



On Theoretical Practice of Cooperative Learning Teaching Approach

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ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning is a kind of teaching theory and strategy initiated by new curriculum reform as well as a new learning style proposed by new curriculum standard. In recent years, with the constant deepening of educational reform, cooperative learning teaching approach has aroused more and more attention. This study introduces cooperative learning teaching approach from three aspects: the definition, history and methods, in order to understand the deep meaning of theoretical practice of cooperative learning teaching approach.

1. Introduction

The society today has made much different from that of the old days, demanding new form of thinking and acting. It means that the complicated social conditions have brought to the forefront the importance of learning to be cooperative with others (Slavin, 1985). However, most college learners just lack such sense and skills. There are two reasons: first, for many years, Chinese learners are exposed to frustrating exam competitions in schools and have learned to compete with each other for the limited chances, because not all of them can be admitted to colleges. Sometimes some learners' successes decrease the chances of others. As a consequence, their sense and skills on competition are much stronger than on cooperation. Second, the society today needs people who can cooperate well with others and focusing on social skill development will increase the learners' achievement.

2. Definition of Cooperative Learning

Many researchers have contributed a lot to the development of Cooperative Learning (CL), the understanding of CL is differing from one researcher to another, because it is based on many different kinds of theoretical basis. Many scholars propose their own definitions, but it has been defined in different ways, it is hard to choose an exact definition.

Although the definitions are different in shape, they have shared characteristics such as the group learning, common goal, and so on. So, all the CL approaches share the following basic elements: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1993).

To sum up, CL is a learning strategy and a classroom organization, in which students work together in small

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groups toward a common goal. Within a CL group, students actively participate in the learning activities, cooperate with other group members and receive rewards based on their efforts and success. Others' learning as well as their group members are responsible for one, therefore, learners are more likely to encourage each other to work hard.

3. History of Cooperative Learning

The history of CL can be traced back as early as the 17th century. Yet strictly speaking, the origin of modern CL dated from 1896 when John Dewey advocated that teachers were not the only sources of knowledge and students should be able to help each other and learn in an interdependent way (Bao, 1999). Soon in the middle of the 1970s it emerged as a new learning approach in the United States. With the development of jigsaw and other teaching methods in the late 1980s, this approach became more and more popular.

Since the late 1980s, research and experiments have been done into CL in China and have achieved a great deal. In the early 1990s, some Chinese researchers and instructors introduced CL into classroom instruction in elementary and high schools. CL appeared in China, traditional classroom reform is the biggest reason. Traditional teaching methods had been employed in all kinds of classrooms in the past time, although it had a lot of advantages, the disadvantages of neglecting individual difference were more and more obvious. Consequently, more and more researchers argued that CL could promote teaching quality so that teacher-centered could be removed and student-centered mode could be encouraged.

Nowadays CL is considered as one of the most popular strategies in the United States and has been widely employed in classroom instruction by more than fifty countries all over the world (Guo, 2002), and in China, more and more researchers employed this approach into classroom.

4. Methods of Cooperative Learning

4.1 Learning Together

Learning together was developed by Johnson and Johnson in middle of 1960s. During the learning process, students work as a group to complete a group task, share ideas and provide support to ensure that everyone in the group is involved and ask for help from each other before asking the teacher, and the teacher praise and reward the group base on the group performance (Johnson & Johnson 1989). The learning together method provides a concep-

tual framework for teachers to plan and carry out CL in teaching according to the real situation.

4.2 Group Investigation

The Group Investigation method was developed by Sharan and colleagues, it is similar to Learning together, but emphasizes on student self-regulation of learning activities. Group investigation includes both a cooperative group process and a cooperative goal structure (Sharan & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 1980). During the process, groups take on topics in a unit which is studied by the whole class, and then further divide the topic into tasks within the group. The students investigate the topic together and finally present their findings to the class as a whole.

In this method, cooperative skills should be taught and reinforced in the group learning process; in addition, positive interdependence and individual accountability which have been mentioned above would encourage group members to promote language learning. In classrooms, group investigation may be employed in the many different forms, such as class report and group discussion.

4.3 Jigsaw Methods

The Jigsaw method was developed by Aronson and his colleagues in 1978. Simply speaking, this process of Jigsaw method is like that: teacher divides material into several parts, and each group takes charge of one part. Within a group they discuss, learn and investigate this part together. Students are then asked to teach that part of the lesson to the rest of the students in other groups. In addition, the students from the other groups also have the same material to learn, therefore when a group presents their findings of the material, other groups' students can share their different opinions, even discuss with the teaching group, then take turns presenting their part (Aronson, 1978).

In this way, cooperation among students occurs not only within each Jigsaw group but also within the whole class. Jigsaw method is the one of the most widely known methods on CL and it creates twice cooperation in the classroom and encourages students to communicate with others. It can be used for various learning activities and arouse students' interest in language learning because of its flexible application in language classrooms.

4.4 Student Teams Achievement Divisions

Student teams-achievement divisions was developed by Slavin and his colleagues. An essential component of Student team's achievement divisions is competition among groups. Students work in their groups to help each

other to prepare for the competition. The main aim of Student team's achievement divisions is to motivate students to encourage and help each other master skill and to promote the achievement of all students (Slavin, 1995). The active competition motivates students to provide peer support for achievement. Students work in mixed ability teams to master material presented by the teacher, then, students take individual knowledge on the material, and the teams may earn reward based on improved their own past records. Therefore, all team members would learn hard, explain questions to one another, help other members, because the only way of the team can succeed is to ensure the team members' activities focus on one another practice, and encouraging one another to achieve.

5. Conclusion

Through cooperative learning, teachers would hand the learning initiative over to students and provide them with more time and space to construct as well as more chances to exhibit their thinking modes and learning strategies. The advocacy of cooperative learning in classroom teaching is an effective method for transforming students' learning style and its even greater value lies in the fact that an attitude towards life is determined and students can learn a series of contents and excavate more learning resources by taking advantage of learning partners. Cooperative learning, as an effect learning strategy, can effectively change the single and passive learning style in some colleges and universities in China and give full play

to the subjectivity of students and exploit their multiple intelligence.

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