

General Principles of Group Work in the Classroom

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Abstract

Education occupies a very important role in the life of each person. It is the means that we can rely on to become successful members of our society and occupy suitable place. It helps people to develop such skills as critical thinking, analysis, general transferrable skills and many others.

Group work is one of the important skills the development of which in students requires effective planning and implementation from teacher's side.

Group work prepares students for real life situations. Group work is considered as an efficient methodology type which increases motivation in learners, involves them in active learning and develops critical thinking, decision-making and co-operation skills.

Student-centered education gave a strong influence to the development of cooperative pedagogy. Collaborative pedagogy offers a different way of learning, when the student has his friends by his side, whom he needs to help or ask to find out what he does not understand. Group work is one of the important skills, the development of which requires effective planning and management by the teacher.

The importance of group work is indisputable, if we consider that the goal of modern education is not only the accumulation of knowledge level, factual information, but also the development of the ability to analyze and critically evaluate the received information.

A student's critical thinking is formed only in such a learning environment, where there is frequent intense, structured interaction between students.

The work deals with the size of group, methods of groupings, the role of a teacher, major problems in groups, etc. We offer a very interesting research which we have conducted in public school students (4-5 grades). The research gives information about the position of students towards the group work and main problems they have found out during this method of working.

The findings help us to improve the

Key words: cooperative pedagogy, learning environment, active learning, purposeful action, homogeneous/heterogeneous groups, competence.

Among the forms of organization of the educational process in the whole world, group work is really worth noting. Student-centered education gave a strong influence to the development of cooperative pedagogy. Collaborative pedagogy offers a different way of learning, when the student has

his friends by his side, whom he needs to help or ask to find out what he does not understand. Group work is one of the important skills, the development of which requires effective planning and management by the teacher.

The ability to communicate and cooperate plays a special role in the formation of the student. The development of these skills is greatly facilitated by such a form of class organization as group work. "The importance of group work is indisputable, if we consider that the goal of modern education is not only the accumulation of knowledge level, factual information, but also the development of the ability to analyze and critically evaluate the received information. In order to develop critical thinking skills, students must have the opportunity to think, speak and have a listener. For this, it is not enough just to talk with the teacher, and even more so, just to listen to the teacher's conversation. A student's critical thinking is formed only in such a learning environment, where there is frequent intense, structured interaction between students. This is the goal of group work.

Any person who has the skill to work in a group as a single member or as a leader, is able to clearly formulate tasks, agree with group members, coordinate their activities, adequately evaluate the abilities of group members, manage conflict and difficult situations- s/he can do anything. S/he belongs to the number of people who successfully copes with the most difficult requirements of modern times and is much better adapted to social reality than others. Therefore, the main task of teaching and the teacher is and should be to raise communicatively competent and educated individuals. But communicative competence does not arise in an empty space; it is formed and developed on the basis of purposeful action. The starting point of this competence is the experience of human relations, the acquisition of which should begin at the initial level of education. Exactly from this stage, we should help students to develop communicative and social skills. The teacher should promote the development and establishment of this kind of competence and, for this reason, organize the interaction of the students in advance, and first of all, organize group work.

A very important question is how many members should be in a group. This is a question that does not have universal answer, because the number of students in a group depends on the total number of students in the class, the purpose of the lesson, the age of the students, space, the possibility of arranging desks and other factors. However, the researchers recommend that a group size of five to seven students is optimal, not more than seven, because in larger groups some students are expected to sit passively and not be noticed by the teacher, while in smaller groups there may be fewer differences of opinion. Students can be grouped into pairs, small groups of 4-5 or larger groups of 6 or more people. When the groups start working, the teacher's role changes. In the process of group work, the teacher performs various functions: he checks both the course of work and responds to questions, regulates the order of work and

disputes between students. If necessary, he helps an individual student or the whole group. The teacher should monitor the work of the whole class, but should not give the impression that he is helping only one particular group. The teacher should not interfere in the work of the group, unless the students want some kind of clarification regarding the mentioned issue. The teacher is the initiator, informer, stimulator, and evaluator. The teacher observes group work and asks himself questions:

- Does anyone dominate in the group, and if others are only his helpers?
- Who is looking for a teacher to help?
- Has anyone been excluded?
- Who can't communicate in a group appropriately?

For group work, it is better to choose the following types of tasks:

Tasks that involve checking something or giving advice.

