

Problems and Solutions in Collaborative Learning

Xiaocai Wang

Shandong Vocational College of Industry, Zibo 256414, Shandong, China.

Abstract: Collaborative learning has been paid more and more attention and has been widely used in teaching. Collaborative learning can exercise students' team spirit, improve learning efficiency and develop the ability of active learning. However, there are also some obvious problems in the process of implementing collaborative learning, such as how to group students, how to set learning tasks and how to evaluate the learning process. This paper aims to explore common problems in collaborative learning and propose corresponding solutions.

Keywords: Collaborative learning; Group; Learning Activities; Evaluate

Collaborative learning refers to a way of learning that multiple learners form a group to complete a task or solve a problem through joint efforts. It is based on constructivism learning theory and humanism learning theory.^[1] In this way of learning, group members are no longer independent and closed, but learn new knowledge through division of labor, communication and discussion. Group members share learning resources, and everyone is assigned a role. In the process of completing tasks, it is essential for students to communicate and even argue with team members, which can improve their communication skills and enhance their self-confidence. Although collaborative learning has many advantages and can indeed improve the enthusiasm of learning, there are also many problems in the implementation process. As Johnson Brothers said that putting multiple learners together in the same room and telling them that they are a group will not produce efficient collaboration. Many organizations are ineffective or even destructive. They waste time and produce bad work.^[2] Many teachers have also found some problems in teaching, for example, the diverse enthusiasm of group members and the poor quality of group discussion. The following are three common problems and the corresponding solutions.

1. Reasonable grouping can guarantee the effects of cooperative learning.

The first step of collaborative learning is to divide students into groups. Teachers often adopt the way of free combination, such as taking a dormitory for a group, which shows that teachers do not pay enough attention to the division of groups. The lack of scientific standards and effective controls can cause problems, for instance, large differences in ability between groups. The grouping method of free combination seldom considers the ability difference and mutual compensation among students, which is not conducive to role allocation and task completion. If students only choose group members who share the same interests, they miss the opportunity to be exposed to different viewpoints. In addition, such a combination tends to have fewer conflicts of views in the discussion process. Although it seems to be smooth, no innovation is actually produced.

A properly assigned group is an important foundation for collaborative learning. Groups are divided in different ways depending on the learning contents. Teachers should fully consider students' grade, ability, personality, gender and other factors, and try to make members of a group differing in all aspects. The most common phenomenon is that there are both high and low achievers in the same group. Such a combination helps to influence each other, achieve goals together, and cultivate the spirit of cooperation. Furthermore, from a psychological point of view, students of different personalities and genders are more likely to stimulate a positive discussion atmosphere in a group. Therefore, on the basis of free combination, taking into account the differences in all aspects is the most desirable method. Each group member assumes different roles according to their abilities and characteristics to complement each other and ensure learning efficiency.

2. Comprehensive learning objectives and appropriate learning activities ensure the smooth implementation of collaborative learning.

The learning objectives of a course should include two types. The first one is knowledge objective, which refers to the content and knowledge points of the textbook that students need to master. The other one is social objective, which refers to the ability of students to adapt to the workplace and society, such as communication ability, cooperation ability, competition ability and resistance to pressure. In designing collaborative learning activities, teachers should define the two goals that students need to achieve, and then design appropriate learning activities. Teachers should make detailed plans and arrangements. Knowledge and social goals should have distinctive implementation plans. Some students are not very active in the process of collaborative learning. The reason is not poor grades, but a lack of social skills, such as, not knowing how to properly express their own opinions, how to deal with different opinions, and how to deal with others' objections. In view of students' defects in this respect, teachers need to give guidance and encouragement, and provide specific and effective strategies.

The selection of learning activities can follow the following principles. First of all, learning activities can ensure students' acquisition of knowledge. Whether through discussion, role play or games, students can acquire knowledge by participating in activities. Secondly, design the links to be completed jointly by team members, improve the participation rate of each member, and promote the exchange and communication among team members. Thirdly, the designed activities should conform to the characteristics

of modern students. Considering students' concern and dependence on the Internet, take full advantages of the Internet and design activities that attract students' attention. Finally, activities should be as varied as possible and be closely connected with true life. Rich themes can give students more space and a broader vision, which is conducive to maintaining interest in learning.^[3]

3. Various evaluation methods play an important role in promoting collaborative learning, which is the key link to determine the learning effect.

At present, there is a relatively unified view on the evaluation of collaborative learning, which is to combine the result evaluation with the process evaluation. It is important to measure the final learning results, such as the presentation of assignments, as well as to monitor the overall collaborative process. In the evaluation process, the following aspects should be included.

3.1 Internal evaluation of group members.

First, a table should be created and be filled out by the group members as they work through the tasks. Group members write down the roles and tasks of each person in the table, and assign points according to how much each person has contributed. Each time a mission is completed, team members can reset their roles. Through this evaluation method, members who give more can earn higher points and the enthusiasm of team members can be fully mobilized.

3.2 Evaluation among groups.

As one group presents the results, other groups score them. In order to have a clear marking item and criteria, the teacher can prepare a marking table, and students only need to give the corresponding score according to each criterion. Group members can find their own problems and shortcomings while comparing the performance of other groups and then be able to improve their performance according to the scoring items.

3.3 Evaluation from teachers.

After the presentation of each group, teachers should give a timely and comprehensive evaluation. Getting timely feedback can be a positive motivator for students and this is when students are most eager to be evaluated. Advantages as well as the problems should be pointed out so that students can master the state of learning and do better preparation for the next assignment. In addition to the comments of the final results, the process of collaborative learning should also be evaluated, including the role allocation of members, the allocation of points, the discussion process, and the final result presentation, etc. Teachers should clearly indicate the problems in each step and the ways to improve them.

In summary, collaborative learning can not only improve learning efficiency, but also enhance students' communication ability and cooperation ability. Its advantages can not be replaced by other learning methods, and it will be more widely used in teaching in the future. Therefore, by reasonably allocating team members, setting appropriate goals, arranging reasonable activities and comprehensively evaluating the performance, students will be more willing to participate in collaborative learning. By adopting collaborative learning, students benefit a lot and teachers can improve their abilities.

References :

- [1] He Wentao. Structured Design Framework of Collaborative Learning Activities[J].e-Education Research,2018(04):73-79.
- [2] Peng Zihan, Wang Yunwu. Study on the influencing factors of group cooperative learning behavior based on blending learning model[J]. Heilongjiang Researches on Higher Education,2019(06):141-147.
- [3] Li Ruiqian. A Study on College Students' Satisfaction with Group Online Collaborative Learning[J].Journal of Jiaozuo University,2020(03)111-113.

About the author:

Xiaocai Wang(1979.12—), Female, ethnic Han, Zibo, Shandong, Master's Degree, Main Research Field: English Teaching in Higher Vocational College.