

## **Interaction through group work (Brown, 2001, pp. 176-190)**

Group work: an umbrella term for multiple techniques where two or more students are given a task that requires self-initiated language input and output through collaboration

Pair work: a type of group work in groups of two

## **Advantages of group work**

Group work

- Creates interaction, resulting in student language use
- Facilitates a friendly learning climate that lowers anxiety levels
- Promotes learner responsibility and autonomy for one's learning
- Offers a step for individualized language instruction

## **Excuses for not doing group work and clarifications**

- Excuse 1: Teacher's losing control
- Clarification 1: With careful attention to guidelines for implementation of group work on the parts of both learners and the teacher, the issue of losing control can be solved. Yielding more control to autonomous learners will facilitate interaction that can never be obtained from traditional teacher-centered class.
  
- Excuse 2: Learners' using their own first language
- Clarification 2: In a second language setting, strategic placement of learners in different first language groups solves the worry. However, in a foreign language situation, a teacher can try to set the climate for group work by
  - o Establishing guidelines about only using the target language
  - o Emphasizing the importance of practice in group work for successful learning
  - o Highlighting the enjoyment active learners will have from various small-group tasks
  - o Informing learners of the emotional security provided by the small group activities
  
- Excuse 3: Learners' self-reinforcing their errors in group work
- Clarification 3: Research on errors and error correction says that accuracy in unsupervised small groups is as high as that in teacher-centered whole class work. In addition, teachers' overt attempt to correct errors in the class has a marginal effect on the learners' following performance (Long & Porter, 1985). Two points should not be forgotten: (1) Errors are a natural element in inter-language development (Gass & Selinker, 2008), (2) Learners provide peer correction in small group activities.

- Excuse 4: Learners' preference for individual work
- Clarification 4: It is true that some adult learners prefer individual work where they are given the correct answer about a problem and then move on instead of being placed in a group work for more interaction-oriented, but less guide-lined activities. It is important to let the learners know that learning a language is not a skill that can be obtained from memorizing grammar structures and words separately. To be successful learners, face-to-face communication is a must and small group activities are a sure method to fulfill the goal.

#### References

Brown, D. (2001). *Teaching by principles*. New York: Pearson Education Company.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. Mahwah, N.J. : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Long, M., & Porter, P. (1985). Group work, interlanguage talk, and second language acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 207-228.