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## Teaching Cooperative Learning in Japan: Perspectives and practical applications for teaching English Language Learners from a Canadian Educator's point of view.

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### Abstract

Kobe-Shinwa Women's University has graciously invited Canadian Educators from across Canada to teach and research pedagogy within their faculty of education. I have been fortunate to have participated in these efforts as both a teacher and researcher. This paper explores the perspectives, opinions, and strategies I have both witnessed and employed while working and studying here. I will define the identification of English Language Learners' (ELL), examine their profiles and demographics, and track first-hand data collected from my personal and intimate experience with teaching and researching. More so I will draw on my 30 years of experiences as a front-line educator, school administrator, and literacy coordinator with the Toronto District School Board. I hope to offer the community at the Kobe-Shinwa Women's University' faculty of education an urgency for the study of cooperative learning strategies and their deployment in the classroom. Classroom Activities for Cooperative Learning well over a decade, the focus of the university classroom has steadily shifted from a teaching-centric approach to a learning-centric approach (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

**要旨：** 神戸親和女子大学はカナダ全土よりカナダ人の教育者を招聘し、発達教育学部において授業や研究を行っている。私は幸運にも教育者および研究者としてこの活動に関わらせていただいた。本論は、私が本学で教鞭をとりまた研究活動を行う中で、観察し、実践した、視点、見解、方略を探求するものである。まず、私が関わった英語学習者(ELL)について、学習者たちの人物像を同定し、つぎに、私のトロント教育委員会における30年にわたる現場での教育、学校管理、およびリテラシーコーディネーターとしての経験にも頼りつつ、本学での教育及び研究で得た個人的で親密な経験から収集した一次資料を提供した。これらは、神戸親和女子大学発達教育学部において、協働学習に関する方略の研究と、授業での実践展開を喫緊のものとして提案することを期待して記述されている。協働学習における授業内活動はこの十年以上にわたりになされており、大学における授業は教え中心から学び方中心のアプローチへと着実に変化を遂げているのである。(Barr & Tagg, 1995)

### In the Beginning...

Teaching English Language Learners in Japan has always been my dream. My teaching practice began in 1989 in a small farming town in Ontario, Canada. My first teaching assignment was Kindergarten in an area of mainly Mennonite children. It was a truly idyllic job; teaching children that were well mannered most of whom could already read and write. More so, I had a wonderful teaching partner who mentored me and taught me all the strategies I would need to become a successful Kindergarten teacher.

Some years later my wife and I secured jobs in Toronto, which has often been regarded as one of the most multicultural cities in the world hosting over 200 languages represented and many more ethno-cultural populations. The transition from my homogeneous cultural group of Mennonite students in the farmlands of Ontario to the dynamic and noisy diversity of language, attitude, and thought housed in the inner-city classroom was both daunting and exciting. On my first day teaching grade three at my new school in downtown Toronto I met 30 students including two English Language Learners. In fact they were classified as Newcomers, which meant that they did not speak English. This is where my journey begins.

### **What is an English Language Learner?**

**English language learners in Ontario schools:** English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and *who may require focussed educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English*. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs. (Supporting English Language Learners A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 1 to 8. 2008)

### **What are Newcomers?**

Newcomers arrive from countries around the world at various stages in their educational careers. They may arrive in their pre-school years or at any point between Kindergarten and Grade 12. They may arrive at the beginning of the school year or at any time during the school year. Depending on their age and country of origin, they may have had varying educational experiences prior to their arrival in Canada, and consequently will require different levels of support in order to succeed in the classroom.

Newcomers from other countries may include:

- children who have arrived in Canada with their families as part of a voluntary, planned immigration process. If they are of school age, they have most often received formal education in their home countries, and some may have studied English as a foreign language. However, some of these students may have had limited or inconsistent access to schooling.
- children who have arrived in Canada as a result of a war or other crisis in their home country, and who may have left their homeland under conditions of extreme urgency. These children have often suffered traumatic experiences, and may also be separated from family members. They may have been in transit for a number of years, or may not have had access to formal education in their home country or while in transit. (Supporting English Language Learners A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 1 to 8. 2008)

"ESL students actually require at least 5 years of exposure to academic English to catch up to native-speaking norms. In addition to internalize increasingly complex academic language, ESL students must catch up to a moving target... ESL students must make 15 months gain in every 10 month school year" Collier and Thomas, 1999

Recent research (Thomas & Collier, 1995) has shown that if a child has no prior schooling in native language development, it may take seven to ten years for ELLs to catch up to their peers.

