

2000-12-01

## Collaborative Learning: Principles, Practice and Potential in the English Language Classroom

William Littlewood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/pasaa>



Part of the [Reading and Language Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Littlewood, William (2000) "Collaborative Learning: Principles, Practice and Potential in the English Language Classroom," *PASAA*: Vol. 30, Article 1.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.PASAA.30.1.1

Available at: <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/pasaa/vol30/iss1/1>

This Original Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Chulalongkorn Journal Online (CUJO) at Chula Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in PASAA by an authorized editor of Chula Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [ChulaDC@car.chula.ac.th](mailto:ChulaDC@car.chula.ac.th).

## **Collaborative Learning: Principles, Practice and Potential in the English Language Classroom**

---

**William Littlewood**

Language Centre, Hong Kong Baptist University,  
Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

### **Abstract**

Students across a wide range of countries (including Thailand) express their liking for classroom learning activities in which they work purposefully in groups in order to achieve common goals. This mode of learning also lies at the heart of the philosophy and techniques of “collaborative learning.” This paper presents briefly the principles which underlie collaborative learning. It describes a range of strategies and techniques which teachers can use in order to organize collaborative learning. Finally, it discusses how collaborative learning tasks fit into an overall framework for language learning and how they relate to the development of learner autonomy.

### **Introduction**

The desire to replace confrontation with collaboration is active in many domains of life as we move from the old millennium into the new. One way in which this is reflected in education is in widespread initiatives to create structures in the classroom which reduce the competitive ethos between students and, furthermore, offer ways of transcending the traditional divide between the roles of teachers and learners. These initiatives include several “labeled” approaches, such as experiential learning, task-based learning, problem-based learning and collaborative learning, which differ in the details of their philosophy and implementation but share the belief that students construct knowledge most

effectively by working together under the guidance, but not necessarily the control, of the teacher. In this article the focus will be on one of these approaches – collaborative learning – which has aroused considerable interest in recent years, most noticeably outside the field of language teaching but now, increasingly, inside it.

### **Some Characteristics of Collaborative Learning**

As Oxford (1997) shows, there is more than one conception of collaborative learning. In this section I will describe some basic characteristics which are common to all conceptions. Further discussion of these characteristics can be found in Clarke, Wideman, and Eadie (1990); Coelho (1992);

Coelho, Winer, and Olsen (1989); Crandall (1999) and (within the broader framework of experiential learning) Kohonen (1992).

*Students work mainly in small heterogeneous groups*

The basic working unit for collaborative learning is a group of about four students. The formation of the groups may be based on various criteria including academic achievement, language proficiency, gender, age, personality, or learning style, but the aim is to achieve variety within the group rather than homogeneity, so that students may make their unique contributions and help each other. Such heterogeneous groups are sometimes called “jigsaw” groups, since each member often carries out a different individual task (perhaps matching his or her specific needs or interests) which forms part of an overall group task. As we will see later, the class may also sometimes be organized into “expert” groups in which members of similar interests or abilities work on the same material together.

*Students work in positive interdependence*

Collaborative learning tasks are structured in such a way that they involve the sharing of information and ideas. This may involve simply discussing the same materials in order to reach a decision or produce a concrete output (often to be shared with others in the class). Often, however, the members depend on each other to carry out different parts of an overall task or project. This is the jigsaw principle just mentioned and forms an important component of many approaches to cooperative learning.

*Students are accountable as individuals and as a group*

It follows from the principle of “positive interdependence” that each student is accountable to the group for contributing to the outcome or for completing his or her part of the task. This individual accountability is reinforced by the fact that the group as a whole is accountable to the class. Each group will often be asked to contribute its findings or other outcomes to the class in the form of a presentation or display. In some cases the work of each group may form one part of a whole-class project which integrates the work of the various groups into a still larger whole.

*Students learn through purposeful communication*

Collaborative learning requires students to use language in various ways and for various purposes. In jigsaw groups, each student has different information and ideas which he or she needs to contribute to the common pool. When students are working on this common pool or on the same materials (e.g., in expert groups), they need to apply higher-level thinking skills to the exploration and discussion of the same information and ideas. If groups also produce outcomes such as written products or presentations to the class, this extends still further the range of communicative activity that collaborative learning involves.

