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COOPERATIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES IN GRAMMAR LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Following the success of using cooperative learning techniques in a teacher in-service training which proved the applicability of the techniques learned to teach different subject areas, not only English, I have continuously used cooperative learning techniques in some teacher pre-service and in-service training programs as well as other adult-learner English training programs. The techniques are applied in the form of workshops, so the teacher training is done by directly experiencing the learning using the techniques. Most of the selected techniques work well in the learning of the four language skills as well as grammar and vocabulary. The participants are usually actively engaged in the process. This paper specifically presents sample grammar learning using some selected cooperative learning techniques. Learning grammar using the techniques could be an alternative way in making the class more engaging and less boring to the learners than using the traditional classroom lecture and exercises

Keywords: cooperative learning, grammar

INTRODUCTION

Observing how teachers practice peer teaching in different in-service training programs in Indonesia, particularly in Central Java, it is obvious that most of the teachers like using the traditional lecture-and-exercise technique when teaching grammar. It is almost predictable that they start the lesson by presenting the grammar rules, giving explanation (mostly in the Indonesian language, or mixed between English and Indonesian), then giving tens of exercises. The class is usually not engaging, learners are passive, and the teachers dominate the classroom talk and directions.

Concerned with the above situation, I conducted an in-service training program for teachers in a school as a community service program. The training was designed in the form of workshop of learning English for a small group of teachers using 9 cooperative learning techniques, i.e. jigsaw, think pair share, three-step interview, round robin brainstorming, team pair solo, circle the sage, partners, three-minute review, and numbered heads together. The learning materials include grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The participants were not only English teachers but also teachers of other subjects. The pre-test given before the workshop revealed that they were not familiar with any of the techniques, and the post-test showed that they could make scenarios of teaching using different techniques for different subject areas and topics. Their response through an open-ended anonymous questionnaire also shows their positive perceptions and their expectations that similar workshops are given to other teachers in Indonesia.

The success of the workshop and the proven applicability of the techniques in teaching other subject areas (Yuliasri, 2013) have encouraged me to use similar workshop format in other pre-service and in-service English teacher training programs as well as other adult learner training programs. The cooperative learning workshop format works well in most training programs with most participants, although in big size training groups there are cases where a few participants could not successfully show their creative application of the techniques.

This paper presents a sample cooperative learning workshop for teaching grammar. In this paper three cooperative learning techniques are selected for teaching grammar, i.e. Jigsaw, Round Robin Brainstorming, and Numbered Heads Together. The selection is based on the past workshop's success experience and is expected to work well in different classroom contexts.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning is a kind of teaching method that involves “students to work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates’ learning as well as their own” (Jacobs, et al, 1997). In this case, Cooperative Learning (CL) encourages students to learn with and from friends and the teacher acts as the facilitator. In CL, each student does not only learn for him/herself but also makes sure that his/her friends in the team also learn.

Most experts on CL agree that CL should have the following characteristics: a task for group completion, discussion, and resolution; face-to-face interaction in small groups; an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual helpfulness within each group; and individual accountability, which everyone does their share. Other experts would also include other characteristics such as: heterogeneous grouping; explicit teaching of collaborative skills; and structured mutual interdependence.

The key principles in the structural approach of CL proposed by Kagan and Kagan as cited in Jacobs et al (1997:17) are:

- (1) simultaneous interaction;
- (2) equal participation;
- (3) positive interdependence; and
- (4) individual accountability.

Unlike the usual teacher-fronted classroom with sequential interaction pattern where only one person speaks at a time, the simultaneous interaction pattern allows a number of students, one in each group, speaking at a time. This is believed to increase students’ engagement and foster learning.

Besides simultaneous interaction, another key principle in CL is equal participation. With assigned roles for individual members of each group in CL, every student has equal participation. This avoids students for being too dominant or too passive.

Positive interdependence means that group members feels that they “sink or swim together”; the feeling among group members that what helps or hurts any member of the group helps or hurts everyone in the group (Jacobs et al, 1997:8). In CL, the positive interdependence among students is promoted through shared goals, rewards, roles, resources, and identity in the group.

In CL, with structured group activities, students are promoted to feel that they are individually accountable for the success of the group. This feeling of individual accountability is not usually existent in the traditional unstructured group work; some group members might end up doing all the work and learning, while others try to avoid working.

Structure in CL is meant to give good teaching. As Kagan and Kagan (2009:6.1.) state, “Good teaching is student-centered, focusing on learning not on teaching. Structures redefine teaching. Teaching is not what the teacher says, but rather creating student learning experiences. Cooperative structures maximize student interaction with each other and with the academic content.”

