

Students' Attitude Towards Teaching Models

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Abstract

Most methodologists acknowledge necessity of interactive methods in classroom activities. Group work is the best solution of this problem. Groups are usually more productive, creative, and motivated than individuals on their own. Group projects help students to develop skills specific to collaborative efforts, allowing students to tackle more complex problems than they could on their own. Before starting the group work, teachers set some kinds of rules for students to obey. The rules can be connected to different working process. Although most students like to be involved in them, teachers still should be very careful when they are making them get involved in a group work. They should plan it very carefully trying to involve all the group members equally. The more familiar team work becomes for students, the fewer problems they have and they learn how to use their skills. Students develop and practice skills in: decision making, problem solving, communication, critical thinking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and teamwork. To maximize these benefits, teachers try to manage group work effectively. A successful lesson that involves interesting group work activities, full of competitions and excitement will make your lessons very productive, challenging, motivating, engaging and successful.

Keywords: Group work, interaction, competition, motivation, social skills

Introduction

“More hands make for lighter work.” “Two heads are better than one.” These adages emphasize the importance of potential groups which are usually more productive, creative, and motivated than individuals on their own” (Teaching excellence and educational innovation: 1). “Schools have started using group work system since the age of humanism” (Lortkifanidze: 137). It has great potential for many reasons. “Properly structured, group projects can reinforce skills that are relevant to both group and individual work, including the ability to: break complex tasks into parts and steps, refine understanding through discussion and explanation, develop stronger communication skills (Teaching excellence and educational innovation:1). This does not imply that the entire teaching process should be constructed on the group work, but it must be one of the essential parts of the teaching-learning process.

Research problem and objectives

If we talk about the necessity of interactive methods, we can say that one of the bases of teaching environment is group work. (Nizharadze: 44) “Group projects can also help students to develop skills specific to collaborative efforts, allowing students to tackle more complex problems than they could on their own, delegate roles and responsibilities, hold one another (and be held) accountable, receive social support and encouragement to take risks, develop new approaches to resolving differences, find effective peers to emulate.” (Teaching excellence and educational innovation:1).

Another key advantage of a group work in the classroom is that everything can be accomplished faster. “When a group attacks a project or task, it can be done more quickly and with greater efficiency than if just one person attempted to muddle through it” (Belcher: 1). While the potential learning benefits of group work are significant, simply assigning group work is no guarantee that these goals will be achieved. In fact, group projects can – and often do – backfire badly when they are not designed, supervised, and assessed in a way that promotes meaningful teamwork and deep collaboration” (Teaching excellence and educational innovation:1).

Teachers sometimes avoid using group work for its complex nature; it concerns even those teachers, who theoretically like this model of the lesson. There can be several possible reasons for not using it: they face students’ negative reaction at the first site, teachers cannot manage to deal with the noise and conflicts that follows it, estimation of a group work is a far more difficult task, etc.

I am an English teacher for many years and I often use a group work in my classes. So, I always try to follow some instructions which are essential for managing any kind of classroom activity. At first I set the rules, which should be followed by every student, give students clear instructions about the working process, divide the groups and distribute the roles for every group member, introduce evaluation criteria, set and try to manage time, set a kind of prize for the winner group and so on.

Group division

It is not easy to divide students into groups, as it seems at first glance. We use different types of group divisions, sometimes we divide them at random, sometimes we give them choice. We usually group them in pairs, triads, small (4-5 students) and large (6 or more students) groups. I always give preference to 3-4 students group

working on a task simultaneously, as it is easily manageable for me. There is less noise, less conflict, all students are actively involved, and no one tries to hide behind a stronger student. I give each student a different role and try to divide the work equally among students. For instance, one of them tries to get some information and discuss with group members, another writes down discussion consequences, the other is putting notes to get ready for the speech, etc. Students try to reach an agreement during the discussion. They listen to each other, consider several options, different versions, analyze and sum up all of them. However, there is a risk that majority overcomes one's even logical, maybe better idea, so teachers should pay attention to this process very carefully.

Students learn how groups function productively. "In order for groups to function productively, students must fulfill individual responsibilities. Productive group members come prepared, they contribute to the group interaction, they support each other, and they deliver good work on time. In order for individuals to function productively in groups, they have the right to expect the group to value their individual contributions" (Weimer, 2013: 1).

Setting the group

As we already mentioned we use several criteria when setting the group. At the beginning group division causes noise. However, eventually students get accustomed to it and after using it a few times, movement of the process gets quite fast and easy.

When we give students a choice they prefer to work with their friends. It has got one positive side: they work with pleasure with the partners chosen by them; they feel responsibility, initiative and accomplish the task faster. However, we know that group work should develop social and interpersonal skills, such as co-operation, collaboration, leadership, speaking, listening, discussing, etc. Therefore, we always mix different kinds of students and give them chance to cooperate with students who have different skills and academic achievements. "Group work helps students learn how to work with people outside their circle of friends, including those who have different backgrounds and experiences. They can even learn how to work with those who disagree with them and others they might not "like" or want as friends" (Weimer, 2013: 1).