*Students learn and practise the skills required for collaboration*

The interactive skills required in collaborative learning go beyond the use of language for processing and presenting information and ideas. They also involve

skills of a more fundamental interpersonal nature. These include task-related social skills such as requesting clarification, elaborating others' ideas and paraphrasing. They also include group-related social skills such as acknowledging others' contributions, asking others to contribute, mediating disagreements, tolerating differences and demonstrating empathy. In some approaches to collaborative learning, students are asked explicitly to observe and evaluate their progress in these domains.

### **Some Strategies for Organizing Collaborative Learning**

We will now begin to look at some of the ways in which collaborative learning may be organized, focusing on four general strategies of organization.

#### *Groups work on common input from the teacher or materials*

This form of collaborative learning departs least radically from traditional, transmission-oriented conceptions of teaching and learning. It fits easily into contexts where the content of learning is pre-determined by a syllabus or textbook. New material to be learnt is presented by the teacher, and groups are then asked to work on it together, with the aim of ensuring that each student understands or masters the knowledge or skill involved. Students are encouraged to help each other and the teacher may get feedback by asking individuals to report or perform (perhaps using the "numbered heads" technique described in the next section or by completing individual tests or assignments). Some proponents of cooperative learning take the principle of accountability to the point where each individual student's performance affects the overall progression (or, in some cases, grade)

of his or her group. Many others (including the present writer) reject this approach as one which exposes too harshly the student who has difficulties in the classroom.

#### *Jigsaw groups work on differentiated input from the teacher or materials*

The second strategy is a development from the first in the sense that the learning material is still determined largely by the teacher, textbook or syllabus. The important difference is that each individual student within the group now receives different material to work on. For example, each student may be given a different text to read, a different aspect of a topic to research or a different activity to carry out. These sub-tasks may be allocated within the groups themselves or assigned by the teacher according to students' interests or levels of proficiency. The sub-tasks are the components of the jigsaw and must of course be linked by an overall theme. When students have completed their individual sub-tasks, they pool the results, discuss them, and synthesize them in the service of some overall group purpose, such as solving a problem, making a decision or producing a report or presentation.

#### *Jigsaw groups combine with expert groups*

The previous paragraph has described the operation of the home group or jigsaw group. For some units of work, the teacher may also organize so-called expert groups. These are groups in which students come together to process *the same* material and share ideas on it. Let us say, for example, that the four students in each jigsaw group have been asked (respectively) to (1) watch a video, (2) gather classmates' opinions, (3) read a simple newspaper article and (4) read a more

demanding article on a topic such as “healthy eating.” After the jigsaw groups have met to get an overview of the topic as a whole (or even before they meet), students may form groups with others who have been assigned the same sub-task, so that they can help each other and share ideas on the sub-task. These groups may be more homogeneous in terms of proficiency level or interests. Students then return to their home groups, where they contribute their knowledge and ideas to the jigsaw.

*Groups work on topics and/or with resources selected by the students*

In the three strategies mentioned so far, the main framework of learning is determined by the teacher. Even within this framework, of course, students may have varying degrees of scope for making choices. For example, group members may select for themselves which tasks they work on within the overall group assignment. The task itself may require varying degrees of decision-making, ranging from (e.g.) working in prescribed ways on an assigned text to (e.g.) deciding the most effective way of exploring the topic that has been allocated. In general, however, the initial and final points of reference are a predetermined set of objectives which will be pursued through group structures. In terms of classroom organization, the fourth strategy can be seen as an extension of the first and second strategies above. The key difference is that the groups themselves can now select the content and methods of their learning. Within the topic area they have chosen, each group allocates the work amongst its members and creates its own mechanisms for ensuring adequate control and integration of the parts within the whole. It may also decide on the most suitable means for communicating its work to the class (e.g.,

through presentation, dramatic performance, video, posters, etc.). The aim is that each group within the class should be a learning community within the broader learning community of the whole class (which is itself situated within the broader learning community of the school). The approach encourages and requires the group to develop a high degree of independence not only in working towards set objectives but also in deciding its own objectives and evaluating its own learning. Within the group, students are strongly encouraged to help and “scaffold” each other’s learning as they move together towards “autonomous interdependence.”

This fourth strategy is distinct from the others in the active role that it allows learners to take in shaping their own learning and thus re-defining the educational status quo. Some writers see this as an essential feature of “collaborative” learning and reserve the term for this form of collaborative learning. They use the label “cooperative” for strategies in which learning remains within the control of the teacher or syllabus (see for example Flannery, 1994; Oxford, 1997). It is important, however, to recognize that the other strategies, too, allow varying degrees of student choice and that the four strategies can also be viewed as parts of a single continuum. In this article, the term collaborative is used to cover the whole continuum.

