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**SOME ASPECTS OF GROUP WORK IN THE  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

Group work is when the learners work together on a task or activity in groups. Group work increases the opportunities for all learners to speak the new language, it allows them to learn from each other, frees the teacher to monitor individuals and give them feedback. Group and pair work are so much a part of our everyday teaching routine that we hardly pause to think before partitioning the class to tackle some particular communicative task.

The purpose of this article is not to dictate to language teachers what is correct or workable for classroom management in all situations. It is, rather, designed to provide teachers with more information on group work so that a decision to use group work or not to use group work is based on a more complete understanding of the process. The solution of the aim claims for doing away with certain tasks, such as: to point out the goals of group work; to describe the types of group work; to list the main problems with group work; to set out some benefits of group work. The object of the research is group work as an efficient strategy in teaching foreign languages. The subject of the research is specific learning technology of the above-mentioned strategy.

Group work came into the teaching repertoire with communicative methodologies in the 1970s. At that time, studies of contemporary foreign language classes revealed that as much as 80% of lesson time consisted of the teacher talking to the students. In a class of, say, 30 students, it is evident that the learner hardly got a chance to practice the language. Teacher talking time became taboo and ways were devised to stamp it out and train the students to actually perform in the language they were learning.

Lots of research studies on group work were conducted by different scientists [1; 2; 3; 4; 5]. These and many other scientific works are methodological basis for projecting current techniques of group work which draw attention to the problem of team-building, dynamics of group development, relation of a person and a group, etc.

Like all learning activities, group work is more likely to go well if it is properly planned. Planning requires an understanding of the principle that lies behind successful group work.

Several factors work together to result in group work where everyone involved is interested, active, and thoughtful. If these factors agree with each other, then group work is likely to be successful. If they are not in agreement, group work is likely to be unsuccessful [3]. The five factors are (1) the learning goals of group work, (2) the task, (3) the way information is distributed, (4) the seating arrangement of the members of the group, and (5) the social relationships between the members of the group. Before seeing how

the factors work together let us look first at the learning goals of group work which are covered in this article.

The following description of the goals of group work focuses on the spoken use of language. There are several reasons for this focus. Firstly, group work is most commonly used to get learners talking to each other. Secondly, much research on group work in language learning has studied spoken activity, partly because this is the most easily observed and recorded. Thirdly, most teachers use speaking activities in unprincipled ways. One of the aims of this article is to suggest how such activities can be used and adapted to achieve goals in language-learning classes.

Group work can help learning in the following ways: negotiation of input, new language items, fluency, communication strategies, content. Let's describe these factors in brief.

Group work provides an opportunity for learners to get exposure to language that they can understand (negotiate comprehensible input) and which contains unknown items for them to learn. There has been considerable research on the possible sources of this input and the processes of negotiation [1, p. 207 – 228] with the general recommendation that group work properly handled is one of the most valuable sources.

Group work gives learners exposure to a range of language items and language functions. This will often require teaching of the needed language items. Group work provides more opportunities for use of the new items compared to the opportunities in teacher-led classes. Group work may also improve the quality of these opportunities in terms of individualization, motivation, depth of processing, and affective climate. Group work allows learners to develop fluency in the use of language features that they have already learned. The arguments supporting group work for learning new items also apply to developing proficiency in the use of these items.

Group work gives learners the opportunity to learn communication strategies. These strategies include negotiation strategies to control input (seeking clarification, seeking conformation, checking comprehension, repetition), strategies to keep a conversation going, strategies to make up for a lack of language items or a lack of fluency in the use of such items, and strategies for managing long turns in speaking.

Particularly where English is taught through the curriculum, a goal of group work may be the mastery of the content of the curriculum subject the learners are studying. For example, a communicative task based on the water cycle may have as one of its goals the learning of the processes involved in the water cycle and the development of an awareness of how the water cycle affects our lives. In addition, the teacher may expect the learners to achieve one or more of the language-learning goals listed above.

Whatever instinctive feelings about group work in higher education, there is clear evidence that it is a good thing. Among the benefits of group work are the promotion of deep (versus surface) learning, and active (versus passive) learning, as well as the provision of an environment conducive to experiential

and/or collaborative learning [4]. Group work also provides an authentic form of assessment in terms of a student's later employability. More instrumental reasons for greater adoption of group work include increased student numbers, as a way to personalize the student experience in large cohorts.

There are three main problems with group, despite its many advantages: free-riding (to adopt the term used in the literature), social dilemma (students having to weigh up personal versus group goals), and issues of cultural integration.

