

IASCE Forum

This is the latest in the series of Forum members' "calling cards" that describe the development of cooperative learning in their respective countries.

Cooperative Learning and Teaching in Germany Claudia Finkbeiner

This survey article focuses on the status quo as well as the historical development of cooperative and collaborative learning in Germany. Due to the growing social, cultural and ethnic diversity in Germany, cooperation and communication are overall goals in all official curricula and are considered as key qualifications (Finkbeiner, 1995) for a successful school and job career in a highly diverse society. For instance, the recent PISA study (Program for International Students' Assessment) put major emphasis on the research of cooperative and communicative skills (Stanat & Kunter, 2001).

Socialization and individualization are seen as complementary processes supporting each other. Cooperative behavior is seen as a conglomeration of complex personal characteristics that include various linguistic, social and cognitive skills as well as attitudinal and affective factors (Stanat & Kunter 2001). In specific regard to multi-literacy, the area in which I work, proficiency in several languages is valued as a pre-condition for creating equity in cooperative settings (Cohen & Lotan 1997; Finkbeiner 2001). This includes proficiency in the mother tongue, German as an official classroom language, English as *lingua franca* and possibly the language of one of Germany's nine neighboring countries and/or a language of other countries (Finkbeiner & Fehling, in press). This is true both for school, university and labor and market settings.

Historical perspective

Even though there is a long historical tradition of cooperative learning and "Gruppenarbeit" (group learning) in Germany, there still is a major focus on teacher-oriented lessons (Huber, 1997; Nuhn, 2000). Historically speaking, the term 'group work' was not used in German educational terminology before the end of the 19th century. However, the idea of student-student cooperation had already been developed in medieval times. At the time of the Reformation, the so-called 'Helfersystem' emerged in which older students taught the younger ones to assist the teacher in managing a huge class.

Later, in the early 20th century, several reform pedagogues deployed forms of cooperative learning and teaching to meet the challenges and consequences of a changing society. It was extremely contradictory to the underlying idea and devastating for educational development in Germany that the "Reformpädagogik"-movement in Germany was abused by the Nazi regime and, as a consequence, came to a complete standstill. Together with the ideas of the "Reformpädagogik"-movement, the concept of cooperative learning and teaching were rediscovered in the 1970s and were channeled into a holistic, action-oriented, humanistic approach with a high focus on autonomous and student-centered learning (Finkbeiner, 1995; 2002).

Cooperative learning has remained at the center of interest to this very day (Huber, 1997, 2001; Finkbeiner, 1995; Meyer, 1975; Jank & Meyer, 1991). Yet, classroom research in the 1960s as well as in the 1980s showed that only rarely would forms of cooperative learning and teaching be used in German schools (Huber, 1997). Teachers often argued that this was due to a number of organizational obstacles that they had to deal with, such as the arrangement of tables in the classroom. This was particularly awkward if not all teachers wanted to conduct forms of cooperative learning and teaching. Teachers to this very day are

often preoccupied with organizational matters and sometimes lose sight of the students' activities. This is why it is important to integrate cooperative principles directly into teacher qualification programs, such as indicated below in the LMR plus model.

Terminology of Cooperation

The German terminology focuses on the organizational form (*Gruppenarbeit* = group work, team work), whereas, internationally, the emphasis is put on the process of group activities, such as cooperation and collaboration. Huber (1997) points out that the keyword 'Kooperation' (cooperation) hardly appears in established German handbooks of school education (*Schulpaedagogik*). Similarly, a database search in the FIS Bildung Literaturdatenbank, a comprehensive database of educational publications in German, resulted in 79 hits for the key phrase 'kooperatives_Lernen' ('cooperative_learning') as opposed to 653 hits for the keyword 'Gruppenarbeit' (I thank Eva Wilden, University of Kassel, for help with the data base research.). That might be due to the fact that the term 'cooperation' goes together with 'collaboration,' and the latter term carries a secondary, negative connotation. Thus, 'collaboration' is not used as frequently as 'cooperation.' This is somehow a pity, as originally the two terms highlighted two important ends of group dynamics: a) cooperation focuses on the "opus," the product, and b) collaboration focuses on the "labor," the process.

Today, different models have been developed in order to make cooperative learning and teaching proficiency a basic and fundamental skill all learners can share and build on. The challenge lies in the fact that cooperative learning cannot really be taught: cooperative learning is learned through cooperative learning. The LMR Plus model I have developed at the University of Kassel elucidates how this is done (Finkbeiner, 2001). All classes on EFL teaching and on foreign language research at the University of Kassel are based on the LMR Plus model. My work has been highly influenced by Elizabeth Cohen, Celeste Brody, and Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt, all three from the U.S., Yael Sharan from Israel, and Ernst Meyer and Guenter Huber of Germany.

The LMR Plus model

The LMR Plus model is employed at the university level, mainly with teachers training to be EFL instructors. L stands for learner, M stands for moderator or teacher and R stands for researcher. The LMR Plus focuses on cooperation and collaboration among the changing and interchangeable roles of teacher and learner, as well as both of them as researchers (Finkbeiner, in press). As there are three different roles, students must acquire at least three different sets of competencies: a) L as in learner: as a learner one needs to develop learning strategies, learning techniques, and learning awareness. b) M as in moderator: as a moderator, one needs organizational skills, as well as strategies for presentation and moderation. Organizational skills include giving task and learner orientations and developing criteria for the appropriateness of tasks and topics. A meta-cognitive awareness of these strategies allows the individuals to revise their theories on moderating and teaching groups. c) R as in researcher: as a researcher one develops an elaborate diagnostic competence, the ability to develop and use tests, and respect for specific standards of reliability and validity in tests and research results. For example, in this role, a teacher needs to make sure that test objectives are carefully defined. In using peer assessment, the researcher-teacher needs to make sure that peers know how to assess one another in particular situations. d) The Plus in the model refers to the use of the foreign language as a vehicle for classroom communication. Using a foreign language involves knowledge about a different culture (Finkbeiner & Koplín, 2002; Schmidt & Finkbeiner, in press), empathy for others, the capacity to change perspectives and see the world through the other person's eyes, and the power to negotiate and give critical yet constructive feedback to peers.

The application of cooperative principles is so important because what we do not care about in teacher education today will not be cared about by teachers who educate children tomorrow.

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