### **Using Cooperative Learning in the classroom...**

So, how do we best serve the needs of the English Language Learner has been the great question in Toronto and Ontario for many years. With over 200 languages represented in our Toronto schools in the year 2017, educators must evaluate their teaching methods to best serve such a wide variety of population. As an educator of 30 years I experienced many teaching philosophies and policies throughout the years teaching in the Toronto District School Board. The Philosophy that our Principal and school researched was Cooperative Learning and Active Learning. I started using Cooperative Learning strategies in that first classroom in Toronto. My Newcomer students responded well working in small groups and receiving support from their peers and I was able to give quality individual time when the class was working independently. Their English Language acquisition was wonderful to watch from my perspective but also observing the other students desire to assist teaching them vocabulary. All of us used pictures, stories, gestures and actions to create an understanding. My Principal saw that I had initiative to use the strategies, and as a result the Toronto Board of Education sent me to be trained in Cooperative Learning with a program from California called "Tribes". Becoming a Tribes trainer allowed me to share Tribes approach to schools across Toronto. The program is designed to help the educator create a safe and inclusive learning environment. Using Active Learning and Cooperative Learning

Strategies to enhance student success has been demonstrated in my classroom practices every since and with all levels from Kindergarten to University students.

### **What is Cooperative Learning?**

Cooperative Learning is not a new concept. It has been around since 1930 when John Dewey introduced this approach to education for student success. He believed that education was a process of living and that schools had a responsibility to capture children's interests, to expand and develop their horizons, and assist them in responding appropriately to new ideas and influences.

- an active and dynamic process based on children's expanding curiosity in their world. It should be child-centred and responsive to the child's own developing social interests and activities.

In this regard, he believed that schools had a responsibility to build on students' natural interest in their social environment by fostering interpersonal communication and group involvement.

- children receive feedback on their activities, they learn socially appropriate behaviours, and they understand what is involved in co-operating and working together (Dewey 1940,1966).

Dewey's ideas were quite revolutionary at the time and had a profound influence on education, particularly as the effects of developments in the field of group dynamics began to be realized.

Cooperative Learning refers to a set of instructional methods in which students work in small, mixed-ability learning teams.

The students in each team are responsible not only for learning the material being taught, but also for helping their teammates learn. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993).

### **What are the benefits of Cooperative Learning?**

- Increased Achievement
- Increase in Positive Relationships
- Greater Intrinsic Motivation
- Higher Self-Esteem
- More "On-Task" Behavior

### **Better Attitudes Toward Teachers and School**

Cooperative learning groups may be used to teach specific content (formal cooperative learning groups), to ensure active cognitive processing of information during a lecture or demonstration (informal cooperative learning groups), and to provide long-term support and assistance for academic progress (cooperative base groups) (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1993).

### **Teaching Cooperative Learning in Japan...**

It has been a great honour and privilege to be invited to work as a visiting scholar at the Kobe- Shinwa Women's University. I planned and developed a syllabus to teach an Overseas Canadian content curriculum to first year Education students. The goal was to teach the program in English but also have a translator to assist with questions and

difficult concepts. The beginning class was challenging because of the newness of the course and because of the class size. The forty-eight students were sitting in rows in a classroom not large enough to create smaller groups. We moved to another classroom and I was able to create groups so they could begin working and helping each other. I also evaluated their English level and could create a balance of abilities in each group. The students responded well to working in groups on projects and learning Cooperative Learning strategies. Within cooperative learning groups, students discuss the material to be learned with each other, help and assist each other to understand it, and encourage each other to work to achieve their goal. My experience teaching ELL students became a useful teaching tool along with Cooperative and Active Learning strategies to create an Inclusive Learning Classroom.

### **Creating an Inclusive Classroom:**

This shift calls for a rethinking of the traditional classroom, replacing the standard lecture with a blend of pedagogical approaches that more regularly involve the student in the learning process. Under a learning-centered approach, the instructor retains "control" of the classroom, but thought is regularly given to: (a) how well students will learn the material presented, and (b) the variety of pedagogically sound methods that may be employed to help the students better understand the core information to be learned. There is now strong empirical evidence that active involvement in the learning process is vitally important in two areas: (a) for the mastery of skills, such as critical thinking and problem-solving and (b) for contributing to the student's likelihood of persisting to program completion (Braxton, Jones, Hirschy, & Hartkey, 2008; Prince, 2004).

**Below are comments from Education students from Kobe-Shinwa Women's University after experiencing Cooperative Learning strategies. These comments retain the authenticity of language approach. So, language has not been edited.**

Yuki - "Benefits of Cooperative Learning"

- We can laugh
- Laughing makes people happy
- We can make friends because we communicate
- Brain become active because we can remember life experience
- Help partner learn new words

Yuma - "About Cooperative Learning"

- We can talk face to face with our classmates
- Children can get along well with each other
- Helps so we are not shy of speaking in front of our classmates
- Everyone can answer and imagine
- It can be played in small space
- Children can have opportunity to talk to each other
- Teacher can make class communication
- Class's mood become better

Rina - "Cooperative Learning"

- Uncomfortable the first time
- Fun
- Able to understand each other's ideas
- Master thinking skills

Amane - "Cooperative Learning Ideas"

- I think Cooperative Learning is very good. I write three good points.