### **Techniques for Collaborative Learning**

In this section the focus will move from broad strategies to specific techniques (often also called “structures”) through which the strategies can be realized. There is an immense range of such structures. Kearney (1993) gives excellent descriptions of many of them and provides specific examples of their use. The references in Oxford (1997)

also provide a valuable guide to other sources. This section gives a selection of those which have proved (in my own experience as well as that of others) particularly useful in providing contexts for practice, exploration and/or interaction in the second language classroom.

### *Jigsaw*

The basic unit of jigsaw learning is the jigsaw group or home group, which will usually contain between three and five students. Here a group of four is the basic unit:

Student A	Student B
Student C	Student D

Each student in the group has a different but complementary sub-task. For example, each may have to read a different text related to a particular topic, or each may read the same texts (or watch the same video) but be asked to look for answers to different questions.

The most common variation on this basic structure is expert jigsaw. With this technique, students usually begin in their home (jigsaw) groups, then re-group so that the new expert groups contain students doing the same sub-task, then return to their home groups to contribute their expertise to the overall group task:

Stage One  
(Home Groups) ⇨

Student A1	Student B1
Student C1	Student D1
Student A2	Student B2
Student C2	Student D2
Student A3	Student B3
Student C3	Student D3
Student A4	Student B4
Student C4	Student D4

Stage Two  
(Expert Groups) ⇨

Student A1	Student A2
Student A3	Student A4
Student B1	Student B2
Student B3	Student B4
Student C1	Student C2
Student C3	Student C4
Student D1	Student D2
Student D3	Student D4

Stage Three  
(Home Groups)

Student A1	Student B1
Student C1	Student D1
Student A2	Student B2
Student C2	Student D2
Student A3	Student B3
Student C3	Student D3
Student A4	Student B4
Student C4	Student D4

Of course we are not often lucky enough to have exactly sixteen students as in the example above and often we will want to work with home groups of three, five or some other number. Part of the enjoyment of using expert jigsaw structures is working out how to accommodate different numbers. Here are just two examples:

In the example above, let us say that two students are absent. The teacher may decide to have only three home groups, 1x4 and 2x5. In the two groups with five members, two of the students will act as one, sharing the same sub-task (to ensure that the expert groups are as equal as possible, it is better if different sub-tasks are shared within the two groups). There will still be four expert groups at Stage 2, two with three students and two with four students.

Let us say that on another occasion, there are 30 students in the class and the teacher wishes to work with home groups of 3. He or she could follow this up with 3 expert groups of 10. In many situations, however, it would be more practical to work with 6 expert groups of 5. For each of the sub-tasks, there would then be 2 expert groups working in parallel to each other. (It may be easier to conceive of the class as two half-classes of 15 each; in each half-class there are 5 home groups and 3 expert groups.)

### *Snowball*

Two useful techniques for stimulating students to produce or analyze a number of ideas on a topic are "Forward Snowball" and "Reverse Snowball."

Forward Snowball is especially useful when the aim is to generate *as many ideas as*

*possible* on a topic, for example, in preparation for an essay or presentation. It can be particularly helpful with groups of students who are inhibited when asked to "brainstorm" about an issue. Each student is given a set period of time (e.g., three minutes) in which to list (e.g.) four facts or ideas related to a theme or issue. Students then form pairs and are given a similar period (or slightly longer) to combine and expand their ideas into a list of eight. Pairs then form groups of four, who produce a combined list, deleting ideas which are repeated but attempting to add more to produce sixteen. The snowball may finish there or continue to groups of eight, who produce a further combined list.

Reverse Snowball is especially useful for the opposite function to snowball, namely: to agree on what are the most *essential* factors or aspects of a topic. It is the same as forward snowball so far as the grouping sequence is concerned, but successive groups have to reduce rather than expand. Each student is given three or four minutes to write down three or four ideas or characteristics on a given topic (e.g., four statements about money or the four most important qualities of a teacher). Students in pairs then attempt to reduce their combined list (which could contain up to eight items) by agreeing on the four (or five) most essential points. Pairs form groups of four, who should again reduce their combined list to produce an agreed list of most essential points. At this point the snowball may proceed to groups of eight, or the whole class may be asked to agree on a list of essential points, or students may produce group or individual tasks (e.g., essays on the topic).

