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COLLABORATION: AN INNOVATIVE PRACTICE FOR EFFECTUAL LEARNING

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ABSTRACT:

Education should make a difference to the learner, it should make a noticeable change in his life; it should matter to him in one way or the other; and should add value to his dreams. It may be knowledge, skill, attitude, behavior, wealth, health, character or learning; it could be anything and in any degree but it should be imparted to a person through education. Teaching is a noble job, for the teacher has to give more than he receives and what he gives is priceless. So, it is going to be a market-driven educational system demanding quicker adoptability to universal changes. But it is not easy for a teacher to suddenly change the method of handling a class from a system based on suppression. Once children are familiarized well they will begin to appreciate the value of orderliness and will want to behave well simply because they like and trust the teacher. Motivating children to get them interested in learning could be a starting point or the keystone of any new system. Collaborative Learning refers to the instructional method in which students at various levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. It shows that school achievements, creations of positive inter group relations and socialization is higher in cooperative settings. Both mainstream and minority students show far greater increases in academic achievement when they participate in collaborative learning projects than when they remain in traditional teacher focused class rooms. However, most of the schools in rural and urban areas may not have seen the implementation of such innovative practices. The realization of the much demanding goals and objectives of school curriculum is possible only when the teachers make use of certain innovative practices. But, the collaborative learning is sure to be flexible and changing from time to time on the basis of the individuals or the topics of discussion. Therefore, it is highly advocated as a modern class room technique to provide learner-centered teaching as well as learner participation and contribution in the teaching learning process.

KEYWORDS:

Collaboration, Learner-Centered Teaching, Cooperative Learning, Reciprocal Learning.



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INTRODUCTION:

The quest for improvement of quality is the central feature of every educational system today. Many programmes have been initiated from time to time based on the emerging needs and analysis of previous experience to achieve national goals. We all are tired of the traditional method of learning to the stereo typed lecture of various teachers. An exceptional educational environment begins with a vision that the most powerful and meaningful learning when thinking and feeling are fused together.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is nothing but the grouping and pairing of students, for the purpose of achieving more in their academic achievement. It is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches in education that involve joint intellectual efforts by students, or teachers together (Siddiqui, 2005: 18). It deals with interaction methods that seek to promote learning through collaborative efforts among students working in a given learning task. Various names have been given to this form of teaching. Some of the commonly used ones are cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, peer learning, reciprocal learning, team learning, study circles, study groups and work groups. But in all there are three general types of group work informal learning groups, formal learning groups and study teams (Johnson et al., 1991).

Collaborative learning claims the idea of sharing information with one another. It also promotes the knowledge of critical thinking. It is an interactive approach to team work that enables students to combine their individual skills and resources to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems (<http://brilliant.edublocks.org/.../glossary-of-terms/>). According to Johnson et al. (1991), there is persuasive evidence that co-operative teams achieve at higher levels of thought and retain information longer than students who work quietly as individuals. The shared learning gives students a chance to participate in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers. Moreover, involving students in real world tasks and linking new information to prior knowledge requires effective communication and collaboration among teachers, students and others. Indeed, it is through dialogue and interaction that curriculum objectives came alive.

Principles of Collaborative Learning

According to Vygotsky (1978), students are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative situations than when asked to work



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individually. Group diversity in terms of knowledge and experience contributes positively into the learning process. Bruner (1985) contends that co-operative learning methods improve problem-solving strategies because the students are confronted with different interpretations of the given situation. The peer support system makes it possible for the learner to disguise both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to change over them into tools for intellectual functioning. (Gokhale, 1995) concluded that collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas and evaluation of others ideas. Consequently, if the purpose of instruction is to enhance critical thinking and problem solving skills, then it is more useful.

The principles of collaborative learning are:

- ❖ Learning actualized in small groups consists of 2-6 persons.
- ❖ Interaction of students in group is important at learning.
- ❖ Competition between groups is more important than competition among students.
- ❖ Success or failure is belonging to groups more than individuals.
- ❖ Friendship is increased among students.
- ❖ Cognitive, affective and social behaviors of students are improved using this learning application.

Strategies of Collaborative Learning

Studies from creativity and organizational development prove that ideas often emerge out of collaborative process (Samuel, 2010). Collaborative learning can be used to learn facts and concepts, problem solving, group assignments, conducting experiment, assemble a collage, prepare a research report, prepare a biographical report, group investigation and for providing drill work to a group. The below strategies can be used with any subjects, in any grade and without a special curriculum.

- ❖ Think-Pair-Share
- ❖ Three-Step Interview
- ❖ Simple Jigsaw
- ❖ Numbered Heads Together

Forms of Collaborative Learning

Learning is the most effective when it is multimodal when the material is presented in various forms, and when students have different means of accessing and interacting with material and demonstrating their knowledge being evaluated. Instruction is designed to meet the needs of a broad range of learner preferences (Gafoor, 2010). Impact of collaboration benefits students by mastery of content, retention of material, quality of reasoning strategies,



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generation of new ideas, transfer of learning, increased self-confidence and increased liking of school and classrooms.

