

Omiya: March – *Cooperative Learning Techniques in English Lessons* by Kumiko Fushino.

With a clear PowerPoint presentation and handout, Fushino introduced theories of Cooperative learning (CL) along with CL activities in a well-organized manner. First Fushino defined CL in her own words, “Principles and techniques that employ small groups as an instructional means so that students work together to increase their own and each other’s learning to the maximum.” According to Fushino, CL is not language teaching *per se* but does include incorporate this educational philosophy. Also, CL group work is a particular approach to group work instead of being merely a group work.

After familiarizing the definition of CL, eight important principles, inspired by Jacobs, Power, and Loh (2002), were summarized. These are : 1) Cooperation as a value, 2) Heterogeneous Grouping, 3) Positive Interdependence, 4) Individual Accountability, 5) Maximizing Student-student interaction, 6) Equal Opportunity of participation, 7) Collaborative Skills, and 8) Group Autonomy. The participants experienced CL activities, such as Jigsaw and paired drawing, for each principle.

Fushino emphasized the principle of mutual assistance, viewing fellow students as collaborators and cooperating with each other. She also urged teachers to consider group formation carefully and need to consider factors, such as English proficiency and personality. Also, student-chosen groups and groups of three should be avoided. According to Fushino, students need to feel a bond with other group members and each student needs to feel responsible for his/her share amount of work in order to accomplish the group goal. It is important for students to have equal opportunity to participate in group work and requiring the involvement of each student will maximize student-student interaction. Fushino emphasized small group skills and showed how to increase the use of English used in a task by breaking down the group roles (e.g. an encourager, a praiser, a challenger, and a questioner) positions with achievable target language. Also, group autonomy should be fostered.

Finally, Fushino made a series of suggestions to help teachers with the practical implementation of CL. 1) start with simple activities, 2) start with pair work for novice students, 3) as the skills take time to develop, CL

should be used regularly rather than one off lessons, 4) need to be patient for students to get used to CL, 5) expect unsuccessful administration of CL at the beginning, 6) monitor students' use of English, 7) observe students' participation, 8) create friendly atmosphere, 9) restructure your beliefs about teaching, and 10) not consider CL as a panacea.

The participants engaged into CL activities and were mesmerized by Fushino's presentation for three hours. After the meeting had officially been adjourned, some of the participants kept asking questions and discussing CL with Fushino.

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