Some peer and collaborative learning strategies english language essay

Linguistics, English

Introduction

"…learning with and from each other is a necessary and important aspect of all courses. The role it plays varies widely and the forms it takes are very diverse, but without it students gain an impoverished education." (Boud, 2001)What is peer learning? Reliance on the traditional lecture as the main mode of student learning has been criticized as: molding students into passive recipients of information transmitted by the teacher and making them highly dependent on teachers for much of their learning needs; promoting rote-learning that involves mainly memorization, recall facts; andacquiring abundant inert knowledge often difficult to apply in the work environment, whereas " What matters…is not just what students know but what they can do with what they know. What's at stake is the capacity to perform, to put what one knows into practice" (Meyers & Jones, 1993). Today, information technology (e. g. computer programs/databases, Internet facilities) has provided " students with excellent opportunities to learn without requiring a teacher to transmit the available information" (Bohuijs, 1998), thereby necessitating a shift in paradigm from the highly teacher-centered to learner-centered education (e. g. peer learning) in which students are expected to take greater initiative and responsibility to manage more of their own learning and educational/personal development. In peer learning, students will construct their own meaning and understanding of what they need to learn. Essentially, students will be involved in searching for, collecting, analyzing, evaluating, integrating and applying information to complete an assignment or solve a problem. Thus, students will engage themselves intellectually, emotionally and socially in " constructive

conversation" and learn by talking and questioning each other's views and reaching consensus or dissent (Boud, 2001). Peer learning is optimized when incorporated as an integral component of a curriculum, paying special attention to: Creating a conducive learning environment: Students must build mutual respect for and trust and confidence in one another, so that they " feel free to express opinions, test ideas, and ask for, or offer help when it is needed" (Smith, 1983). Peer learning can be further enhanced if the " environment of mutual help…continues over time and beyond the classroom" (Boud, 2001). Thus, students are individually and collectively accountable for optimizing their own learning and achievements. Learning in small collaborative groups: Many of the key elements for effective peer learning are often incorporated in the design of small collaborative learning groups, and " research shows that students who engage in collaborative learning and group study perform better academically, persist longer, feel better about the educational experience, and have enhanced self-esteem" (Landis, 2000). Furthermore, " the peer support…is a powerful psychological ballast to critical thinking efforts" (Brookfield, 1987). Expected beneficial outcomesIn addition to content knowledge acquisition, peer learning, especially in small collaborative groups, nurtures and fosters the development of: self-directed learning skills, and thus lays the foundation for life-long continuing self-education; critical thinking and problem-solving skills; communication, interpersonal and teamwork skills; andlearning through self, peer assessment and critical reflection. Peer learning also strongly motivates learning often attributed to the fun and joy of learning in small groups. The outcomes of peer learning ultimately depend on the

design strategy, outcome objectives of the course, facilitating skills of the teacher, and the commitment of students and teachers. Many institutions of learning now promote instructional methods involving ' active' learning that present opportunities for students to formulate their own questions, discuss issues, explain their viewpoints, and engage in cooperative learning by working in teams on problems and projects. ' Peer learning' is a form of cooperative learning that enhances the value of student-student interaction and results in various advantageous learning outcomes. To realize the benefits of peer learning, teachers must provide ' intellectual scaffolding'. Thus, teachers prime students by selecting discussion topics that all students are likely to have some relevant knowledge of; they also raise questions/issues that prompt students towards more sophisticated levels of thinking. In addition, collaborative processes are devised to get all group members to participate meaningfully. Peer learning strategiesTo facilitate successful peer learning, teachers may choose from an array of strategies: Buzz Groups: A large group of students is subdivided into smaller groups of 4–5 students to consider the issues surrounding a problem. After about 20 minutes of discussion, one member of each sub-group presents the findings of the sub-group to the whole group. Debate Groups: A large group of students is subdivided into smaller groups of 4-5 to consider the topic. After about 10 minutes of discussion, they will have cross debating with other group members. Affinity Groups: Groups of 4–5 students are each assigned particular tasks to work on outside of formal contact time. At the next formal meeting with the teacher, the sub-group, or a group representative, presents the sub-group's findings to the whole tutorial group. Solution and Critic

Groups: One sub-group is assigned a discussion topic for a tutorial and the other groups constitute ' critics' who observe, offer comments and evaluate the sub-group's presentation. Teach-Write-Discuss: At the end of a unit of instruction, students have to answer short questions and justify their answers. After working on the questions individually, students compare their answers with each other's. A whole-class discussion subsequently examines the array of answers that still seem justifiable and the reasons for their validity. Critique sessions, role-play, debates, case studies and integrated projects are other exciting and effective teaching strategies that stir students' enthusiasm and encourage peer learning. Students thus have diverse opportunities to experience in a reasonably ' safe' and unconstrained context (while perhaps being evaluated by another group and/or the teacher), reactions to complex and ' real' problems they may face later in their careers. Successful peer learningFor peer learning to be effective, the teacher must ensure that the entire group experiences ' positive interdependence', face-to-face interaction, group processing, and individual and group accountability. ' Positive interdependence' emphasizes the importance and uniqueness of each group member's efforts while important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics are quietly at work. As students communicate with one another, they inevitably assume leadership roles, acquire conflict-managing skills, discuss and clarify concepts, and unravel the complexities of human relationships within a given context; this process enhances their learning outcomes. Thus, students' learning extends far beyond the written word and even the given task. However, peer learning may encourage the presence of ' freeloaders'—team members who fail to

fulfill their team responsibilities, but are awarded for assignments or presentations the same (high) grade as their more responsible teammates. Freeloading may be minimized by using peer ratings to assess individual performance of team members, or conducting a ' post-test'. There will then be two levels of accountability: the individual and the group. Some suggested activities for classroomFew activities given below will help English teachers improve their students' interest. Keeping the below guidelines they can come up with their own games/activities or change the present games to suit their classroom situations.