Delicate issues that do not have a clear explanation: complex tasks, tasks to be solved by brainstorming, mosaic type assignments, tasks that involve competition.

The task should be clearly formulated, the goal unambiguous and clearly understood by everyone.

We must distinguish between closed, open and free tasks.

During the closed task, the teacher specifically tells the students what to do: to assemble, arrange, etc. Such a task should preferably be given at the initial stage, before they get used to group work (e.g. match a picture of an animal to their living place).

Open group assignments, despite their openness, should be written specifically, but here students have more freedom in how they solve the problem and how they present their work (e.g. what should people do to reduce pollution).

Free assignments mean giving students the freedom to choose a topic they want to work on and decide for themselves how to present their work.

How to group students in a group work?

One of the important elements in preparation for group work involves the teacher thinking about how students might be grouped. Our experience suggests that it is important to consider whether you want students to work in friendship groups, to work in self-selected groups, to work in randomly assigned groups, or to work in teacher-engineered groups which might be of mixed attainment so that the higher-attaining learners are able to assist the lower-attaining students to understand the task. We offer several ways of grouping the students.

- Randomly (counting, matching cards, candy colors, birthdays, etc.). Students are not opposed to such a division, but the teacher cannot be sure whether he will accept a heterogeneous group or not.)

- The teacher decides how to group, in such a case, in order to avoid resistance from the students, the teacher will have to explain why he decided so and what contribution he expects from each member.
- Students decide how to group, depending on who is interested in which topic or because of personal sympathies; the positive side of this kind of grouping is that group members feel calm and safe, and the negative is that they lose the chance of close contact with others, or some students may be left without a group at all.

A good group means a combination of representatives of different ages, genders, backgrounds, academic backgrounds and cultures.

In order for the group work to be productive, it is necessary to distribute the responsibilities: who will lead the discussion, determine the action plan, observe the time limit, ensure compliance with the rules, and make the presentation. It is desirable for everyone to take different responsibilities at different times. It is also important that everyone participates in the presentation of the completed work. It is better if the group decides who will present which part at the end of the work, so that the group members are motivated until the end.

It is desirable that all students individually receive/chose a card on which the responsibilities of the students are written and it is explained which responsibility involves the performance of what work.

Responsibilities can be:

- Who will lead the discussion?
- Who determines the action plan?
- Who will keep the time limit?
- Who ensures compliance with the rules?
- Who will make the presentation?

Homogeneous and heterogeneous groups

Grouping according to high and low academic performance (homogeneous group): Care should be taken here that the frequent formation of such groups does not hinder the sharing of knowledge and does not create an academic gap.

Heterogeneous groups with different academic backgrounds are desirable in the sense that all students have the opportunity to share and move to a new level of knowledge/experience.

In any case, in order for group work to be productive, members need to understand that they must unite and be able to organize work independently.

Problems in a group work

In a group, there will always be a conflict of group and personal interests, which can even be considered a positive side, because it will be necessary to find the best solution. It is important that before starting group work, students should work out the rules of group work together. They should learn: the principles of work, communication and cooperation, as well as taking responsibility for their own work. Working in a group corresponds to human social needs. Each participant has to argue his own opinion. It helps to shape social thinking, attitudes and behavior. In well-organized group work, students see problems and ways to solve them in a social context, which gives them a sense of belonging to each other, and thus the spirit of teamwork develops. Group work allows students to adapt many different roles. Even shy students feel safe and are given the opportunity to express their opinion, they feel that they are needed.

The research referring to “impact of group work on the example of primary classes“ was conducted in Telavi Municipality schools. The subject in which the research was carried out was English language. One class was controlling and another experimental one. In a controlling group there were 11 pupils and in an experimental one 12. The duration of the research was 7 weeks. During this time 4 types of group works were held.

At first we observed the situation in the two classes. Next we had questionnaire with the students. Some of the interesting questions were the following:

- How often do you apply group work in the classroom?
- What kind of relationship do you have with other students?

Friendly---medium----don't have any relations

- Do you often work together on the tasks?

Yes-no-seldom-never

- Do you have meetings outside the classroom?

Yes-no-seldom-never

In a controlling group we didn't include any group works, everything continued as it was, as for the experimental group we conducted 4 group works throughout 7 weeks. Group work titles were the following: A warm family, a tale for sweet dreams, Celebrating birthday outdoors and indoors, Create Vision board for my future success.