It is interesting to note that only one of the listed benefits is linked directly to employability outcomes. We should not automatically assume that group work is always direct preparation for the type of group or team working that occurs in the workplace. Group work in the workplace varies greatly, depending on the sector or industry: some roles are intrinsically team-based, with a precise, pre-determined division of labor necessary to successful performance; in other workplaces it may be more common that individuals work independently on aspects of a shared task coming together in meetings only to check progress towards an overall goal. Recognizing the variety of group working practices in the workplace should allow us to free up our thinking about group working within the higher education curriculum. There is room for different types of group working, both formal and informal, and we should foster and encourage all types.

As for assessment of group work [4], key things to pay attention to are: 1) task type: 'additive' tasks are best, in which each contributes a defined piece of the puzzle; 2) task complexity (stimulating tasks are more motivating) and desired outcomes (what will a good end-product look like?); 3) group size: the larger the group, the greater the risk of free-riding.

A useful way of classifying group-work activities is to look at the distribution of the information needed to do the activity. In many group-work activities learners have equal access to the same material or information and cooperate to do the task. In this article we call such kind of activity the cooperative arrangement. In the superior-interior arrangement one member of the group has information that all the others need. In the combining arrangement each learner has a different piece of information that all the others need. In the individual arrangement each learner has access to the same information but must perform or deal with a different part of it. These four different types of group work achieve different learning goals, are best suited to different kinds of tasks, require different kinds of seating arrangement, and draw on or encourage different kinds of social relationships. In order for group work to be successful, each type of group work must have its most suitable choice of other factors.

The combining arrangement is the ideal arrangement for group work because it ensures interest and participation. The essential feature of a combining arrangement is that each student has unique, essential information. This means that each student in a group has a piece of information that the others do not have, and each piece of information is needed to complete the

task. A teacher can involve a group of three students if each learner has a map of an island. On the first student's map only some towns are named and some roads are indicated. On the second student's map the railway system is given, and the airport is shown. On the third student's map the forests and mountains are named and shown. By combing this information each student can make a complete map. They do this by describing what is on their map for others and by picking the needed information from the others.

The best seating arrangement of the members of the group during this activity supports the essential features of the arrangement. Each student needs to have equal access to the others to get the essential information while preserving the uniqueness of their own information. This means that when working in pairs the students should face each other, because that allows good communication while hiding their written or pictorial information. When working in a group, it is best if the students sit in a circle, so that each learner is an equal distance from any other learner. Equal access to each other is the most important element in the seating arrangement of combining-arrangement groups.

The social relationship amongst the members of a combining group needs to be one of equality. For this reason it is usually unwise for the teacher to become a member of a group unless the students are prepared to treat the teacher as an equal and the teacher is willing to take a non-dominant role. Some teachers find this difficult to do. In addition, various status relationships among students may upset the activity. The way in which the local community's group activities were organized had a strong effect on students' participation in classroom activities. Just as social relationships can affect the group activity, participation in the group activity can have effects on the social relationships of learners. Besides, working in combining arrangements increased the liking that members of the group had for each other, and resulted in a relationship of equality.

The most suitable tasks for combining-arrangement group work include: 1) completion, e.g. completing a picture by exchanging information, completing a story by pooling ideas; 2) proving directions, e.g. describing a picture for someone to draw, telling someone how to make something; 3) matching, classifying, distinguishing, e.g. deciding if your partner's drawing is the same as yours, arranging pictures in the same order as your partner's unseen pictures; 4) ordering, e.g. putting the sentences or pictures of a story in order.

Combining-arrangement activities do not usually present problems for the teacher. Group size is not a restricting factor. Strip-story exercises involving the ordering of pictures or sentences can be done with groups of fifteen or even more as long as students can sit in a large circle or move about to have easy access to each other. One difficulty that may occur is maintaining the uniqueness of each student's information. This can be done by getting students to memorize their information at the beginning of the task.

If speaking about the language background of students in combining-arrangement activities we should remember that different goals will require different membership.

The cooperating arrangement is the most common kind of group work. Its essential feature is that all students have equal access to the same information and have equal access to each other's view of it. This is because the purpose of a cooperative activity is for students to share their understanding of the solutions to the task or of the material involved. Cooperating requires some degree of equality between students, particularly a rough equality of skill. Group performance is often inferior to the best individual's performance if there is an exceptional individual in the group. Thus, for cooperating activities it is best to put exceptional learners in one group rather than to spread them across groups.

