

SMALL GROUP LEARNING COMPREHENSION USING TBL

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the problems faced by higher secondary students learning comprehension in Synod College, Shillong. In particular, it looks at the difficulties that students have in small group work activities. This paper will also offer some recommendation on how these can be overcome. The differences between task-stage and report-stage language shall be analysed. Moreover, this paper will study the impact that Small Group Work (SWG) has in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) classroom. This paper is hopeful that Small Group Work will give students opportunities for practice of negotiation of meaning, conversational exchanges and other face to face benefits that would not be possible in other type of activities.

Keywords: *Small Group work, Task-based Learning, Second Language Acquisition*

Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. Reasoning activity occurs during reading whereby the reader creates meaning based on the textual clues. Reading can be defined as 'the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language' (Snow, 2010, p.11).

Reading is considered an important academic task faced by learners. While studying an academic course, the main goal of reading will be to gather information in order to answer an assignment question or to gain information or knowledge on a subject for an exam or assessment purpose. Apart from all these, reading is to develop one's thoughts, to incorporate new ideas into one's existing understanding, to see things from different dimensions, to develop one's knowledge and

understanding. Learning, therefore, comes not only from reading and remembering the minute details but from developing what one understands of the details. Thus, critical thinking is developed in a learner.

Reading comprehension is the ability to understand the information that is presented in written form. Comprehension for learners would be for reading and understanding textbooks for assignments and examinations. Competent reading with comprehension will harness information and knowledge which will drive the learners to heights of proficiency.

The skills involved in the different contexts of reading are:

1. Skimming : It is reading quickly without pausing to study the details. It is important to take a moment to preview the text before starting to read a text in detail.

2. Scanning : After the text is skimmed, it can be studied in more detail, reading slowly and carefully, looking out for information that is specific.
3. Study reading: The intensive reading one does to gain adequate information from a text to prepare for tests, assignments etc.
4. Word attack skills: This enables the reader to tackle unfamiliar lexical items by using morphology, inference from text or by using a dictionary.
5. Text attack skills: This skill involves the process of interpreting the text entirely by using all the hints available including cohesion and rhetorical structure.

Reading encompasses three elements:

- I. The reader doing the comprehending
- II. The text to be comprehended and,
- III. The activity in which comprehension is present

These are the elements that shape reading comprehension. Readers are engaged with those texts that are all influenced or determined by the sociocultural context. Reading comprehension can be classified into three stages. They are the pre-reading, reading and post-reading stages. At each stage, the reader brings in their understanding of the text and what they take back from the text differs from each reader.

Some of the Problems that Learners face while Reading:

The problem that learners encounter while reading is that they are unable to understand a word or a sentence. Learners are also unable to understand how sentences are related. Inability to understand how the information is conveyed

in a meaningful manner and the most common deterrent is lack of interest and concentration.

Learners also have difficulty in reading text for a longer period, after 15 minutes they are distracted and some learners have lost interest. Moreover, different learners have different problems while reading; some are not flexible problem solvers while others use many sources of information as they read.

Report Stage in Reading Comprehension Task:

It is crucial that the teacher should have a balance in planning the time. The role of the teacher is significant, especially in planning for small group learning. However, there will be a time when the teacher addresses an issue or make clarifications. Creating an interest in the learners by activating the previous knowledge while reading and after reading a text is crucial. The Learners who are skilled readers think about what they already know about a text's structure or topic before they embark to read. These learners make connections to their lives, other books, and the world as they read; and they think about these connections after they are done with reading.

During the report stage, teachers should allow learners to talk about different topics so that they can infer about what they are going to read. The Teacher should observe what the learners are doing during conversations, such as

1. Learners' body language indicating whether they are actively listening in the form of facing the speaker, nodding or reacting to what has been said
2. If the learners are asking questions to clarify on ideas
3. If the readers are sticking to one idea and also

adding and building on that idea

4. If the readers are open-minded and are conversing to arrive at new thoughts and ideas, or if they are simply sharing about what they already thought
5. If the readers are prepared for conversation by writing on stick notes or in a notebook
6. If the learners are providing textual evidence for what they are talking about
7. If the learners are stopping to reread parts of the text
8. If the learners are offering questions or controversial thoughts to entice more interesting conversation

Task Stage:

When the learners reach the task stage, they should be able to make conversation about the text. At this stage, the teacher should act merely as a guide providing the scaffolding as and when it is needed. Learners should be able to have conversation about the text without the support of the teacher. Teachers must keep in mind that putting learners into small groups right away will not generate productive conversation. It is very important that the teacher sees the group as a unit, yet at the same time observe the learners as individuals. This will allow the teacher to trace the progress of each learner and ensure that everyone is involved in the conversation and group discussions.

The main objective for Small Group Work is to create balanced literacy amongst students. For instance, learners must have opportunities to observe teacher's demonstration, learners must also have opportunities to practice with teacher support, and opportunities to practice

independently, offering a bridge to autonomy. Teachers should have a model that students can follow, learners and teacher should have opportunities to work together, and learners must practice working on their own to be independent.

Some of the Benefits of using Small Group Work:

A Small Group Work allows the teacher to meet the instructional goals by matching student's need with a purpose and method. It is also more efficient for time management since the teacher can meet learners in small groups and more often for enriching their skills. It also helps learners to work in a group ensuring that team effort is being fostered. Learners learn to support each other and provide mentoring in order to reach a common goal.

One of the most important factors that learners take from SGW is that it keeps learners motivated which a teacher will not find in big classrooms. This SGW did help the students to learn comprehension in a new light altogether. Dividing the class into small groups helps the teacher to focus on the interests and varied abilities of the students in a better way. The students are more enthusiastic to learn in a small group.

Recommendations and Conclusion:

In order for learners to improve their reading skills, they need to practice. Learners must engage themselves to read for long stretches of time, with the right material, by joyfully engaging in their reading. It is vital that learners learn to engage themselves during their reading time.

Fluency affects learners' comprehension, comprehension affects fluency. Assessing

comprehension is always a challenge because it is invisible. A student is not writing down what is going through his/her head, or talking to one another about what he/she is thinking. Therefore, it becomes challenging to see whether the reader is progressing or not. SGW did foster interests in the learners and they were encouraged to discuss with their group members.

In order for SGW to succeed teachers need to engage with the learners. The teacher ought to give one-on-one attention which will tailor the focus of the lesson to the individual's needs. The teacher also differentiates by changing how he interacts with each child and the type of output expected (Tomlinson 2001).

The most crucial part of Small Group Work is the “link”. That is, the teacher must link the work of

the group to the learners' independent work. This will allow learners to become more confident in their learning and they can utilise what they have learnt in the group to their own learning. Moreover, with repeated practice in multiple contexts their new learning can solidify.

One of the most important factors that learners take from SGW is that it keeps learners motivated which teachers will not find in a big classroom setting.

SGW helps the students to understand the subject matter more thoroughly and it transforms the class by keeping the students energized and motivated. For the present study, the researchers found out that SGW did leave an impact for learners in the classroom.

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