

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IS A METHOD OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights general approaches on collaborative learning as a method of teaching and learning in which students work together. A collaborative activity assists to generate ideas in a team as well as explore an important question or create a project.

KEYWORDS: *project, learning, teaching, method, collaborative, Google hangouts*

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative learning is the educational approach of using groups to enhance learning through working together. Groups of two or more learners work together to solve problems, complete tasks, or learn new concepts. This approach actively engages learners to process and synthesize information and concepts, rather than using rote memorization of facts and figures. Learners work with each other on projects, where they must collaborate as a group to understand the concepts being presented to them. Through defending their positions, reframing ideas, listening to other viewpoints and articulating their points, learners will gain a more complete understanding as a group than they could as individuals. [1]

Collaborative learning redefines the traditional student-teacher relationship as activities can include debates, joint problem solving, collaborative writing, study teams and group projects. This can happen in either in a classroom setting or in e-learning sessions using Google hangouts or skype, allowing students to converse freely on the subject. Learning here happens within the dialogue of the group, with student led conversation that is not overseen by a teacher or instructor. The teacher will usually only prompt the group when asked questions about the work in order to direct the students on their learning path. The work of the end of the session is shared between the group and such as, it is assessed as a group effort. Some collaborative learning approaches also get students of mixed ability to work in competition together, which helps to drive more effective collaboration. [2]

Methods. A collaborative activity for generating ideas

Below is an activity using collaborative techniques for generating ideas in the classroom; the activity has been used in EFL university writing course. For this example, students are preparing to write an opinion essay on the following topic: “What is the most important problems in the world?”

Activity summary. The objective is that students will be able to collaborate with other students to generate ideas for an essay topic and reflect on how their ideas were similar to and different from those of other students. The technique is suitable for teenagers and adults, it is recommended for learners at the intermediate and advanced levels. The technique can be modified for use with learners of other ages and language levels. The materials required are sheets of paper or cards for each group “label”(in this case, the name of the problem)and two sheets of paper for brainstorming/listing for each student group. The activity should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Following is a summary of the steps in the activity: The whole class brainstorms a list of the most important problems in the 12 world. Groups are assigned different problems; each group brainstorms reasons for choosing this problem as the most important. Groups are reassigned a different problem and brainstorm a second time. Groups compare the answers of different groups and discuss similarities and differences in ideas. [3]

Results. Below, the steps of the activity are presented in more detail. Tell students they are going to work on generating ideas for an essay topic. Present the essay topic: “What is the most important problem in the world? Explain the reasons for your response with details.” The objective is that students will be able to collaborate with other students to generate ideas for an essay topic and reflect on how their ideas were similar to and different from those of other students. Ask the full class, “What are the main problems in the world?” Students will provide main problems in the world at first (climate change, poverty, corruption etc.). List them on the board. Ask the students, “Are there any other problems in the world?” Add other problems to the list (discrimination, conflict wars, etc.). Divide students into groups of three or four. Assign one problem to each group. Have a student in each group write the name of the problem on a card or sheet of paper and display it in front of the group as a label for that group. Note that if you have a large class, more than one group might be assigned the same problem. Instruct groups to brainstorm as many reasons as they can to support the idea that the problem they were assigned is the most important problem in the world. They should write their reasons on a different sheet of paper – not on the paper or card that gives the name of the problem. Set a time limit of two or three minutes – or a bit longer if the groups need more time to brainstorm and write. Circulate and make sure all students are getting a chance to offer suggestions. Provide vocabulary as needed. At the end of the time limit, collect the cards or pieces of paper with names of problems and redistribute them to different groups. Have the groups (on a new sheet of paper) brainstorm reasons why the new problem is the most important. Again, allow two to three minutes. Collect all the lists from the groups. There should now be two lists for each problem (in large classes, they may be more than two lists for each problem). Keep the two list for each problem together and distribute those two lists to a group that did not discuss reasons for that problem. [4] Instruct students to find the ideas from the two lists that are similar and ideas that are different. Tell students to choose three to five of their favourite ideas those lists. Have the groups share with the full class some of the similarities and differences they found on the lists, along with their favourite ideas.

Analysis. At the end of the activity, ask students to talk about their thought process. You might ask some or all of the following questions. You might ask some or all of the following questions:

Did the activity lead you to change your ideas? Were any of the ideas from other groups surprising? Do you think you would be able to come up with this many ideas on your own? Did someone have an idea that you wouldn't have thought of? Did you learn any new vocabulary during this activity?

It is important to note that prewriting activities of this type will result in better writing only if there is writing produced in the end; students still need to spend most of their time writing in order to gain proficiency in this skill. Following the collaborative prewriting activity, the next step is for students to select and organize ideas. One way of transitioning to this step is to place the lists of reasons that students generated in different areas of the room. Tell students to walk around to read the lists and choose which problem they have decided is the most important in the world – the problem that they would like to write about. Students can choose any problem – they do not have to write about one of the problems they brainstormed lists that they will include in their writing. Let students now that they can add ideas of their own that are not ready on the lists. A template of a basic outline could be used – written on the board or distributed as a handout – for students to fill in their selections and add support, such as examples or additional details. The structure of the outline should be based on the organizational structure of the essay that the teacher will assign. The outline could look something like this: The most important problem in the world is the _____ because _____ and

Reason1: _____.

Example/Details: _____, Reason2: _____

_____. Example/Details: _____.

Discussion. After students fill in their outlines, they can use this organizational structure to write their ideas in paragraphs to form essays and extend their ideas with additional detail. This outline is a template that can help students become familiar with the process of organizing their ideas when they write, but as students develop their writing proficiency, they should be encouraged to try different ways of organizing and presenting their ideas.

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