The most suitable tasks for cooperating-arrangement group work include: 1) ranking, ordering, choosing, e.g. choosing the best candidate for a job, raking a list of items needed for survival or a list of actions open to you; 2) finding implications, causes, or uses, e.g. brainstorming the uses of a paper clip on a desert island, interpreting a picture; 3) solving problems, e.g. solving logical puzzles; 4) producing material, e.g. making a radio program, preparing for a debate or play.

The major problem with cooperating arrangements is encouraging each student to play an active part in the group. Because all students have equal access to the same information, no individual is essential to the activity as occurs in the combining arrangement. Various strategies have been used to deal with nonparticipation. One way is to introduce elements of the combining arrangement by giving each student in the group a different job to do. For example, one student acts as the secretary to keep a record of decisions. The second student has the job of encouraging each learner to offer an opinion. The third student controls the various steps in the discussion procedure. Another way is to have a reward structure that gives the group responsibility for each individual's learning by rewarding the winning group rather than any individual in the group. A third way to deal with non-participation is to change group size or the people in the groups to provide the optimum climate in each group for participation to occur.

The superior-inferior arrangement in group work is a parallel to traditional class teaching. The essential feature of the arrangement is that one or more students have all the information that the others in the group need. For example, one student has a complete text and the other students have some important words from the text. By asking yes/no questions using those words as clues, the students try to reconstruct the text.

The best seating arrangement of the members of the group is with the person in the superior position facing the others. All the others should be an equal distance from the person with the information. This arrangement has parallels with the combining arrangement. The combining arrangement may be viewed as a set of superior-inferior arrangements with every student in the

group having the chance to be in the superior position – that is, having information that others need and do not have. The social relationship amongst the members of a superior-inferior group is one of inequality. The person with the information is in a superior position.

The most suitable tasks for superior-inferior group work include: 1) data gathering, e.g. interviews, questioning; 2) providing directions, e.g. telling how to get to a place on the map, providing instructions about how to arrange parts to make a complete item; 3) completion.

In the individual group-work arrangement each student has the same information but must perform individually with a part of that information. Unlike the superior-inferior arrangement and combining arrangement, no student has information that the others do not have. Unlike the cooperating arrangement, each student makes an individual performance which is not necessarily helped by the others in the group. The major effects of the individual arrangement are to increase the time each student can spend on a task, and to ensure that each student participates.

The students in the group need to have equal access to the material and be in sight of each other. Sitting in a circle is usually the most convenient.

The most suitable tasks for the individual arrangement in group work include: 1) solving problems, e.g. roleplay activities where each individual must perform in a certain way; 2) repetition, e.g. a chain story where students retell the story to each other and see the changes that occur in retelling; 3) completion, e.g. each student has to add a part to complete a story.

Teachers sometimes feel uncertain about aspects of group work. Typical questions are: “How many people should there be in a group?”, “Is it best to have students of mixed proficiency or equal proficiency in a group?”, “What sort of material do I need to prepare for group work?” The answers to these questions all depend on the principle of group work, that is, the five features must all be in agreement with each other. For example, the size of a group depends on the particular goal of group work, the type of information distribution that most suits the goal, and the seating arrangement that suits the information distribution. If the learning goal is to learn through negotiation of input, then a combining-arrangement distribution of information is most suitable and students should work in pairs or groups of four or less with students sitting near and facing each other.

Similarly, the question of mixed or equal proficiency is best answered by applying the principle. If the goal of learning is to master new language items, a superior-inferior arrangement with a more proficient learner in the superior position would be a useful choice. If, however, the goal is to develop fluency, groups could be made up of students of equal proficiency in a cooperating arrangement.

If the principle is not applied, then group work will probably not go smoothly – for example, a cooperative arrangement with four or more students sitting in a row or with two high-proficiency and two low-proficiency students

in a group, a fluency goal with a superior-inferior arrangement, or an individual arrangement with a finding implications task.

Research on group work provides useful guidelines in applying the principle. Experience and experimentation in the classroom is equally viable.

Thus, the successful group work depends on the agreement of such factors as the learning goals of group work, the task, the way information is distributed, the seating arrangement of the members of the group and the social relationships between the members of the group. Group work was introduced into the teaching repertoire to come to grips with a particular problem. Group work made it possible for the teacher to devote more time to the students' oral production, which perhaps before had not been a priority of the foreign language classroom. Thanks to group work, less confident students get the chance to put their knowledge of the new language into practice in a non-threatening environment, away from the critical eye and ear of the teacher. Instead of being dependent on the teacher, students get used to helping and learning from each other. Meanwhile, the teacher is left free to discreetly monitor progress and give help, advice and encouragement where and when it is needed.