### *Other techniques for stimulating analysis and discussion*

Three other effective techniques for helping students to analyze and discuss topics and issues carry the labels “Think/Pair/Share,” “Three-Step Interview” and “Constructive Controversy.” They can all be valuable ways of helping those learners who are shy to express themselves spontaneously in open class or larger groups.

In Think/Pair/Share, a topic for discussion (which may be simple or complex) is given to the class. Each student has a short period of time to think about it and jot down notes. Pairs of learners then share ideas with each other for a further period. Pairs then share their ideas within a larger group or the whole class. Of course this structure may be extended so that the initial period of sharing is carried out in groups of three or more.

In Three-Step Interview, students form groups of four, in which they choose or are assigned a controversial topic for discussion (e.g., whether smoking should be banned in public places, or a local issue in the news). Each group of four divides immediately into two pairs. In each pair, student A interviews student B about the topic but does not express his or her own opinions. B then interviews A in the same way. The two pairs re-form into a group of four, in which they first simply share their ideas and opinions. They then enter into free discussion and attempt to reach an agreement on the issue. Their conclusion may be reported to the class or form the basis of a written report, etc.

Constructive Controversy involves similar group structures but different interactional goals. Students again form

groups of four and assigned (or choose) a controversial topic for debate. Each group again divides into two pairs. Each pair is now asked to support one side of the issue (e.g., to argue *either* for *or* against the issue of whether smoking should be banned in public places). Pairs research the issue and review the arguments on both sides. Within the reformed groups of four, a debate now takes place, as each pair tries to convince the other pair of their own side of the issue. After a time, they are asked to step out of the formal “debating” structure and (as in Three-Step Interview) engage in free discussion.

### *Numbered Heads*

This is not a grouping structure but a device for organizing the feedback or reporting stage. It often happens that after group work, the same confident, vocal students always take on the role of reporter. This not only deprives some students of the opportunity to develop important communication skills but may also affect the extent to which each student feels the need to engage in the group’s work. However, the teacher may not wish to control the event to the extent of nominating specific individuals rather than others. The Numbered Heads technique can be useful in this situation. In each group of (e.g.) four, the students are asked to assign each other, at random, a different number from 1 to 4. At the feedback or reporting stage, the teacher simply indicates a group and a number. In this way all students have an equal chance of being nominated and have to be ready to speak on behalf of the group.

### **Collaborative Learning Tasks in Their Methodological Context**

In this section we will move more specifically into the field of language



teaching and base the discussion on the concept of “task,” which has gained wide currency in recent years (see for example Willis, 1996; Nunan, 1999). Many pages have been written on defining the term task but here, a “collaborative task” is defined simply as a purposeful language learning activity which involves collaboration between learners. It will be assumed that the

collaboration takes place through the foreign language and that the activity has some purpose which goes beyond analyzing or practising language for its own sake.

Figure 1 classifies language learning activities along a continuum which is defined according to the relative degree to which the learner focuses on form and meaning:

**Figure 1: Focus on form and meaning**

Focus on form		←	→	Focus on meaning	
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice			Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g., through exercises, “discovery” and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g., in “question-and-answer” practice			Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language but with some unpredictability, role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g., in creative role-play, more complex problem-solving, discussion, “discovery” and collaborative learning
Analytic learning “Exercises”		←	→	Experiential learning “Tasks”	
		←	→	“Exercise – Tasks”	

In this framework the left-hand end of the continuum is occupied by activities in which the focus is mainly on form. Such activities involve a high degree of analytic learning and are sometimes termed “exercises.” At the other end are activities in which the focus is mainly on the communication of meanings. Such activities involve learning through experience of language use; often the term tasks is reserved for activities towards this end of the continuum. Between these two ends of the continuum are activities in which the focus is distributed to varying degrees between form and meaning (Skehan, 1998, p. 131, calls this

“focus on form in the context of meaningful language use;” Morris et al., 1996, p. 114, coin the term “exercise-tasks”). Within this framework, the interaction that takes place in collaborative learning will be located primarily towards the right-hand end of the continuum, as students use the language to negotiate meaning with each other in order to collaborate towards common goals. (We might note, however, that the goal of this interaction may be to investigate facts about the language, e.g., by analyzing a text, in which case the two ends of the continuum will be present simultaneously.)