- First, students can become friends with each other. Because the activities can connect people and swell in the class.
- Second, students can learn many things through the activities. For example, imagination and cooperation. I learned how to think from my friends. We thought about one thing but we were different from each other and I know now how to think new. Also, I know through cooperation activity the character of others and their hobby.
- Lastly, I think these activities can be used with other subjects.

### **Cooperative Learning Strategies...**

Below are a few strategies that can be used by faculty in a wide variety of courses at the University, College and High School level. Questioning techniques for those who use lecture as the primary delivery method in the classroom, there are a few relatively easy methods to increase student involvement and interest in the classroom, regardless of course level or academic field. At the simplest level, this approach requires asking questions during the lecture that challenge students to apply the concepts and principles introduced.

#### **1. Think Pair Share (Kagan, 1990)**

**Purpose:** Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a cooperative structure in which partners privately think about a question (or issue, situation, idea, etc.), then discuss their responses with one another. As a relatively simple structure that can be implemented quickly, Think-Pair-Share can be incorporated into almost any form of instruction. It is particularly useful for actively involving all students during lectures. (B. Bennett & C. Rolheiser, *Cooperative Learning: Where Heart Meets Mind*, 1991, p. 201.)

#### **Procedure:**

Teacher poses a question, statement, issue or prompt to the class. Teacher provides an amount of time for individual thinking (students can mentally rehearse or jot down ideas). Teacher asks students to pair up and share responses. Students may clarify and elaborate. Teacher can randomly choose a number of pairs to share their responses with the class.

#### **2. Four Corners (Kagan, 1994)**

**Purpose:** This cooperative technique provides an opportunity for learners to deepen their understanding by exploring issues and expressing opinions. The technique can energize a lesson by providing movement and interaction with peers.

#### **Procedure:**

1. Post the dimensions related to the topic in each of the four corners of the room (e.g., strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or number four different pictures and then post the numbers).
2. Each student selects a particular dimension in response to a question posed by the teacher, and moves to the appropriate corner.
3. Once in their selected corner students pair up to discuss the reason(s) for their choice.
4. Students listen actively to their partner's response and are prepared to share what they heard their partner say.
5. The teacher randomly chooses partners to share responses from each corner.

#### **3. Jigsaw - Make a book (Aronson, 1980)**

**Purpose:** A jigsaw provides a way for students to learn new content and also provides an opportunity for them to teach each other what they have learned and discuss implications of the reading.

**Procedure:**

1. Instructor selects articles, excerpts from books or other text appropriate to course content.
2. Provide one reading per person, or longer articles can be divided into appropriate sections.
3. Divide the students into small Cooperative Jigsaw groups (e.g., 3-6 persons in each group).
4. Have each member of the Cooperative Jigsaw group silently read the text assigned. Each person will have a different reading. Time: 5-10 minutes.
5. Create new small (2-3) "Expert" groups with the individuals who have read the same material. Allow time for learners to discuss what they have read and how they might teach this when they return to their Cooperative groups. Time: 5-10 minutes.
6. Recreate the original Cooperative Jigsaw groups. Have each person teach the rest of the group the material from the text read. Time: 5 minutes / person.
7. Conclude with a key question(s) for the groups or discuss applications or implications of the ideas within the groups or with the entire class. Maybe combined with other take-up evaluation techniques to ensure that individuals understand the content.

**4. Fish Bowl (Paulson & Faust, 2006)**

**Purpose:** To encourage students to offer feedback on course readings or class discussion. It is often more helpful and engaging to get students to provide the answers to their peers.

**Procedure:**

Students are given index cards, and asked to write down one question concerning the course material. They should be directed to ask a question of clarification regarding some aspect of the material which they do not fully understand; or, perhaps you may allow questions concerning the application of course material to practical contexts. At the end of the class period (or, at the beginning of the next class meeting if the question is assigned for homework), students deposit their questions in a fishbowl. The instructor then draws several questions out of the bowl and answers them for the class or asks the class to answer them. This technique may be combined with many other questioning techniques

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I was trained to be an instructor of Cooperative learning in the Toronto District School Board and able to train over 200 teachers around the board and all my staff from my 4 schools. Thank you to the staff and Administration for the opportunity to share ideas and concepts that have influenced me for 30 years in Education. As Daniel Goleman states, "No creature can fly with just one wing. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head-feelings and thought-meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar."

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