

Transforming ESL classrooms into collaborative learning communities

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Activity: Group work

- Imagine you are planning a campaign to attract more tourists to a city in Canada. Use the ideas below or your own ideas to design a travel brochure:

Famous historical attractions.

Special events or festivals.

Nice areas to stay.

Challenges of group work

“The virtual absence of group work is one of the most startling findings of a range of research into both primary and secondary schools. Children may work in groups but they very seldom work as groups.”

(The meaning of intelligence, 1999)

Outline

- What is cooperative/collaborative learning
- Components of collaborative learning communities
- Challenges of collaborative learning within an ESL context: linguistic/cognitive/cultural.
- Role of teachers:
guiding and coaching learners in group dynamics.
- Collaborative tasks:
scaffolding learning.
- Role of students:
engaging in collaborative dialogue and building knowledge.

Cooperative/collaborative learning

“Cooperative learning is the use of small groups through which students work together to accomplish shared goals and to maximize their own and others’ potential”.

(Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1994)

Elements of cooperative learning

- Positive interdependence.
- Face to face interaction.
- Individual and group accountability.
- Interpersonal and small group skills.
- Group processing.

Cooperative/collaborative learning

“...what occurs in collaborative dialogues *is* learning. That is, learning does not happen outside performance; it occurs in performance. Furthermore, learning is cumulative, emergent and ongoing...”

- (Swain and Lapkin, 1998)

ESL group work

- Informal learning groups: groups formed within a class session to practice and apply what they are learning.
- Formal learning groups: groups formed to accomplish a specific task such as a project that can be done in one class session or over several sessions.

Linguistic and critical thinking challenges:

- ESL students need linguistic proficiency to engage in:
- BICS (Basic interpersonal communication skills) which refer to linguistic skills necessary for social interactions such as everyday communication.
- Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which refers to higher order cognitive skills such as problem solving, inferring, analyzing, predicting and synthesizing.

(Cummins, 1981)

communicative patterns/cultural and personal challenges

Disputation(al) talk

There is a lot of disagreement and the atmosphere is competitive.

Cumulative talk...

Everyone accepts and agrees with other group members.

Exploratory talk

People share relevant information.