The processes that may go on in “structured” and “authentic” communication (the two rightmost boxes above) may be illuminated more fully by means of the framework suggested by Ribe and Vidal

(1993). These writers describe three “generations” of tasks, which involve progressively deeper layers of involvement and learning, as shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2: Three ‘generations’ of tasks**

First generation task	Second generation task	Third generation task
Communicative development	Communicative development	Communicative development
	Cognitive development	Cognitive development
		Global personality development
	<i>Project work</i> → → → → → → → → → →	

First generation tasks aim to develop students’ communicative ability in a specific

area of language. Ribe and Vidal offer these examples:

#### **Simulation**

You are a customer in big store. You want to buy the following items: a pair of slippers, two compact-disks, and a filofax. Walk around and ask politely for directions to the departments/counters you need. Buy the items. Use the language you have practised in class.

#### **Problem-solving**

The students have a map of London with bus and underground routes. They discuss and select the best route for going from one point to another according to a set of given variables (price, time, distance, comfort, etc.).

Second generation tasks aim to develop not only communication skills but also general cognitive strategies of processing information, such as analysing what information is needed in order to complete the task, deciding on procedures, collecting information, selecting relevant data,

presenting data in an organised way, and analysing results. The language is now a medium for carrying out a “real” piece of work, similar to what students may also need to do outside their language course. Ribe and Vidal give this example:

**Through foreigners' eyes**

The objective of this task is to collect and analyse information on what tourists of different nationalities think of the students' country/city/town.

- 1 Students decide (a) what they need to know; (b) how to get this information (interviews, questionnaires, tourist brochures, etc.); (c) where to get the information (airport, beach, library, tourist information office, etc.); (d) when to obtain the information; (e) what grids/database format they want to use to collate the information; (f) the kind of questionnaires/interviews they want to devise; (g) the language they need to carry out the interviews.
- 2 Students carry out the research, transcribe the interviews and put the information together.
- 3 Students select relevant data, decide on a format (posters, dossier, etc.) for their presentation.
- 4 Students make a report and present it.

Third generation tasks not only involve the communicative and cognitive strategies mentioned above, but also aim to develop the personality of the students through the experience of learning a foreign language.

They aim to enhance awareness, develop creativity and interpersonal skills, and involve all aspects of the students' personality and experience. For example (again from Ribe and Vidal):

