

Redefining Collaborative Learning for Language Efficiency

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Abstract

Language efficiency is not a one day process of learning. It is the culmination of a host of teaching learning methodologies that go a long way in bringing out the tangible outcomes. However, the core of language efficiency process can be best understood through defining and re-defining collaborative learning. Implementing collaborative learning has always been a challenge. Even establishing positive social interdependence, structuring a shared goal and providing instructions are unlikely to be enough. As a strategy, collaborative participation promotes the idea of working together in harmony to discover and share knowledge. This paper makes an attempt to explore various practices in order to highlight the scope of collaborative learning that goes far beyond the boundaries of the set notion of group study. The paper also explores Collaborative Learning as an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual efforts, not only through capitalising on one another's resources and skills but also through the use of multimedia, virtual community and technology assisted learning. The paper further focuses on the collaborative learning process through the tools of technology and identifies the connections between technological affordances and language efficiency.

Key Words: collaborative learning, technology, language efficiency

Introduction:

Language is the very soul of our living. It gives us a chance to breathe our thoughts, to describe our experience, and most importantly share our assimilations with the ones in need. Language is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication. It is not only a means of communication, but also a repository of literature and culture. Language may also refer to the cognitive ability to learn and use systems of complex communication or describe the set rules that makes up these systems. However, humans acquire language efficiency through social interactions, expressions and above all through learning.

The concept and notion of learning has undergone tremendous changes in the course of time. Learning no longer restricts to the components of note taking, listening, speaking, reading, writing, evaluation etc. Today's learners are more attracted towards technology. Hence, language efficiency through reading skill, which is one of the most important one in teaching learning process has become a boring part of the study. The present generation of learners in the fast changing Indian scenario, with overwhelming influence of electronic and social media, appreciate the alternative models of collaborative learning and group working. Communicating information, ideas

and arguments effectively using a style and language appropriate to the subject and purpose form the basis of collaborative learning. This paper makes an attempt to redefine the notion of collaborative learning in the present context of learning, influenced by the digital age. The same can be very well reflected in the words of John Dewey, 1915:

“If we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow.”

Although, the role of multimedia is reflected in all the spheres, language efficiency through the innovative collaborative programs has allowed students to creatively express themselves. Before exploring the various collaborative learning practices and re-defining the term, it would rather be a meaningful exercise to understand the dictionary definition of the term “Collaborative,” and not undermining the same. The Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines the term “Collaborative” as “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour.” The same dictionary also provides a series of synonyms for the term such as “collective, combined, common, conjunct, cooperative, joint, mutual, pooled, shared etc.” The dictionary explains “Collaborative” as the activity done collectively as a group. These received definitions of “Collaborative,” explains the conventional meaning of the term.

One can see that the recent studies and research have opened the doors of knowledge and resources for the tech savvy generation of learners. Hence, this paper makes an attempt to contest the term, from the point of view of the present generation of

learners, and outline the benefits of learning in collaborative style, beginning with the concept of the term and continuing with the advantages created by collaborative methods. Collaborative learning is a philosophy wherein individuals cooperate and coordinate respecting the abilities and contributions of their peers. Hence, there is a sharing of authority and acceptance of responsibility among the peers for their group’s actions. The underlying premise of collaborative learning is based upon the consensus building through co-operation by group members, contrast to competition in which individuals best other group members. Collaboration is a promising mode of human engagement that has become a twenty first century trend. The need for think together and work together on critical issues has increased (Austin, J. E., 2000; Welch, M., 1998), causing to stress on from individual attempts to team work and from autonomy to community. (Leonard, P.E & Leonard, L.J., 2001)

The grouping and paring of learners for the purpose of achieving a learning goal has been widely researched and advocated. Johnsons (1989) and Panitz (1999) have explored the numerous benefits of collaborative learning from the perspective of social, psychological and academic category. Firstly, in terms of social benefits, one can say that collaborative learning helps to build diversity, understanding among the students and develops a social support system for the learners, which in turn helps the learning communities to establish a positive atmosphere. Secondly, on the psychological front, through collaborative learning the student-centered instruction increases students’ self esteem and reduces the anxiety

levels of the learners. Thirdly, from the academic benefits point of view, one can compare that collaborative learning promotes critical thinking skills and involves the learners in the learning process. It also helps in motivating students in language efficiency through personalised lectures and models appropriate problem solving techniques. In short, through collaborative learning techniques, learners can be questioned as to identify the behaviours and skills that help them to work together, reflecting on their contribution to the team's or group's success or failures and can be made aware of the need for healthy, positive group communications and interactions.