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#### **Козловська Г. Б. Деякі аспекти групової форми роботи на заняттях з іноземної мови**

У статті досліджуються деякі аспекти групової форми роботи на заняттях з іноземної мови. Важливими чинниками успішної роботи в групах є організація робочого місця кожної групи або посадка учнів, чітке формулювання цілей і завдань, соціальна взаємодія, планування та організація групової роботи. Змінюється роль вчителя, який перетворюється з єдиного можливого джерела інформації та контролю в радника і консультанта, направляючого роботу групи в потрібне русло. Робота в групах ефективна, якщо студенти підготовлені до співпраці, групи сформовані відповідно з урахуванням психологічної сумісності та

рівня навченості учнів, підготовлений необхідний роздатковий матеріал, продумане планування робочого місця учнів. Систематичне і цілеспрямоване застосування групової форми роботи на заняттях з іноземної мови дозволяє формувати вміння критичного мислення, підвищити рівень соціальної компетентності учнів. Групова робота має свої особливості і методику проведення, будучи дуже важливою і одночасно складною для організації форми роботи на заняттях з іноземної мови. Для досягнення позитивного навчального результату необхідно систематично використовувати групову роботу, постійно оцінювати отриманий досвід і вдосконалювати його. Робота в групах на заняттях з іноземної мови може бути ефективно використана в сукупності з іншими методами і становить один з компонентів дидактичної системи.

*Ключові слова:* групова форма роботи, організація робочого місця, учні, вчитель, соціальна взаємодія.

#### **Козловская А. Б. Некоторые аспекты групповой формы работы на занятиях иностранного языка**

В статье исследуются некоторые аспекты групповой формы работы на занятиях иностранного языка. Важными условиями успешной работы в группах являются организация рабочего места каждой группы или посадка обучаемых, четкая постановка целей, формулировка заданий, социальное взаимодействие, планирование и организация групповой работы. Меняется роль учителя, который превращается из единственно возможного источника информации и контроля в советника и консультанта, направляющего работу группы в правильное русло. Работа в группах эффективна, если студенты подготовлены к сотрудничеству, группы сформированы в соответствии с учетом психологической совместимости и уровня обученности учащихся, подготовлен необходимый раздаточный материал, продумана планировка рабочего места учащихся. Систематичное и целенаправленное применение групповой формы работы позволяет формировать умения критического мышления, повысить уровень социальной компетентности. Групповая работа имеет свои особенности и методику проведения, являясь важной и одновременно сложной для организации формы работы. Для достижения положительного учебного результата необходимо систематически использовать групповую работу, постоянно оценивать полученный опыт и совершенствовать его. Работа в группах может быть эффективно использована в совокупности с другими методами и составляет один из компонентов дидактической системы.

*Ключевые слова:* групповая форма работы, организация рабочего места, обучаемые, учитель, социальное взаимодействие.

**Kozlovska G. B. Some aspects of group work in the foreign language classroom**

The article deals with some aspects of group work in the foreign language classroom. The successful group work depends on the agreement of such factors as the learning goals of group work, the task, the way information is distributed, the seating arrangement of the members of the group and the social relationships between the members of the group. Organizing the whole class as one cluster is a useful teaching strategy but it also has its shortcomings. Its efficiency and effectiveness depends on the level of attentiveness of the students. Another disadvantage of this activity is that only a limited number of students participate when they are organized as a whole class. The shy or the passive ones prefer to be quiet while the others actively participate. Also, there are three main problems with group, despite its many advantages: free-riding, social dilemma, and issues of cultural integration. Among the benefits of group work are the promotion of deep (versus surface) learning, and active (versus passive) learning, as well as the provision of an environment conducive to experimental and/or collaborative learning. Group work increases the opportunities for all learners to speak the new language; it allows them to learn from each other, frees the teacher to monitor individuals and give them feedback. One of the most important benefits of group work is that it enables students, who are learning English as a second language, to develop their listening and speaking skills. Group activities encourage students to learn through discussions working in collaboration with one another. Eventually, they learn to respect and value each others' contribution.

*Key words:* group work, seating arrangement, learners, teacher, social relationship.

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**САМОСТІЙНА РОБОТА В СИСТЕМІ НАВЧАННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ  
ТЕХНІЧНИХ СПЕЦІАЛЬНОСТЕЙ З ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ**

На етапі інтеграції України в єдиний європейський освітній і науковий простір зростають вимоги до рівня знань студентів, відображені в Законі України „Про вищу освіту”, Державній національній програмі „Освіта” („Україна XXI століття”), Національній доктрині розвитку освіти України, Загальноєвропейських рекомендаціях з мовної освіти [1]. Одним з важливих умов забезпечення високої якості підготовки майбутніх