Teacher's role

"Teachers shouldn't dominate a group but support it. Teachers shouldn't just stand and teach whole class stuff. That's an old-fashioned way of doing things. If children learn in groups consistently, then they really can learn to work together" (Smith, 2006:1). So, when groups start working, I become an observer. I pay attention to everything what is happening in class. I move between desks, observe groups and try to be a kind of information source for them. Of course I try not to interfere in working process, if there is not special need. Students should feel that they can always rely on the teacher and she is always ready to provide them with help. If it is necessary to encourage and activate group I can even get involved in their work, as a member of a group. Sometimes I notice students continue working in the wrong direction and it becomes clear that they cannot achieve the right goal; in this case I give them instructions and help with different advice.

Set the rules and give clear instructions

Before starting the group work, I set some kinds of rules for students to obey. The rules can be connected to different working process: we set the aim, divide students into different groups, set the function for each member, introduce the evaluation criteria, and give clear instructions to students about the methods and strategies of working over the task. "Teacher should give clear instructions to students. Students should be aware of the required time to carry out the task before they start working. Teacher must find the extra work for those who finish before others" (Nizharadze, 2011: 61). All the instructions are given in advance; however introducing them is not enough. The main thing is to follow the rules very strictly.

Methodology

I decided to make a kind of research at school I work to identify our students' opinion about the group work and how they feel about this model of the lesson. I made a survey among 100 students and 90 % mention that they like this model of the lesson. They realize that group work can provide with distinct benefits. Here I present their opinions about the group work:

- * There is competition. Students like to be winners. Teachers set a prize for the best composition, the most interesting ideas. Competition element always encourages them, gives them motivation, as they always want to be the best.

- * It is very comfortable for shy pupils who do not have experience in solving problems through cooperation with others.

- * Students in pairs sometimes easily cope with the kind of exercises, which are difficult for them to cope with independently;

- * Alternative ideas and points of view can be generated to find the right answer, especially when the questions are misleading;
- * If you do not understand something, other group members help you by explaining everything;
- * You can be shared with many interesting ideas which can play an important role in deepening your understanding of a particular subject area at the same time helping you to become more imaginative and creative;
- * It helps you to develop a sense of responsibility for others, as the success of the whole group usually depends on abilities and achievements of each member;
- * Working with others gives students pleasure as they feel happy when they know they are doing it together;
- * Group members help each other and you feel safer because you are not alone;
- * It is more cheerful, interesting and motivating, gives you many funny moments;
- * You feel more comfortable when you are working together with your classmates;
- * It gives you possibility to participate in different activities and competitions;
- * You have possibility to communicate and interact with group members;
- * You work with friends and get different kinds of experience;
- * It gives you chance to enjoy the lesson with your classmates.

In spite of above mentioned advantages, 10 % of the students say that they do not like this model of the lesson. They state their opinion by giving disadvantages of a group work. They like working alone for several reasons:

- You can develop the ability of solving the problem alone, without assistance, so you are getting more independent;
- No one interrupts you, no one prevents you, and no one wastes your time;
- Sometimes group work goes to conflicts and it becomes very noisy;
- You are not influenced by others and you can keep your ideas based on your opinions;
- In a group there are students who do not share your ideas, so your opinion is sometimes left out;
- In a group work there is noise, everyone is talking and I hate it;
- You can manage your work time yourself when you work alone;
- You gain time when you work alone;
- You can concentrate on you task better;
- You do not have conflict with other students;
- Many students don't consider it as "real educational process" and for them it is just a game and a way of killing the time.

What can be the reason of this estimation? Sometimes students cannot realize the importance of a group work. So I suggest teachers to analyze the group work process with them. They should realize that group work causes noise but it is actually a productive noise, as they argue about important issues and try to find a way of solving problems together. But there can be another reason; students cannot benefit anything from a group work just by putting them together in groups. Student attitudes about group work are sometimes negative because "They've been in lots of groups where they didn't learn anything other than the fact they don't like working in groups. Much of the group work used in classrooms is not well designed or well managed. But when group work is carefully constructed and when teachers help students deal with those group dynamic issues that compromise group effectiveness, students can learn the content and the skills listed above". (Weimer, 2013:1).

I also decided to investigate how frequently teachers in the school I work use this model of the lesson. 100 students of this school were questioned. The study revealed the following:

Table 1.

Percentage of English teachers using group work activities:	Frequency:
47 %	Three times a week
27 %	Twice a week
15 %	Once a week
9 %	Once a month
2 %	Never

According to the table we can see that most teachers particularly in this school give preference to this model of the lesson. Accordingly students' estimation which is given above reveals that these teachers deal with this method quite successfully. So we can acknowledge not only popularity but at the same time necessity of this teaching model.

Conclusion

As a result of conducting this research, I propose that most of our English language teachers use this model and most of the students like to be involved in them, but teachers should be very careful when they are making the

students get involved in group work activities. They should plan it very carefully and try to involve all the group members equally. The more familiar team work becomes for students, the fewer problems they have and they learn how to use their skills. Furthermore, students develop and practice variety of skills in: decision making, problem solving, value clarification, communication, critical thinking, negotiation, conflict resolution, and teamwork. In order to maximize these benefits, teachers try to manage group work effectively. A successful lesson that involves interesting group work activities, full of competitions and excitement will make your lessons really productive, challenging, motivating, engaging, successful and exciting.

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