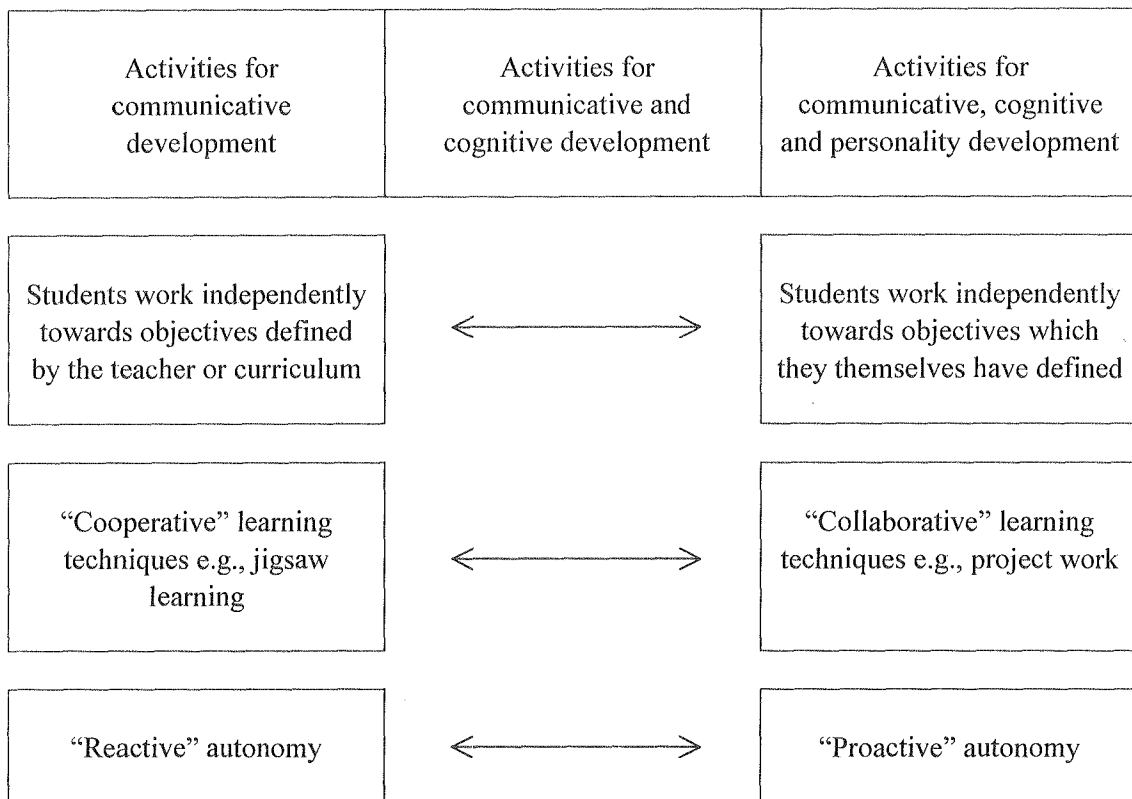
**Designing an alternative world**

- 1 Students and teachers brainstorm aspects of the environment they like and those they would like to see improved. These may include changes to the geographical setting, nature, animal-life, housing, society, family, leisure activities, politics, etc.
- 2 Students are put into groups according to common interests. The groups identify the language and information they need. The students carry out individual and group research on the selected topics. The students discuss aspects of this 'Alternative reality' and then report back. They decide on the different ways (stories, recordings, games, etc.) to link all the research and present the final product.
- 3 Students present the topic and evaluate the activity.

**Collaborative Learning and the Development of Autonomy**

This final section will integrate some of the main themes of the preceding discussion and suggest how they can be related to another important issue in language teaching,

namely, the development of autonomy. Figure 3 shows four dimensions which, while they are independent and not linked in any inextricable way, all indicate similar forms of development or progression.

**Figure 3: Four dimensions in the development of communicative skills and autonomy**

The top row shows the three generations of task proposed by Ribe and Vidal (1993). As we move from left to right, the level of engagement deepens and the demands made on learners and teachers become correspondingly greater. We might expect a teacher new to collaborative task-based work to start towards the left.

The second row is based on a dimension mentioned earlier, namely, the extent to which the objectives of the activity are defined by the teacher or to which, conversely, the learners themselves can participate in shaping and defining them. Again, as we move from left to right, the learners' contributions and responsibility become greater.

The third row is based on the same dimension but is now described in terms of the cooperative/collaborative learning

techniques that are used. As indicated previously, some writers restrict the term collaborative for activities where the learners themselves participate in determining, to a greater or lesser extent, the objectives and sequences of learning. For activities in which the teacher or syllabus defines the direction, they use the word cooperative. In this terminology, the progression from left to right would involve an increasing use of collaborative rather than cooperative techniques.

The fourth row introduces a new dimension, which is also discussed in Littlewood (1999). It is based on a distinction between two types of autonomy. In reactive autonomy, students work independently and autonomously in directions that have already been set. In proactive autonomy, students themselves

participate in establishing the direction of learning, by selecting their own goals, methods, etc. Obviously, like the other dimensions in Table 1, this is a continuum along which learning activities may be located at different points and along which teachers and students may move in either direction, depending on factors such as situation, experience and goals. The dynamism for this movement may be provided in part by activities such as those discussed in previous sections.

### Conclusion

Figure 3 in the previous section summarizes the key elements that have been discussed in this paper and suggests how they are related to each other and to the development of autonomy (a term which should here be understood as encompassing autonomy in both learning and communication; see Littlewood, 1996). This paper has discussed the role of collaborative learning strategies and techniques in providing structures within which this development can take place.

In concluding the paper, reference should also be made to a further dimension, which lies outside the scope of the present paper. This is the affective and interpersonal dimension, in which the determining factors are not so much the structures that are created as the ways in which teachers and learners relate to each other *within* these structure (see also Underhill, 1999). In that

respect, the present paper and that of Underhill may be regarded as providing complementary perspectives on how we can seek to create satisfactory conditions for collaboration to stimulate both language learning and other forms of whole-person development.

I will end this paper with a further quotation from Ribe and Vidal (1993, p. 4), who say with reference to their analysis of tasks:

Within this framework, student and teacher are no longer two separate poles (i.e, the teacher gives information and the student receives it) as in the more traditional type of teaching, but two entities working together, planning, taking decisions, carrying out the task, and sharing the final sense of achievement.

To move further in this direction, not only within the frameworks of principles that we design but also in the extent to which we become able to implement these principles in ever wider sectors of the educational system, is a worthy goal for the new millennium. It is a goal through which English language learning can contribute not only to the development of communication skills in children and adults but also to their wider development as individuals and members of a multilingual world.