Etymologically, to collaborate means to work together, which implies a concept of shared goals, and an explicit intention to "add value" to create something new or different through collaboration, as opposed to simply exchanging information or passing on instructions. Clustering as a concept is also effective in fostering a culture of excellence as learners learn from each other and emulate what is best. It aids in peer exchange of ideas, technology and materials. It raises the learners' potential and facilitates in group engagement through collaboration. Cluster based activities and support, exchange of ideas through books, information and communication technology brings parity in knowledge sharing and building bridges of collaboration. Cluster based collaboration helps in capacity building and creates more opportunities for the learner to raise the bar of language efficiency.

Language efficiency and computer programming are two of the most important job skills in today's global economy. The

importance of English language efficiency as the dominant factor has resulted in the need of computer mediated communication. One can claim that a new environment of online education, providing unprecedented opportunities for educational interactivity, is used as a powerful tool for collaborative learning. In this context, one can also interpret computer support as meaning the use of computers and computer networks as communication tools by learners who collaborate with each other to achieve a shared common goal, which does not require the physical presence or co-location of participants, and which provides a forum for continuous communication and language efficiency. Computer support for activities gives rise to collaborative learning. Computer conferencing and training programmes, online classroom, computer mediated communication, virtual seminars and webinars etc. have been developed for collaborative learning. The essentially textual nature of computer conferencing and electronic mail, combined with the use of word-processing software for drafting, has obviously attracted interest within the field of language efficiency skills. The online forum provides greater equity of use than the traditional classroom setting and gives the learners more control over what they read, write and respond in order to be more creative than their traditional counterparts.

Positive group, social interaction and communication skills – one-to-many, many-to-many multicultural education etc. link students for collaborative learning. The tools of technology such as computers, smart phones, tablets, laptops, internet modems and software, audio and video digital equipment

prove the process of language learning more effective. The digital tools improve access to various teaching and learning resources and offer collaborative, creative, dynamic, adaptive and innovative experiences of language efficiency.

Collaborative learning, through social media has been a boon for the present day learners. A plethora of opportunities are available for the learners to enhance and excel their language efficiency if they collaborate with the students, around the globe, through Reading Circles, Webinars, Web tools and Apps. As the famous quote by C.S. Lewis goes - "Two head is better than one head" – the notion of collaboration can best be understood in depth. As each person in the group has different perception about the topic, one can learn, unlearn and relearn better with the help of their fellow-mates as different members have different ways of learning, sharing, explaining and discussing.

Mobile learning or M-Learning has also brought about a fine balance and synthesis between smart phones and education. Learners are familiar with the functioning and operations of smart phones, which does not require any technical training. Additionally, they provide a huge opportunity for collaborative learning by connecting classroom across geographical boundaries. Critical thinking skills that helps students gain a deeper insight into cognitive domain, has also be done through mobiles. Learners can collaborate, ask questions, share their opinions and knowledge, reflect on their experiences and form learning forums using Short Messaging Services (SMS), Multimedia Messages (MMS), MSN Messenger, E- mail, Chat etc. to discuss

deeper concerns of language. This facilitates direct authentic collaboration with the language tutor and other learners. Computer-mediated collaboration allows the learners to send and receive instant messages. Chat provides a means for meaningful authentic communication with the real audience. Online forums which use the internet as the open discussion ground also help the students to connect and coordinate with their counterparts.

The present generation is already immersed in a wide gamut of tech-tools. Social networking, digital gaming and simulations – deserve a deeper look in order to really understand what is going on! These platforms are already demonstrating the way the learner thinks, learns and interacts and it is surprising to see the potential these channels have to create an impact on the learner. The emergence of social networking and the evolution of digital games have helped shape the new ways in which people are communicating, collaborating, operating and forming social constructs. Games and simulations have also become a key component of learning a language. Gamification is proven to strengthen memory, improve cognitive function, encourage collaboration plus involve and challenge students to use prior knowledge and hone competencies. Gamification in learning engages students retain more if they collaborate and watch visuals, demo, complete challenges and share their winning and losing with their teammates. Gamification improves the teams' self-confidence and ability to learn. Collaborative language learning through games and activities signals the release of dopamine, a

neurotransmitter that controls the pleasure centres of the brain, making learning enjoyable and creating a long-lasting affinity for the topic the learners are learning. Gamification is an effective tool and provides immediate feedback, which helps the team improve and improvise more learning techniques. This also helps the group identify their strengths and weaknesses and creates insight about their areas where focus must increase. In short, gamification in learning a language has evolved as a tactic implemented for collaborative learning to achieve the objectives of engaging the learners' needs in the digital era.

Conclusion

The aim to choose this topic is to show the how the notion of "Collaborative Learning" has undergone a change in the course of time, keeping abreast with the easy access to technology. Today's generation of tech-savvy learners, with the incredible availability of tools and learning experiences, have compelled us to redefine the term of "Collaborative Learning." Multimedia, virtual community and technology assisted learning has helped the learners to master the art of language learning and efficiency, beyond the walls of the classrooms, and work co-operatively to meet the challenges faced in today's globalized world.

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