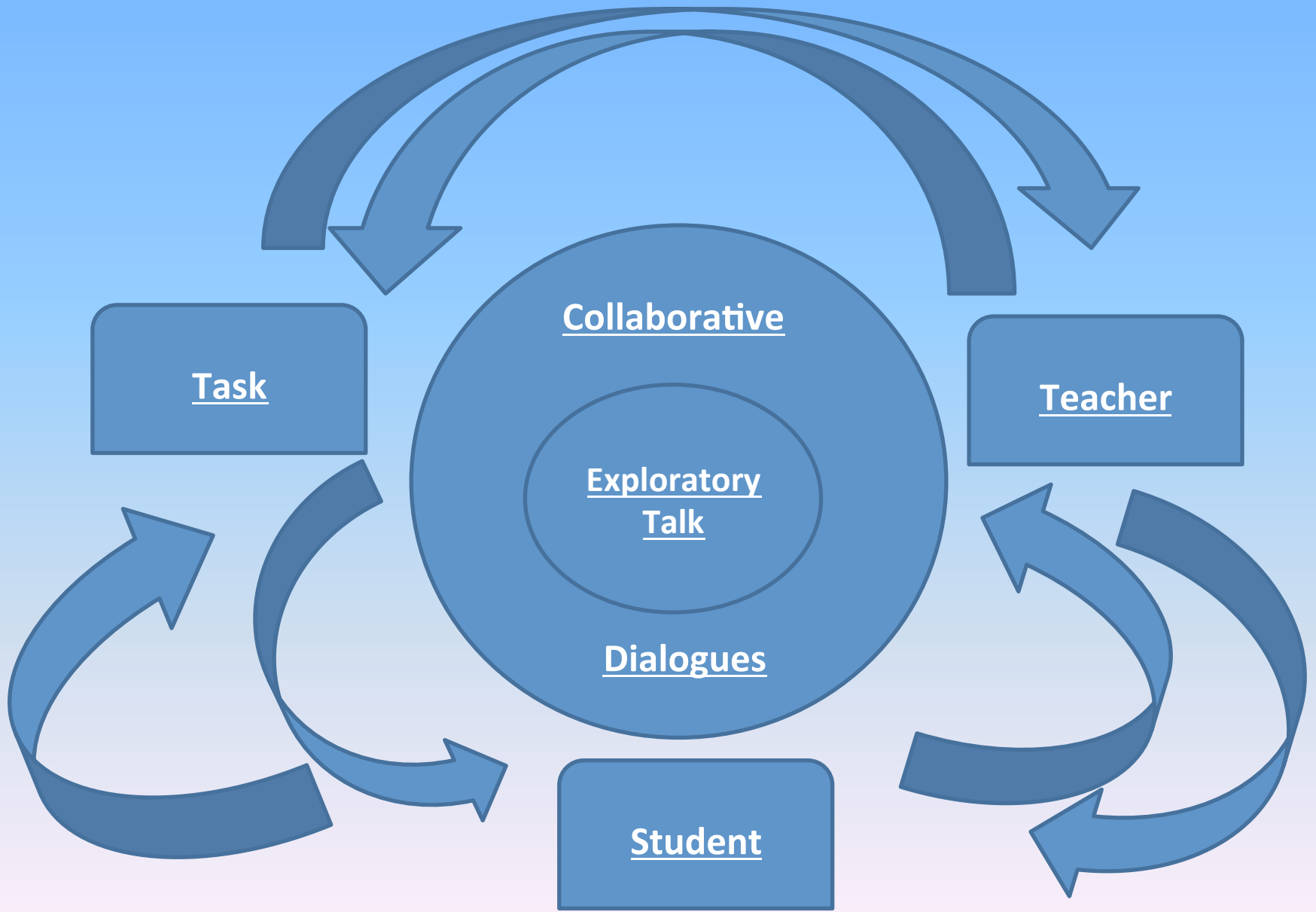
Ideas may be challenged.

Reasons are given for challenges.

The group seeks agreement for joint decisions.

(Neil Mercer, 2008)

Collaborative Environments



Teacher's role: coaching students in group dynamics

- Help students identify cooperative and uncooperative behaviors in turn taking, conflict resolution and body language.
- Use prompt cards to teach students to:
 - Let people finish what they are saying.
 - Keep quiet when others are speaking.
 - Listen to the views of others.
 - Maintain eye contact

Promoting exploratory talk

Prompt Cards to promote *Exploratory Talk*

What do you think?

What are your reasons?

Is there another way of looking at this?

Have we considered all the factors?

I agree with you because...

I disagree with you because...

What have we agreed?

What if...

Assign group roles: use prompt cards to tell students what they are expected to do

The Reporter

It is your job to report on the groups ideas.



You will need to:

- Record information clearly and accurately
- Summarise the main ideas
- Structures feedback clearly
- Report back to class/teacher

You could say:

"In our group the key points were..."

"Our conclusion was that ..."

Group roles

Working with Others Effective Group Work

A Good Group Leader

- Clarifies roles
- Communicates clearly
- Delegates fairly
- Ensures everyone understands the task
- Encourages everyone to contribute
- Keeps the group on task
- Considers others views
- Summarises the outcome for the group



Collaborative tasks

- Open ended, problem solving activities that relate to students' lives.
- Collaborative dialogues that include all four linguistic skills.
- Appropriate linguistic and critical thinking prompts that generate giving and sharing opinions, making decisions, solving problems.
- Rubrics that guide students as to expected learning outcomes.

Students' role: building knowledge

- Engage with the task: follow group dynamics to ensure the creation of collaborative dialogues and exploratory talk.
- Exhibit learning through oral and/or written performance.
- Reflect on performance.
- Participate in a community of learning.

Benefits of collaborative learning

- Helps in building linguistic, cognitive and cultural knowledge.
- Promotes motivation and learner autonomy.
- Develops social skills such as leadership, team work, organization, negotiation etc...
- Encourages creativity and discovery.
- Provides opportunities for all students to feel successful.

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