

Answering Quizzes Collaboratively in Second Language Learning

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Context

- This experience took place this semester with students of Academic English whose TOEFL Score goes from 503-527.
- These students are asked to get a 550 in order to meet their graduation requirement and 530 to be able to pass this course.
- Students are trained in Listening and Reading Comprehension and in Grammar Structures in order to be prepared for the TOEFL Paper Test. They are also trained in the Writing Skill even though they are not required to write in this type of test.
- According to our experience teaching this course; the Structure has been the most difficult to be developed by students that is why we are always trying to find new ways of presenting this information to students.
- Students usually ask each other (and not the teacher) about how to deal with the structure section.

Why collaboratively learning?

- Collaborative learning groups improve student learning having a positive attitude towards the subject and their classmates (Slusser & Erickson, 2006).
- Collaborative dialogue is dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building
through such dialogue, students engage in constructing their L2 and in building knowledge about it (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Steps for a Collaborative Activity

- Initially, the activity included four phases:
 1. Students' previous preparation
 2. Answering quiz individually
 3. Answering quiz in team
 4. Applying the structures in a writing (editing) activity (in team).
- Because of time constraints, we had to leave out the fourth phase. The four phases were only carried out in the first month.

Description of the activity

This activity was carried out every month before the monthly grammar exam.

- 1. Gathering the team:** The groups are formed by students who had taken Remedial English 5 and had achieved a TOEFL score of 500 – 527 and students who obtained 510 – 527 points in a placement TOEFL. We decided to have teams formed with both types of students. Teams chose a spokesperson or leader.
- 2. Material:**
 - A TOEFL-type quiz with the grammar structures seen during the month.
 - Signs with the letters (A-D) of the four options given to each TOEFL item on the quiz.
- 3. Students' Previous Preparation:** Students were asked to study and practice the grammar structures seen during each month. The purpose of the collaborative activity was to help students prepare for their monthly grammar exam.
- 4. Procedure:** First, students took the quiz individually and then they got together in teams to answer the same quiz.
- 5. Feedback:** After the team quiz, the group got together and a member of the team had to show the sign with the letter of the answer they chose. One team was randomly asked to explain their answer and the teacher clarified any doubts.
- 6. Evaluation:** The individual quiz was given 1 – 2 more points than the team quiz. The purpose of this decision was to motivate students for their individual effort because sometimes they feel that their grade is affected by the performance of the team.

Some difficulties in the process

- There was not enough time for the writing/editing phase.
- Some students complained that it was hard to make a final decision on some answers.
- Some students also complained that some partners did not work or prepare previously and did not help the team.

Some solutions along the way

- Even though the fourth phase was eliminated for time constraints, students were asked to do it as homework but did not count as part of the evaluation.
- Students were asked to support their opinion by basing themselves on the studied grammar skills.
- If the teacher saw that some of the students were not participating actively, she asked them to continue working individually on a different quiz, but still on the same topics.

Positive Results

- **Teachers:**
 - Most students said they did not find any disadvantage in the activity.
 - Passive students were participating actively.
 - Different topics were reviewed within the same session.
- **Students:**
 - Students felt as if they were part of a contest when showing the signs with the letter of the answer they chose.
 - Students reported that they complemented each other's strengths, clarified their doubts, enriched their knowledge, developed their leadership role, felt part of the team. Besides, the topics were explained at their own level and with simple words; and their partners shared tips on how to handle grammar structures.

Conclusion

- Collaborative work integrates the group socially.
- Passive students end up participating actively.
- Teams should include students with different strengths.
- Students feel that their previous individual work gives them the chance of getting a fair grade in case the team does not perform as efficiently as expected.
- This type of activity can be done more accurately in a setting where furniture can be moved easily.
- The application of a short survey can assure teachers of the impact of the activity on students' learning process.
- It would be advisable to use this type of activity not only as a means for reviewing; but also to work on new topics.

Bibliographical References

Slusser, S. & Erickson, R. (2006). Group Quizzes: An Extension of the Collaborative Learning Process. *Teaching Sociology*. 34(3); 249-262.

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: the uses of the first language. *Language Teaching Research*. 17(4); 251-274