Hundreds of studies of CL across a wide range of subject areas and age groups have shown that, compared to other teaching methods, CL is superior in its results for variables such as achievement, self-esteem, liking for school, intergroup relations, and use of high-level thinking (Johnson & Johnson and Slavin in Jacobs et al, 1997). Kagan and Kagan (2009:1.5) even state that “over 1,000 studies demonstrate the positive effects of cooperative learning on academic achievement, social/emotional development, liking for school and class, as well as a host of other positive outcomes”.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES IN GRAMMAR LEARNING

There are a lot of cooperative learning techniques available. Kagan and Kagan (2009) provide almost one hundred structures. We can choose different techniques to teach the same topic at different times, or we may want to choose a certain technique we think suitable for a certain topic at a certain time for a certain group of students. This paper presents 3 different techniques to teach 3

different grammar items. The selection of the techniques is made on the basis of past success in the pre-service and in-service training programs in Central Java, Indonesia. Details of the sample workshop on cooperative learning in teaching grammar is given one by one below.

Jigsaw for English tenses

Jigsaw is one of the most popular techniques among the participants of pre- and in-service training programs in Central Java, Indonesia. It is also one that participants can apply in different contexts of teaching. Most participants use jigsaw to teach reading. However, some apply this technique to teach different areas. In the case of teaching grammar, we can use it to teach tenses. Tenses are among the most difficult grammar lessons for Indonesian students as the Indonesian language does not have tense-and-aspect system. The use of Jigsaw technique will be a good alternative variation from the usual lecture or explanation plus exercises. An example is given below on how to use Jigsaw in teaching simple present tense in a workshop. Modification can be made to teach other types of tenses.

Procedures:

- The facilitator divides the participants into groups of five (as the materials are also divided into five different parts). These groups are called the home groups.
- In each group, the five members are given five different materials about simple present tense: first member is given the formula of simple present tense; second member is given the uses of simple present tense; third member is given the list of non-progressive verbs; fourth member is given the examples of sentences in simple present tense; and the fifth member is given the adverbs of frequency that are usually used in simple present tense.
- The facilitator asks everyone to read the material given by heart and try to comprehend it; the facilitator also limits the time (for example, five to ten minutes)
- The groups are reformed into "expert" groups: all first members from different groups now gather into one group with their first material; all second members from different groups now gather into one group with their second material; all third members from different groups now gather into one group with their third material; all fourth members from different groups now gather into one group with their fourth material; all fifth members from different groups now gather into one group with their fifth material. They are given time (for example, 10-15 minutes) to discuss in each group their understanding of the shared material and also discuss how to teach it to other members of their home groups later.
- The groups are reformed back to the home groups. Now in each home group every member is "expert" of the material discussed in the previous expert group. Each member, in turns, teaches the other members of the group the material they have got. The facilitator limits the time (for example, 15-20 minutes.)
- The facilitator can check the participants' mastery of the lesson by challenging participants across groups to demonstrate their understanding of the materials. The facilitator may give reward for the successful demonstration. (The group that gets the most reward may be labeled as the best group for the day).
- The facilitator wraps up the class by giving feedback and reinforcement on the Jigsaw technique. (in the case of teaching grammar by a teacher to his/her students, the teacher can give feedback on the grammar lesson).

Materials:

Below is an example of materials for the workshop on teaching simple present tense using jigsaw technique. The material here is just an example. Teachers can always change the material to suit the students' need.

Material for first member in each group (formula of simple present tense)

(+) I, You, They, We + Verb I

- (+) He, She, It + Verb + s/es
- (-) I, You, They, We + do not (don't) + Verb I
- (-) He, She, it+ does not (doesn't) + Verb I
- (?) Do+ I, You, They, We+ Verb I
- (?) Does+He, She, It+Verb I

Material for second member in each group (uses of Simple Present Tense)

- To talk about habitual actions/ routines
- To talk about likes and dislikes
- To talk about general truth (general statements of fact)
- To state a mental state, emotional state, possession, sense perceptions, other existing states (referring to the list of non-progressive verbs to be taught by third member)

Material for third member in each group (list of non-progressive verbs), taken from Azar (1989)

2 Mental state:	Know Realize Understand recognize	Believe Feel Suppose Think*	Imagine Doubt Remember Forget	Want Need Prefer Mean
Emotional state:	Love Like Appreciate	Hate Dislike	Fear Envy	Mind Care
Possession:	Possess	Have*	Own	Belong
Sense perception:	Taste* Smell*	Hear Feel*	See*	
Other existing state:	Seem Look* Appear*	Cost Owe Weigh*	Be* exist	Consist of Contain Include

Material for fourth member in each group (List of adverbs of frequency that are usually used in simple present tense)

- Always
- Usually
- Often/frequently
- Sometimes
- Seldom/rarely
- Never
- Every

Material for fifth member in each group (examples of sentences in simple present tense)

- She goes to school every day
- I like vegetables; I like reading books
- The sun rises in the East; water consists of hydrogen and oxygen

- I have only one dollar right now

Round Robin Brainstorming for Irregular verbs

Based on past workshop experiences, Round Robin Brainstorming is also favourite to participating teachers. Like most other cooperative learning techniques, this technique can be used for different subject areas or different topics at different levels of difficulties. In this paper, an example is given to use this technique to learn English irregular verbs. As there is no irregular verbs in the Indonesian language, students have to memorize English irregular verbs if they want to use the English tenses correctly. The Round Robin Brainstorming technique is good to brainstorm the irregular verbs.

