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MANAGING LARGE CLASSROOMS WITH CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract:

Populated classroom create a deadlock in the free flow of teaching-learning. In the current situations, in many cases, we find the classes admitting students beyond the capacity. For combating such situations, the educational institutions should equip themselves with authentic measures well in advance. The constant effort towards reviewing their goals, policies, and processes periodically is the need of the hour. The present paper offers a discussion about managing large classrooms with co-operative learning strategies.

Key Words: Large Classrooms, Co-operative learning strategies.

Introduction:

21st century is the time of knowledge and skill society. Skilled human resource is the backbone of development, and it makes the nation's roots deeper. The sustainable development in a society or nation directly synchronizes with the institutions imparting quality education. In this contest, the term education is all inclusive and laden with different connotation associated with the term. It is a well-established fact that people's endowment of skills and capabilities and investment in education and training constitute the key to economic and social development. Skill and training increase productivity and income and facilitates everybody's participation in economic and social life.

With such a trend and expectation, new schools are coming every day. There is an unprecedented increase in the number of students in the classrooms at different levels, right from the primary to the higher. Sometimes the administration of educational institutes is forced to admit students beyond the capacity of classes. In such situations, the classes become bigger and bigger every new session, and the standard of education declines.

In the series of problems as referred above, the issue of large classrooms is quite common in a country like ours. Irrespective of the set norms of 30-40 students in a class, the classrooms are seen packed with 100-150 students in many cases. In such conditions, the spirit of teaching dwindles, and the very process itself proves a nightmare. To maintain the ideals of good teaching, a teacher needs proper planning. For this, the following aspects of management are just pre-requisites:

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(i)   Planning (Programming, decision making)

(ii) Organizing

(iii)   Coordinating (administering)

(iv)   Directing (Commanding)

(v)   Controlling (reappraising, monitoring)

(vi)   Communicating (reporting)

In the context mentioned above, co-operative learning can provide excellent results. By bringing these cardinal managerial points into practice, a teacher can easily manage a class. Co-operative learning is task-based learning and teaching. Here a large class can be divided into different groups and subgroups. A teacher is expected to care maximum care in selecting the learners for a group. It should be a group of different IQ level students, i.e. a heterogeneous group. The groups should be trained and facilitated in such a way that they could evolve their leadership themselves.

Table 1: Modern Methods of Cooperative Learning

Researcher Developer	Date	Method	ESL/EFL Primary Applications
Johnson & Johnson	The mid-1970s	Learning Together	Reading, Writing, Speaking, Culture
DeVries & Edward	The early 1970s	Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)	Language, Rules, and Mechanics
Sharan & Sharan	The Mid-1970s	Group Investigation (GI)	Writing, culture
Aronson, Blaney, Sikes, Stephan & Snapp, Slavin	The late 1970s	Jigsaw Procedure	Reading, Literature
Slavin	The late 1970s	Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD)	Language, Rules & Mechanics
Cohen	The early 1970s	Complex Instruction (CI)	Social Skills, Culture, Reading, Writing, Language Rules and Mechanics
Slavin, Leavy & Madden	The Mid-1970s	Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI)	None
Kagan	The Mid-1970s	Cooperative Learning Structures	Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing
Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Farnish	The Mid-1970s	Curriculum Pachages: Cooperative	Reading, writing, spelling, vocabulary, literature

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		Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)	

(Source: David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Mary Beth "Cooperative Learning Methods: A Meta-Analysis")

Learning Together

This Cooperative Learning (CL) model organizes the instruction according to the principles of heterogeneous grouping, positive interdependence, individual accountability social/collaborative ability as determined by past achievement as well as based on some demographic variables such as gender, race, ethnicity and so forth. Positive interdependence among group members is structured through setting a common goal, assuming a collective identity, using the same space and resources, getting the same reward and so forth individual accountability is structured through personal testing, random responses to teacher's questions, and reporting on behalf of the group. Finally, learners do group processing to reflect on their achievement as a group and plan or further cooperation. In the context of ESL/EFL instruction, learners may learn together in a classroom climate of academic and personal support in order to read and comprehend a specific text, write an essay, and/or prepare a group project or presentation about certain aspects of the target culture (i.e., beliefs, conventions of behaviour, attitudes, values and so forth).

Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)

In this method, instruction is organized into the five major components of lesson planning-class presentation, team study, tournament, determining individual improvement points, and team recognition. Initially, the teacher introduces the material under study in a class presentation, following which learners work together to complete worksheets in heterogeneous groups of four members each, making sure that all team members have understood the material. A tournament is then held at the end of a week or unit during which team representatives of similar levels of ability (high, average, low) complete together to earn points for their teams. Finally, the achievement of various teams is determined by calculating the average improvements earned by the members of the teams. TGT is most average for teaching spelling and the language rules and mechanics of the target language.

Group Investigation (GI)

This method divides work among group members who plan and carry out investigations, complete individual specific tasks, and then reconvene to discuss their work, coordinate various tasks, and present a final group project. First, the teacher presents a problem to the learners who work in a heterogeneous group to scan topics, identify resources, assign primary responsibilities, individually research issues, and then reconvene to prepare and present a group project. In the ESL/EFL context, GI is particularly well-suited for completing complex

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tasks such as writing a research paper, preparing a presentation about some relevant theme or issue, or developing culture capsules, mini-dramas, and clusters to learn about certain aspects of the target culture.