Experimental group was very active, group works made them funny, friendly and communicative. Students started to communicate each other actively, they even started to contact outside the classroom as they had to contact each other about certain issues.

After 7 weeks of working in the experimental group, we still had questionnaire about the assessment of group works. We offer the most important questions that are worth to pay attention: 1.how

you evaluate group works? And the total number of students answered with very good. 2. My relationship with the classmates improved (yes --no) and total answers to this question was yes. 3. We have friendly relations outside the classroom (yes--no) and 10 from 12 answers were positive. Respondents expressed that they have great desire to have group works all the time.

The situation didn't change in the controlling group, children had the same cold relations with each other.

However, we used rubrics to evaluate the groups. This rubrics were created by us.

critierion	high	low	medium
involvement			
listening			
collaboration			
Time limit			
presentation			

The rubric to evaluate presentations

critierion	high	Low	medium
Topic relevance			
Speech manner			
Source and resource			
Logical sequence			
Time limit			

We can conclude that as a result of group works students become friendlier, they study how to distribute roles, can make discussions together, they study team work and the techniques to handle problems together. In order the group work to be successful and effective students should be united team and organize how to share the responsibilities and achieve the goals the task has set. Group projects can help students develop kind of skills that are increasingly important in the professional world.

We should advice teachers to apply group works in the classrooms more often and engage their students as to prepare them for their future life. With the group work students become sociable, communicative, acquire the skills that are necessary for real life situations. Group work greatly motivates students, provides active learning and improves critical thinking and decision making skills.

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აბსტრაქტი

განათლებას ძალიან მნიშვნელოვანი ადგილი უჭირავს თითოეული ადამიანის ცხოვრებაში. ეს არის საშუალება, რომელსაც აქტიურად ვიყენებთ, რათა გავხდეთ ჩვენი საზოგადოების წარმატებული წევრები და დავიკავოთ შესაფერისი ადგილი. ის ეხმარება ადამიანებს განვიითარონ ისეთი უნარები, როგორცაა კრიტიკული აზროვნება, ანალიზი, ზოგად ტრანსფერული უნარები და მრავალი სხვა.

ჯგუფური მუშაობა ერთ-ერთი მნიშვნელოვანი უნარია, რომლის განვითარებაც მოსწავლეებში მოითხოვს მასწავლებლის მხრიდან ეფექტურ დაგეგმვასა და განხორციელებას.

ჯგუფური მუშაობა ამზადებს მოსწავლეებს რეალური ცხოვრებისეული სიტუაციებისთვის. ჯგუფური მუშაობა განიხილება, როგორც ეფექტური მეთოდოლოგია, რომელიც ზრდის მოსწავლეებში მოტივაციას, რთავს მათ აქტიურ სწავლაში და ავითარებს კრიტიკულ აზროვნებას, გადაწყვეტილების მიღებისა და თანამშრომლობის უნარს.

სტუდენტზე ორიენტირებულმა განათლებამ ძლიერი გავლენა მოახდინა თანამშრომლობითი პედაგოგიკის განვითარებაზე. იგი გვთავაზობს სწავლის განსხვავებულ ხერხს, როდესაც მოსწავლეს გვერდით ჰყავს თავისი მეგობრები, რომლებსაც უნდა დაეხმაროს ან სთხოვოს გაარკვიოს ის, რაც არ ესმის და პრობლემურია. ჯგუფური მუშაობა ერთ-ერთი მნიშვნელოვანი უნარია, რომლის განვითარება მოითხოვს მასწავლებლის მიერ ეფექტურ დაგეგმვასა და მართვას.

ნაშრომი ეხება ჯგუფის ზომას, დაჯგუფების მეთოდებს, მასწავლებლის როლს, ძირითად პრობლემებს ჯგუფებში და ა.შ. ჩვენ ასევე გთავაზობთ საინტერესო კვლევას, რომელიც ჩავატარეთ საჯარო სკოლის მოსწავლეებში (მე-4 კლასი). ჩვენს მიერ ჩატარებული კვლევა გვაწვდის ინფორმაციას სტუდენტების პოზიციის შესახებ ჯგუფური მუშაობის მიმართ და მოსწავლეებში ჯგუფური მუშაობის შედეგების თაობაზე.

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