Procedures:

- Facilitator divides the participants into several groups (perhaps 6-8 members each, or depending on the class size)
- Each group is given one paper and a marker or pen to write down answers
- Each group should assign a recorder to write down answers
- Facilitator explains or gives directions on how each group should respond to the problem posed (every member in each group should think about the responses, and give the responses in turns, round robin style, starting from a member next to the recorder)
- Facilitator poses a problem (asking each group to list as many English irregular verbs as possible within a given time; participants are asked to list the verbs I, II, and III).
- The recorder in each group records all the responses from the group members until time is up.
- When time is up, every member is asked to stick the paper with the list of the irregular verbs on the provided wall or board.
- The group with the most correct verbs is the winner
- Facilitator wraps up the lesson by giving feedback on Round Robin Brainstorming Technique; he/she may also give a list of English irregular verbs.

Materials (list of English irregular verbs):

Go-went-gone; read-read-read; sing-sang-sung; ring-rang-rung; swim-swam-swum; fly-flew-flown; see-saw-seen; throw-threw-thrown; tear-tore-torn; give-gave-given; run-ran-run; give-gave-given; leave-left-left; write-wrote-written; swear-swore-sworn; drive-drove-driven; make-made-made; ride-rode-ridden

Numbered Heads Together (NHT) for reported speech

In Numbered Heads Together (NHT) technique, learners in each team learn together to accomplish a task or resolve a problem. Each member in the team must make sure that everyone learns as the teacher will ask the members of the group randomly to demonstrate learning or response to a problem. In this paper, NHT is used for learning reported speech. Reported speech is among the difficult grammar items for Indonesian learners as it involves conversion of subjects and tenses. Below is an example of how NHT is used for learning reported speech.

Procedures:

- Facilitator divides the participants into groups (for example, each group consists of four members).
- Each member in each group is labeled as member number 1, member number 2, member number 3, and member number 4.
- Facilitator asks all groups to discuss and learn about reported speech and accomplish some exercises (gives the worksheet); time is limited, for example 15-20 minutes.
- Facilitator explains that everyone in the team is responsible not only for his/her learning but also for his/her teammates' learning, because they will be asked to respond to questions randomly
- When time is up for the discussion, the facilitator calls out a number (for example number 3) to respond to a question/problem posed (gives a direct sentence, and asks the learner to give the

reported speech), and only member number 3 in the groups have the chance to respond. This goes on for some time for different numbers of members, until all the problems (taken from the worksheet) are completed.

- Every time a member of a group gives the correct answer, the facilitator gives a reward (perhaps a point or a star sticker).
- The group with the most correct answers is the best group/best learner of the day.
- The facilitator gives feedback on the lesson and on the NHT.

Materials:

Below is the materials on reported speech as an example taken from Murphy (2004). Modification can be made to suit the level of difficulty with the students' level of ability.

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Compare:

Direct: Paul said, "I am feeling ill."

Reported: Paul said that he was feeling ill

When we use reported speech, the main verb of the sentence is usually past (Paul said that...I told her that...). The rest of the sentence is usually past too. In general, the present tense in the direct speech changes to past tense in reported speech.

Examples:

Direct:

My parents are very well

I'm going to learn to drive

I want to buy a car

John has a new job

I don't have much free time

Reported:

Jenny said that her parents were very well

She said that she was going to learn to drive

She said that she wanted to buy a car

She said that John had a new job

She said that she didn't have much free time

3

Yesterday you met a friend of yours, Steve. You hadn't seen him for a long time. Here are some of the things Steve said to you:

1. I'm living in London

2. My father isn't very well

3. Rachel and Mark are getting married next month.

5. I don't know what Frank is doing

6. I haven't seen Diane recently

7. I'm not enjoying my job very much

8. I want to go on holiday, but I can't afford

Later that day you tell another friend what Steve said. Use reported speech. Number one is given for you.

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1. Steve said that he was living in London.

2. He said that

etc.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on world research and personal experience in giving pre- and in-service training programs for teachers, Cooperative Learning is applicable for different subject areas and age groups. CL techniques also work in teaching grammar. Some selected techniques presented in this paper, i.e. Jigsaw, Round Robin Brainstorming, and Numbered Heads Together may well be applied in the

teaching of tenses, irregular verbs and reported speech. It is also worth trying a lot more different techniques for different grammar items.

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