

Chapter 163

The Implication of Collaborative Learning in College English

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Abstract Collaborative learning means two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together. In the classroom, students rarely communicate with each other due to the limited time. Therefore, this paper focuses on the collaborative learning of English for college students out of class. This thesis analyzes the features of collaborative learning and Chinese college English teaching first. Then I try to suggest ways to imply collaborative learning in college English. Problems about this issue are also mentioned at the end of the thesis.

Keywords Collaborative learning · College english · Teaching and learning · Strategies

163.1 Introduction

In Chinese college, students only have limited time to learn English, especially for non-English majors. They learn English as a tool to help them to improve their majors and also it is an important tool for them to know the latest development of their specialty all over the world. They need to read in English, speak English and listen to English, all these skills are essential for modern college students. In most universities, there are more than 60 students in one classroom. They can learn reading and listening pretty good. But it is not ideal for learning oral English and practice. The main factor is there is not enough time for them to practice. At the same time, it is really a huge task for teachers to manage such big classes if they want the students to practice English more during the class hours. Thus students need to practice English out of class. If the teachers can monitor or guide their

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learning out of class, that will be perfect. Thus, collaborative learning is just the right approach to apply to fulfill this.

163.2 Collaborative Learning

There is no well-received definition for the term Collaborative Learning [1]. Different researchers just focus on different aspects of it. He Kekang [2] defines it as the instruction method in which students are facilitated to learn and achieve a given learning goal collaboratively. Shu Dingfang [3] said that it is an instruction strategy by which instructors promote students to work in groups or communities.

No matter what the definitions are composed, this term has three main features: first, students learn in groups; second, they have a common aim; third, they support each other to create a facilitating environment of learning English.

There are basic theoretical principles under this approach [4]:

- (1) Working together results in a greater understanding than would likely have occurred if one had worked independently.
- (2) Spoken and written interactions contribute to this increased understanding.
- (3) Opportunities are understood by students through classroom experiences of relationships between social interactions and increased understanding.
- (4) Some elements of this increased understanding are idiosyncratic and unpredictable.
- (5) Participation is voluntary and must be freely entered into.

There is a difference between collaborative learning and cooperative learning [5]. The cooperative learning deals exclusively with traditional knowledge while collaborative ties into the social constructivist movement. In cooperative learning, the authority remains with the instructor who retains ownership of the task. In collaborative learning, the instructor transfers all authority to the group.

163.3 Strategies Applicable to Collaborative Learning

163.3.1 *The Information Gap*

This is widely used strategy in collaborative learning. In this method, each member of the group has information which the others need in order to complete the same task or develop a complete report. A full preparation before the group discussion is necessary. They need to work on the topic to discuss the problem and obtain enough background knowledge of the topic. Thus, it will be possible to explain their information clearly to other people. At the same time, they will know what kind of information they need to know in order to complete the task.

163.3.2 Group Investigation

This involves the distribution of tasks across a classroom so that different groups study different aspects of the same topic for an extended period of time. These groups are responsible for doing their own planning, carrying out the study and presenting their finding to the class. They make their own study plans and task division. After the presentation of all groups, they need to work in their own groups and finish the whole task respectively. In order to apply this technique out of the classroom, teachers should give directions in the classroom and give more guidance during the process. The students finish their tasks mainly in groups out of the classroom, they just meet in the classroom to share their information and research result with each other and get what they need to complete the task. Thus, an out of class collaborative learning group is formed. During the process, students work together and communicate with each other and gain information from each other.

163.3.3 Learning Community

A learning community is a group of people who share common emotions, values or beliefs are actively engaged in learning together from each other, and by habituation. Such communities have become the template for a cohort-based, interdisciplinary approach to higher education. Experts frequently describe five basic nonresidential learning community models [6]:

- (1) **Linked courses:** Students take two connected courses, usually one disciplinary course such as history or biology and one skills course such as writing, speech, or information literacy.
- (2) **Learning clusters:** Students take three or more connected courses, usually with a common interdisciplinary theme uniting them.
- (3) **Freshman interest groups:** Similar to learning clusters, but the students share the same major, and they often receive academic advising as part of the learning community.
- (4) **Federated learning communities:** Similar to a learning cluster, but with an additional seminar course taught by a “Master Learner,” a faculty member who enrolls in the other courses and takes them alongside the students. The Master Learner’s course draws connections between the other courses.
- (5) **Coordinated studies:** This model blurs the lines between individual courses. The learning community functions as a single, giant course that the students and faculty members work on full-time for an entire semester or academic year.

163.3.3.1 Writing Groups

In a writing group, all the students talk about their writing plans, read their own writings and others, rewrite their writings and edit their writings in the group [7]. Thus, there will be real communication. One benefit of writing groups is that it focuses not only on communication skills and collaborative learning, but also enforces their grammar. This is very important for foreign language learners.

163.4 Evaluation in Collaborative Learning

In collaborative learning, evaluation is not only made for teachers to evaluate students, but also for students to evaluate each other and themselves [8]. It is also a group evaluation. In this way, teachers can monitor students learning process and help them to get higher levels. Meanwhile, the group members can understand each other better in English learning process and provide advice for each other to improve the English of the whole group. The following are the main evaluation methods:

Peer evaluation Group members hand in reports on their own study and other student's performance. When they evaluate their partners, they get better understanding of their partners. That will facilitate their collaboration and help them to further their learning.

Teacher observation Teachers also need to pay more attention to the process of collaborative learning. It is better to use a portfolio for every student. All the documents resulted from their collaborative learning are kept in it. Thus, every progress they've made will be shown clearly in their documents.

163.5 Teachers and Students in Collaborative Learning

Students are no longer competing with each other. They collaborate with each other to reach a common goal. In the process, students participate in the activities voluntarily. They set the group's goal and make plans together. They negotiate to determine the concrete process of completing the task. They also evaluate each other. In such a way, they are involved in a relevantly fixed community. It is the students who are responsible for and take control of their own study.

The teachers are changing their roles too. Teachers are required to be an expert designer and competent facilitator. They design tasks for students out of class collaborative study. They also need to figure out ways to monitor students' learning out of the class. They should not simply give tests to students to evaluate them. They also need to find ways to encourage collaborative learning. They need to help students to participate in the collaboration give them guidance to ensure the smooth transition from the classroom to outside of the classroom. That is a real challenge for all teachers.

163.6 Conclusion

Collaborative learning is really good for college students to extend their learning time and train their communicative skills. At the same time, they also learn the spirit of collaboration which is necessary for social life. During the collaborative learning process, students negotiate with each other, make plans together, and work at their common goal together. They are in fact experiencing the society in the process of learning. That is what education should do. Thus, collaborative learning out of class is really good for college students. It has many benefits for both teachers and the students. A carefully planned collaborative learning is really a good way to improve students learning ability and communicative skills.

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