learning goals. In our lessons we also used complementary roles (reader, checker, encourager, elaborator) to strengthen positive interdependence.

2. Individual Accountability takes place when the performance of each individual student is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual.

3. Face-To-Face Promotive Interaction is an opportunity for students to promote each other's success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other's efforts to learn.

4. Social Skills are of great importance in CL classroom. Contributing to the success of a cooperative effort requires interpersonal and small group skills. Leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills have been taught while working with Learning Together CL technique.

5. Group Processing was used at the end of every class when group members discussed how well they achieved their goals and maintained effective working relationships.

However, while working with other CL technique – STAD (Student Teams – Achievement Divisions) we had to structure our classes using a bit different CL elements. STAD is based on the work of teams and the key elements are also oriented on the team work. These are team rewards, equal opportunity for success and similar to all CL techniques individual accountability.

Understanding basic elements of CL and developing skills in structuring them, allow teachers to adapt CL to their unique classes and students and make every lesson the one that can make a difference.

References

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