Constructive Controversy (CC)

Learners in Constructive Controversy (CC) are assigned to heterogeneous groups of four members each and each group is divided into two pairs. Instruction proceeds by stating an issue and assigning a position to be advocated by each pair. First, learners research and prepare the best possible case for their team, engage in open and free discussion, reverse roles to have the best case possible for the opposing position presented, and finally drop all advocacy and strive together to find a synthesis on which they can all agree by summarizing the best evidence and reasoning from both sides. CC is particularly well-suited for researching and debating certain aspects of the first language culture and the largest language culture, thereby increasing ESL/EFL learner's knowledge of cross-cultural variations in the belief systems, norms, and values as well enhancing the learner's general research and communication skills.

Jigsaw Procedure

This procedure can be used whenever the material under study is in a narrative or expository form. Instruction proceeds according to the following stages:

(i) lesson planning
(ii) reading the assigned material
(iii) expert group discussion
(iv) team reporting
(v) team recognition as in TGT.

Jigsaw is the most appropriate device for teaching literature, biography, a chapter in a book, or any other similar narrative, expository, or descriptive textual material.

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Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)

This method is very similar to the TGT method described above, except that instead of the tournament in the TGT, learners in STAD take individual quizzes and tests in order to determine their mastery of the material under study. Like TGT, STAD is most appropriate for teaching the language rules and mechanics of the largest language.

Complex Instruction (CI)

In Complex Instruction (CI) learners use multiple-ability curricula that are designed specifically to foster the development of higher-order thinking skills through group work activities organized around a central concept or big idea. Most importantly, the tasks require a wide array of intellectual abilities so that students from diverse backgrounds and different levels of academic proficiency can make meaningful contributions to the group task. In addition, learners are trained in using CL instructional strategies in order to acquire group work norms and management skill. CI ensures equal access to learning through status norms and management skill. It ensures equal access to learning through status treatments to broaden learner's perceptions of what it means to be smart and to convince learners that they each have important intellectual contributions to make to the multiple-ability task. In the context of ESL/EFL, CI can be used to teach all the language skills in addition to language structure given that instruction is organized around certain general sociological principles and is not designed to suit any particular type of knowledge or skills apart from social interaction and group participation.

Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI)
TAI is a program specifically designed to teach mathematics to students in grade 3-6 or older. As such, it is not directly relevant to ESL/EFL instruction.

Co-operative Learning Structures
The CL structural approach is based on using a variety of generic and content freeways of managing classroom interaction called structures.

These structures can be used for team and class building, communication, mastery learning, and critical thinking. Examples of these structures are Round Robin, Mixture Review, Talking Tokens and many other structures that are explained in Kagan (1985). Round Robin can be used to generate ideas for writing as well as pre-reading technique to build a reader's background knowledge in ESL/EFL Classes. Likewise, Mixer Review can be used to review material already studied and ensure that learners have achieved mastery of vocabulary, spelling and language rules and mechanics. Finally, Talking Token can be used to organize group discussions, promote accountable talk and ensure equal opportunities for participation and practice for all learners.
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Curriculum Packages
These are specific programs for teaching mathematics and language and include the Cooperative Integrated Reading and Writing (CIRC) program. CIRC is a comprehensive program for teaching reading and writing based on reading literature. Learners work cooperatively in pairs to read for each other, summarize stories, write responses to literature and practice their spelling, decoding and vocabulary development skill. Likewise, they develop comprehension and writing skills through reading and process writing workshops.
Importance of Co-operative Learning:

1. It promotes classroom interaction and enhances learners cognitive and communication development. (Kegal 1985, Kessler, 1992, MC Groarty, 1993)
2. Co-operative learning makes it possible "for learners to have maximum opportunities for meaningful input and output in a highly interactive and supportive environment." (Ghaith, 2003)
3. Classroom interaction increases the linguistic competence of the students and becomes a catalyst is increasing their overall academic performance.
4. Co-operative learning is very effective in developing a positive attitude towards learning and towards other learners. (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980)
5. It enhances intrinsic motivation (Clement, Dornyee & Novels, 1998, Szostek and Noels, 1994, Vshiode, 1996)
6. It creates solidarity among team members through their working together to achieve group goals.
7. It also decreases levels of anxiety and increases self-confidence. (Deci & Ryan, 1985)
8. It increases social backing for academic achievement. (Daniel, 1994)
9. It is a very important device in EFL, ESL classroom.
10. It also develops a civic and humanitarian feeling.
11. It facilitates the participants in developing the faculty of listening.
12. Co-operative learning is very beneficial is developing the conferencing skill.

Conclusion:

Cooperative learning can bring optimum results in possible resources. The patterns and devices of cooperative learning can develop self-reliance, leadership qualities, peer co-existence and sustainability in the classroom.

Note:

This is the revised and updated version of my article 'Large Classrooms & Cooperative Learning Strategies' for M.A. English, Directorate of Distance Education, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, 2006. I place on record the said article as the base text for it.

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