### The Author

William Littlewood has taught in secondary schools and at tertiary level. He is currently Professor for TESOL and Applied Linguistics at the Hong Kong Baptist University. His special interests are in language learning, methods of foreign language teaching and intercultural communication. He has published books and articles in these fields.

## References

- Clarke, J. R., Wideman, R. & Eadie, S. (1990). *Together we learn: Cooperative small-group learning*. Toronto: Prentice Hall Canada.
- Coelho, E. (1992). Cooperative learning: Foundation for a communicative curriculum. In C. Kessler (Ed.), *Cooperative Language Learning* (pp. 31-49). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Coelho, E., Winer, L. & Olsen, J. W. (1989). *All sides of the issue: Activities for cooperative groups*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Crandall, J. A. (1999). Cooperative language learning and affective factors. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 226-245). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flannery, J. L. (1994). Teacher as co-conspirator: Knowledge and authority in collaborative learning. In K. Bosworth and S. J. Hamilton (Eds.), *collaborative learning: underlying processes and effective techniques* (pp. 15-23). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Kearney, P. (1993). *Cooperative learning techniques*. Hobart: Enterprise Design Associates.
- Kessler, C. (Ed.). (1992). *Cooperative language learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Kohonen, V. (1992). Experiential language learning: Second language learning as cooperative learner education. In D. Nunan (Ed.), *Collaborative language learning and teaching* (pp. 14-39). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (1996). Autonomy: An anatomy and a framework. *System*, 24, 427-435.
- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20, 71-94.
- Morris, P. et al. (1996). *Target oriented curriculum project: Interim report*. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Department of Education.
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle.
- Oxford, R. L. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 81, 443-456.
- Ribe, R. & Vidal, N. (1993). *Project work: Step by step*. London: Heinemann.
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A Cognitive approach to language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Underhill, A. (1999). Facilitation in language teaching. In J. Arnold (Ed.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 125-171). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Willis, J. (1996). *A framework for task-based learning*. London: Longman.

## Appendix

### Further Examples of Collaborative Learning

#### 1. Collaborative Planning

##### **Your Interests and Mine**

- 1 Please sit in groups of 5 or 6 and place yourselves so that you can circulate pieces of paper.
- 2 At the top of a piece of paper (A4 or larger), write a topic that interests you. It can be a hobby, a sport, an activity you enjoy, a person, or indeed any other subject which you find interesting.
- 3 Pass the sheet of paper to the student on your left.
- 4 On the sheet of paper that you *now* have, write a question about the topic written at the top. Then pass the sheet to the student on your left.
- 5 Repeat the procedure described in 4. (Before you write a question on each sheet, look at the questions that have already been asked, so that the same questions are not repeated.)
- 6 When your own topic has come back to you, read all the questions and prepare a short presentation to your group (maximum: 3 minutes) which includes all the information asked for. Organise the information in whatever way you think makes it most coherent and interesting. You may also want to include other information, e.g., in order to make the presentation flow more smoothly.
- 7 After your presentation there will be about 3 minutes for your classmates to talk with you about your interests.
- 8 Write an essay on the topic that you spoke about during this activity, paying special attention to these aspects:
  - How clearly do you express your information and ideas?
  - How well do you organize the material, e.g., by sequencing the material and using paragraphs?
  - How accurate is your use of English?
  - Do you use a variety of language structures?

##### **Interviews and Introductions**

1. You are soon to be interviewed by a classmate. Write on a piece of paper 6 questions about yourself, your interests and your experiences (etc.) that you would like to be asked.
2. Exchange papers with a partner.
3. In turns, you will interview your partner and your partner will interview you. Structure the interview around the questions that your partner would like to be asked.
4. While you interview your partner, you may jot down very brief notes, if you wish.
5. After the interview, with your partner, join with one or two other pairs to form groups of between 4 and 6 students.
6. Using information from the interview, introduce your partner to the others in the group for about two minutes. After each introduction, other members of the group can ask questions and converse for about another three minutes.
7. Write a letter to another member of the class telling him or her about the person who was your partner in Steps 1 to 3.

### Stories from Proverbs

Here are ten proverbs from different cultures, taken from *The MacMillan Book of Proverbs from around the World* (pp. 44-51), compiled and edited by Norma Gleason. Please read them and think about what they mean, both at the purely linguistic level and in terms of the wisdom they wish to convey.