Charades

Grammar Concept – Adverbs: Boldly, quickly, calmly, angrily etc.

In class

The player will volunteer to go out. After he/she leaves the class, the class will decide on the adverb. He/she will be called into the class. He/she can ask questions to students of his choice. e. g : " How are you feeling today?" etc. Let us say the adverb selected is angrily. The student should imitate the word in the form of answer not giving the word away. The player should guess the word. If he/she is not able to guess the word, other students will make him/her do some funny activities like singing, dancing, mewing, barking etc. Precede asking questions to other students until he/she is able to guess the word, if no one is able to guess finally reveal the adverb.

My sentence – your paragraph

Grammar: Linking words – and, but etc.

In class

Ask the class to tell you all the linking words they know. You might start them off by suggesting ' and, but'. Build up a list on the board. There will be some you will have to explain/translate for people who do not know them, or not sure they know them. Write up on the board five open, general sentences around a theme, e. g. Teenagers have never been pensioners. In old age you may want to be close to your relatives. I don't like thinking about ageing. Some young people feel guilty about old people. At times old people want to be independent. Ask the students to work on their own and put the above in any order they want, linking them into two or three sentence paragraph. They may add linking words and further linking clauses or sentences to make full paragraph. While this is going on, go round and help students who are getting linking words wrong. Ask students to stick their paragraphs up on the walls of the classroom; then go round and read each other's.

Naught and crosses

Grammar Concept - Determiners: Some, any, much, many etc.

In class

Divide the class into team A and team B. Put a naughts and crosses grid (9 squares) up on the board and make sure that everybody knows the rules of the game. Someone from team A comes and puts a cross in one of the squares. Then someone from team B comes and puts a naught in another square. The aim of the game is to get a row of three naughts or crosses in any direction. Now draw this grid on the board:

Some

A few

Any

Much

A Lot Of

Too Much

Many

Several

A Pair Of

Tell team A they have 20 seconds to choose a particular square and produce a correct sentence using the word on that square. If they take longer than 20 seconds they lose their turn. If they produce a sentence, ask team B to say whether it is correct or not. If team B's judgment is correct accept it and if it is wrong correct it. If team A's sentence is correct, give them a cross in the corresponding square. Team B then plays in the same way, with team A judging their sentence and you the correctness of team A's judgment. As the game develops the teams are forced to try and make sentences with more difficult words in the grid. Case Study – The Pebble StoryMany years ago in a small Indian village, a farmer had the misfortune of owing a large sum of money to a village moneylender. The moneylender, who was old and ugly, fancied he farmer's beautiful daughter. So he proposed a bargain. He said he would forgo the farmer's debt if he could marry his daughter. Both the farmer and his daughter were horrified by the proposal. So the cunning money-lender suggested that they let providence decide the matter. He told

them that he would put a black pebble and a white pebble into an empty money bag. Then the girl would have to pick one pebble from the bag. If she picked the black pebble, she would become his wife and her father's debt would be forgiven. If she picked the white pebble she need not marry him and her father's debt would still be forgiven. But if she refused to pick a pebble, her father would be thrown into jail. All the villagers were standing on a pebble strewn path in the farmer's field. As they talked, the moneylender bent over to pick up two pebbles. As he picked them up, the sharp-eyed girl noticed that he had picked up two black pebbles and put them into the bag. He then asked the girl to pick a pebble from the bag. Now, imagine you were standing in the field. What would you have done if you were the girl? If you had to advise her, what would you have told her? Careful analysis would produce three possibilities: 1. The girl should refuse to take a pebble. 2. The girl should show that there were two black pebbles in the bag and expose the money-lender as a cheat. 3. The girl should pick a black pebble and sacrifice herself in order to save her father from his debt and imprisonment. Take a moment to ponder over the story. The above story is used with the hope that it will make us appreciate the difference between lateral and logical thinking. The girl's dilemma can not be solved with traditional logical thinking. Think of the consequences if she chooses the above logical answers. What would you recommend to the Girl to do? ConclusionResearch indicates that peer learning activities typically result in: (a) team-building spirit and more supportive relationships; (b) greater psychological well-being, social competence, communication skills and self-esteem; and (c) higher achievement and greater productivity in terms of

enhanced learning outcomes. Although peer-learning strategies are valuable tools for educators to utilize, it is obvious that simply placing students in groups and telling them to ' work together' is not going to automatically yield results. The teacher must consciously orchestrate the learning exercise and choose the appropriate vehicle for it. Only then will students in fact engage in peer learning and reap the benefits discussed above. In conclusion, peer learning is learner-centered education that transcends content knowledge acquisition. Peer learning optimizes student learning outcomes and provides a more holistic, value-added and quality-enhancing education that will better prepare students for the needs of the workforce in this millennium.