
PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF CLA (COLLABORATIVE LEARNING APPROACH) IN THE CLASSROOM.

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INTRODUCTION

Collaborative learning approach is a means of learning that enables students to learn in a harmonious group where all of them has a common goal to achieve. The most notable advantage of CLA is that students can learn from each other and share their knowledge with their peers. Also, in this approach, teacher only guides students towards their goal, and does not wholly control them. This article discusses main principles, practice and its implementation in the classroom.

Methods:

There are many conceptions and methods of collaborative learning that positively and effectively contribute to improve academic performance and interpersonal behavior of students in the classroom. The initial step of forming a collaborative learning environment in the classroom is to organize a group where there are variety of students depending on their interest, academic level, behavior and problems they face while learning. Through this way of collaborating, students benefit by learning from each other's experience, learning skills and moral behavior where every student has their own unique contribution to share.

According to William Littlewood, academic researcher from Hong Kong institute of education, there are several general strategies of CLA organization in the classroom. In the first strategy, he mentions that groups work on common input from the teacher or materials. It fits easily into contexts where the content of learning is predetermined by a syllabus or textbook. New material to be learnt is presented by the teacher, and groups are then asked to work on it together, with the aim of ensuring that each student understands or masters the knowledge or skill involved.

The next strategy mentioned by William Littlewood is to organize students into

“jigsaw” groups. The formation of these groups may be based various criteria including academic achievement, language proficiency, gender, age, personality, and each member often carries out a different individual task (perhaps matching his or her specific needs or interests) which forms part of an overall group task. For units of some work, the teacher may also organize so-called expert groups. ¹These are groups in which students come together to the process the same material and share ideas on it. Let us say, for example, that the four students in each jigsaw group have been asked (respectively)

¹ Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71-94.

to (1) watch a video, (2) gather classmates opinion, (3) read a simple newspaper article and (4) read a more demanding article on a topic such as “healthy eating”. After the jigsaw groups have met to get an overview of the topic as a whole, students may form groups with others who have been assigned the same sub-task, so that they can help each other and share ideas on the sub-task. These groups maybe more homogeneous in terms of proficiency level or interests. Students then return to their home groups, where they contribute their knowledge and ideas to the jigsaw, - explains the researcher.²

I also believe that project-based learning compels students to work and collaborate effectively. Dividing students into several small groups with 3 or 4 members in each and then presenting a different topic to each group, and asking each of them their opinions on the subject matter, encourages them to engage in deep discussions and critical thinking. This collaborative process not only fosters a sense of shared responsibility but also allows students to refine their communication skills as they articulate their perspectives and synthesize diverse viewpoints into a cohesive final presentation.

Results:

Mentioned methods enable students to learn effectively and more consciously. From my perspective, it mostly helps reduce the anxiety and stress students have while studying a new subject. As many students are mostly shy or are not open with their teachers, they can work freely and confidently with their group-mates and classmates in small groups. For example, when they make an effort to speak, there is less audience, and the idea of misunderstanding or the fear of making mistakes lessens. Secondly, CLA facilitates students to support each other instead of competing as their objective in learning is the same. (Dornyei, 2002) For example, performing a drama in which each member of the group should work together starting from preparing the plots of drama to practicing prior to the show in order to exhibit good performance.³ CLA benefits in terms of providing social supports from peers as stated by Dornyei (2002). To prevent language anxiety in English language learning classrooms, Dornyei (2002) suggests avoiding competitions and promoting cooperation. Cooperative behaviors generated by students through CLA environments can let students feel less anxious to produce a speech or conversation among members of the groups (Dornyei, 2002). (Berli Arta)

Furthermore, collaborative learning enhances every members' social communication skills and makes them confident in the expression of their speech. That is, every member has their own responsibility and every member has to work equally in order to reach the goal. This means they share ideas often and discuss everything in their “home groups”. In this way, each student gains experience of communicating with others as well as confidence. One more thing that CLA provides is the opportunity of finding new friends and being closely familiar with their group members who may have different outlook towards life, education and etc. According to one thorough study conducted by a number of researchers of Central Mindanao University, CLA helped to learn Filipino

2.Dörnyei, Z. (2002). The motivational basis of language learning tasks. In P. Robinson (Ed.), *Individual differences and instructed language learning* (pp. 137-158). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

language more effectively and also enhanced students performance. In this study, they examined the efficacy of collaborative learning strategies in improving Filipino language proficiency among Grade 9 students at Batangan Integrated School. They found out about the proficiency of students who are exposed to CLA and those who are exposed to non-collaborative learning strategies and they compared the results of pre and post test results. The results indicated a statistically significant increase in the student performance. They concluded: “Based on the significant improvements observed in learners exposed to collaborative learning strategies, it is recommended that Filipino teachers and curriculum developers actively integrate these approaches into classroom instruction. The demonstrated effectiveness of collaborative methods in enhancing language proficiency, critical thinking, and student engagement suggests their potential benefits extend beyond Filipino language classes to other subject areas as well. To maximize these gains, continuous professional development and support for teachers are essential, ensuring they are well- equipped to implement collaborative strategies effectively. By fostering interactive, student- centered learning environments, educators can promote deeper understanding and sustained academic growth, aligning with the study’s conclusions on the value of peer-driven instructional methods”.

Analysis:

Why is CLA important and widely used? Collaborative learning is a teaching method that has been used for ages and it is extremely important where effective and intensive learning is wanted. It offers students’ independence as well as improving their critical thinking. For instance, when groups are given a logical question, they are urged to think out of box and share their opinions and ideas with each other as they have no choice to ask from their teacher. One important thing I like in CLA is that students do not have competitive learning environment as their goal is the same, so that they learn as well as teaching their peers who is lacking behind them. Also, this type of teaching creates a learning atmosphere where every member is in the same position and has the same responsibility as others whether they are highly skilled or slow at learning. Furthermore, students start to use participate to the class actively as the fear of being isolated from their peers urges them to be more attentive and active. It also helps with the retention of knowledge as they gain it through mostly discussion and interaction. When students are from different cultural backgrounds, they learn cultural awareness and how to respect other members and their opinion.

Discussion:

All in all, collaborative learning is one the most beneficial techniques of teaching and learning both effective for teachers and students by providing independence in the class, enhancing students’ active participation in the class, encouraging them to teach and learn from each other, life-long experience as well as promoting respect and cultural awareness. For all these reasons, collaborative learning can be one of the most effective methods in teaching that helps teachers create an attractive and engaging learning environment combining all the necessary aspects.

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