1. Do not order the tree to be cut down which gives you shade. *Armenian*
2. The swiftest horse cannot overtake the word once spoken. *Chinese*
3. Though the ant works its heart out, it can never make honey. *English*
4. A fault denied is twice committed. *French*
5. The frog wanted to be an ox and swelled up until he burst. *Greek*
6. When faults are scrutinized, relationships cease. *Italian*
7. Spilt water cannot be gathered up again. *Japanese*
8. A wise man knows his own ignorance; a fool thinks he knows everything. *Spanish*
9. Don't cross the stream to find water. *Swedish*
10. Show me a friend who will weep with me; those who will laugh with me I can find myself. *Yugoslavian*

In pairs or threes, please select any one which appeals to you. Then compose a story to be read aloud, illustrating the proverb you have chose. *The story should not take more than six minutes to read.*

Do not include the actual words of the proverb in your story, because the other members of the class will be asked to match your story with the proverb it illustrates.

Practise reading the story aloud, paying attention to clear pronunciation, suitable pace, pausing at appropriate times, emphasising important points, marking the beginnings of new episodes, and so on.

Later you will be asked to read the story to the class. At this stage, *the actual reading should be distributed as equally as possible amongst members of the group.*

## 2. Collaborative Writing

### Activity sequence 1

1. The class agrees on a topic that could be the basis of an essay (e.g., *Money*).
2. Each individual writes three short statements about the topic.
3. In pairs: each pair reduces (or examples) this to four statements.
4. In threes/fours: each group reduces their full list to the four most important ones, e.g., on OHT. (Steps 2 – 4 are the “reverse snowball.”)
5. The class shares and compares the different lists; groups can adjust their own, if they wish.
6. Each group treats its statements as topic-statements. Each person in the group writes a paragraph on one of them (to be shared and discussed with others in the group; some to be shared with the rest of the class, e.g., on OHT). (Step 6 uses the jigsaw structure.)

#### Alternative Procedures

At Step 1: “forward snowball” may be used to identify topics, e.g.: each students writes two possible topics; pairs produce a list of five; groups of four expand the list to ten.

At Step 5: the whole class agrees on the five most important statements (this continues the reverse snowball).

At Step 6: Each of these statements is assigned to a group. Groups collaborate in writing a paragraph elaborating on its statement. One group may be asked to write an introductory paragraph.

Further stages may follow, e.g., peer evaluation, linking and sequencing paragraphs to produce a coherent whole, individual writing assignment, etc.

The activity may also be organized so that each group chooses and works with its own different topic.



**Activity sequence 2 (Instructions to students)**

This is a collaborative writing activity in which you will need to draw information from a number of texts on the same topic, integrate this information and use it to compose a text of your own. Your own text can use the ideas in the original texts (together with any others that you may like to include) but should express these ideas through your own words.

**State One (*Jigsaw groups*)**

Please form groups of (preferably) three or (if necessary) four. Each student will then be given three short texts which deal with the relationship between health and eating habits. Individually, please read all three texts. Each member in the group should then make notes *in point form* about what the texts say about one of the following topics (make sure that each topic is chosen by one person in the group).

- What kinds of eating habits are best for our health?
- In what ways are modern eating habits sometimes unhealthy?
- What can we do to make our eating habits more healthy?

*After taking notes, you will be asked to hand back the original texts.*

**Stage Two (*Expert groups*)**

Form new groups of three or four in which all members have focused on *the same* topic. In these groups, share ideas about what you now know about the topic assigned to you. Note down any new ideas from other members of your group.

**Stage Three (*Jigsaw groups re-form*)**

Return to the original groups of three or four and:

- Together, discuss what specific facts and ideas you would wish to include in a text (of about 300 words) on "Healthy Eating."
- Produce an outline plan for a text on Healthy Eating. (You can design the plan around the three topics listed in Stage 1, if you wish).

The plans of the different groups will be shown to other members of the class for comments.

**Stage Four (*Individual task*)**

Individually, write a full text of about 300 words on the subject of Healthy Eating.

**Alternative Procedure**

At Stage One, an alternative procedure is to give each student in the jigsaw group a different text rather than all three texts. At Stage Two, each expert group then discusses one text. Stages One and Two are then simpler, since they involve summarizing rather than identifying relevant material, but Stage Three is more difficult, since students have no help in organizing the material.