Examples for collaboration in teaching-learning are:

- ❖ Collaborative Networked Learning
- ❖ Computer Supported Collaborative Learning
- ❖ Learning Management Systems
- ❖ Collaborative Learning Development
- ❖ Collaborative Learning in Virtual Worlds

Difference between Collaborative and Traditional Classroom

Teachers should have the freedom to innovate, and to devise appropriate methods of communication and activities relevant to the needs and capabilities of community (Bency, 2009). It is seen that collaborative learning has emerged as the leading new approach to classroom instruction. In collaborative learning, students have two responsibilities, to learn the assigned material and to make sure all other members do like ways (Johnson, 1980).

The differences between collaborative and traditional classrooms are:

- ❖ Shared Knowledge among Teachers and Students
- ❖ Shared Authority among Teachers and Students
- ❖ Teachers as Mediators
- ❖ Heterogeneous Grouping of Students

Students Roles in a Collaborative Classroom

Student's major roles are collaborator and active participator in the collaborative classroom. It is useful to think how these new roles influence the processes and activities students conduct before, during and after learning; they assess their performance and plan for future learning. As mediator, the teacher helps students fulfill their new roles. Slavin (1989) explains, for an effective collaborative learning, there must be group goals and individual accountability. When the group's task is to ensure that every group member has learned something, it is in the interest of every group member to spend time explaining concepts to group mates ([http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/...](http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/)).

Self-regulated learning is important in collaborative classrooms. Students learn to take responsibility for monitoring, adjusting, self questioning and questioning each other. Monitoring is checking one's progress toward goals. Adjusting refers to changes students make, based on monitoring, in what they are doing to reach their goals. Students can further build up their self-regulating abilities, when each group imparts its ideas with different groups



and gets feedback from them.

Collaborative classrooms are natural places in which to learn self-assessment. And because decisions about materials and group performance are shared, students feel more free, to express doubts, feelings of success and uncertainties than when they are evaluated only by a teacher. Furthermore, the sense of co-operation that is fostered in collaborative work makes assessment learn threatening than in a more traditional assessment situation. Ideally students learn to evaluate their own learning from their experience with group evaluation.

Challenges and Conflicts in Collaborative Learning

According to (Gerlach, 1994), Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act, in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs (<http://collaborativelearning.wetpaint.com/>). Classroom control of collaborative classrooms tends to be noisier than traditional classrooms. This is a legitimate issue for a number of people. Some teachers believe that noisy classrooms indicate lack of discipline or teacher control. In such situations they argue, students cannot learn. Collaborative classrooms do not lack structure. Indeed, structure becomes critical. Students need opportunities to move about talk, ask questions, and so on. Thus the noise in a smoothly running collaborative classroom indicates that active learning is going on.

Teachers and administrators may believe that new lesson plans must be formed for these classrooms. To a certain extent, they are correct. But many teachers as of now have created engaging units and activities that are easily executed in a collaborative classroom. Furthermore, teachers can begin slowly, making changes in one subject area or unit within a subject area, probably one they are already very comfortable with teachers, and then add other subjects and units. Teachers can also share their plans with each other. Principals and curriculum specialists can also collaborate with teachers to plan effective segments of instruction. Moreover there is a tradeoff between the extra time needed for planning and benefits such as less time for correcting lessons, increased student motivation and fewer attendance and discipline problems.

A major misconception about collaborative learning is that collaboration is advantageous for the gifted and high achieving students. There are two tough issues here. First many teachers do not believe that low-achieving students have much to contribute to the learning situation, in fact they have no prior experiences or knowledge of value. Second, teacher's worry that high achieving student will be held back. In light of the first issue many



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collaborative teachers have expressed amaze when clearly less capable students had insights and ideas that went beyond what teachers anticipated. Further, if each student contributes something, the pool of collective knowledge will indeed be rich. In answer to the second concern, data suggest that high achieving students gain much from their exposure to diverse experiences and also from peer tutoring. Also, students who may be high achieving in one area may need help in other areas. Teachers and others also wonder whether shy students can completely participate in a classroom that depends so much on dialogue. These students might feel more comfortable talking in small groups that share responsibility for learning. Furthermore, interaction between learners can happen in ways other than oral dialogue writing and art.

CONCLUSION:

Collaborative learning method is examined as an alternative learning method for the other methods used in traditional visual arts education to seek for effective and complete learning. In collaboration students improve their skills successfully using constructivist learning model. Students to think clearly and independently is important equally is to think collaboratively. In an "information age" societal demands for higher order thinking are increasing. Employability studies document the need for future work capable of more sophisticated thinking than was generally required in the past. Such skills as independent analysis, flexible thinking, collaborative problem solving, are now considered basic requirements for many jobs. Students should be trained to think collaboratively from a young age. It will result in a desire to learn throughout life creating a learning society.

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