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## **Promoting EFL Learning through Group Dynamics**

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**Oladunjoye S.O.A** - Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructional Technology (language unit), Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun state, Nigeria

E-mail: [yomi\\_yemi@yahoo.com](mailto:yomi_yemi@yahoo.com)

### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses possible ways of making the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL), easy. The world of teaching and learning tends to consistently increase awareness of educators on the need to make learning easier, much more practical and learner centered. One of the ways of achieving this is through group dynamics which had been 'tested' time and again in sciences and social sciences. This paper counsels the language educators to use this strategy to enhance language learning at all levels of language teaching. What makes this article different from similar papers on this subject is that it centers on the elements of team work and grouping 'therapy' and not mere dividing into groups and then using some other methods to help groups learn. Rather, the paper is about the need to understand the EFL classroom and tap the nature of man (the learner) as a social animal who needs to function in groups, benefiting from and being a benefit to the same.*

**Key Words:** EFL, group dynamics, grouping therapy, team work, social trait conformity

## **Introduction**

Team work, group dynamics, group work, and collaborative learning are terms educators are becoming more and more familiar with in their bids to foster effective student-centered learning. In language teaching, we tend to identify a vital point of TEFL classes in CLL (Cooperative language Learning). Cooperative language learning achieves more than making groups of individuals gather together to achieve a goal or objective either as a committee or some grouping going through several predictable stages before useful work can be done. It would project a function of a number of variables, not the least of which is self identification of the role each member will tend to play, and the emergence of natural vocal leaders and individuals who will serve as sources of information. Any individual in a leadership position whose responsibilities involves getting groups of individual to work together should both be conversant with the phases of the group process and also possess the status necessary to capitalize on these stages to accomplish the objectives of forming a productive, cohesive team. This is not an easy task especially in the teaching of language. Whereas people easily form clubs, fraternal societies and the like, based on congeniality, which may give rise to intimacy, the task of bringing solitary learners together to function in homogenous group is what this article is about.

San Juan de la Cruz in His Sayings of 'Light and Love', and quoted in 'Journey to Ixtlan' by Carlos Casteneda, talking about the individual and the group drew a parallel in a solitary bird whose conditions he summarized as five:

- (i) The first, that it flies to the highest point
- (ii) The second, that it does not suffer for company, not even of its own kind
- (iii) The third, that it aims its beak to the skies
- (iv) The fourth, that it does not have a definite colour and
- (v) The fifth, that it sings very softly

## **Understanding the EFL Classroom**

The EFL curriculum is assumed to emerge from a long period of research concerning the needs of the student(s) and experimentation. The seasoned EFL teacher is also 'charged' with the task of searching for new ideas to expand his curriculum. This is to say that the EFL classroom depends significantly on vision from teacher's notes written on the board, in handouts, from video scenes, from textbooks, from computer scenes or from pictures.

One of such visions that might help the EFL classroom is team-work. In team-work, the EFL teacher who is more or less a facilitator is involved in a merger of social networking where content and identity are bundled together. (Domes 2004). Most EFL teachers would strongly agree with the statement that group dynamics or team work will foster cohesion and development. Bowlby (1980) advises that intimate attachments to the other human beings are the hub around which a person's life resources, not only when he is an infant or a toddler or a school child but throughout his adolescence and his years of maturity as well and on into old age. He explains further that from this intimate attachment, a person draws his strength and enjoyment of life and through what he contributes; he gives strength and enjoyment to others. It is quite possible to set-up and facilitates authentic interactional communication in the EFL classroom using team work. It is simply appealing to the nature of man as a social animal whose creativity, humor, friendliness and healthy rivalry will attract those of his colleague through everyday items and activities like songs, culinary recipes, games, media programmes, mobile technology etc. such that the teacher would create an energized atmosphere conducive to language acquisition and retention. One major issue we should treat in understanding the EFL classroom is that unlike most of their EFL counterparts, many EFL students lack access to native speakers for authentic communication, be it speaking or writing. The consequence of this is that as soon as they leave the classroom, they re-enter a world full of speakers of their own first language leaving with them with little opportunity to use what they've learned.

### **Generating Activities that will promote team-work**

#### **Activity 1**

*What is a team?*

Interview at least three members of each team in a classroom setting or allow groups to interview their membership on what constitute a team- the clues to give might include:

- (i) Teams are groups, but what makes them unique?
- (ii) Is it their unity?
- (iii) Their focus on group goals?
- (iv) The interdependence among members?

This is a focused discussion that would promote verbal communication with elements of group dynamics forming the content.

## **Activity 2**

Using interdependence questions to foster the team learning of an EFL topic or language area. The following questions may generate brainstorming among teams on topics like preparing to write essay on *Parliamentary debates and national issues*

1. Do members of parliament have to agree all the time?
2. Should parliament representatives from a particular community have same opinion on national issues all the time?
3. Will open disagreement on serious national issue by parliamentarians affect their acceptability by the people that elected them?
4. Should the leader in the house of parliament take a divergent position from popular vote?
5. Should the leader in the house of parliament take side on a national issue?

## **Activity 3**

**Using the social trait *Conformity* to treat ‘words isolation and homogeneity or concord’**

Take your class out to such places as the lines at a fast food restaurant or bus stops as people wait for a bus or the library. Let them have a free observation of people’s levels of conformity. Do people conform to the posted rules? Do they conform to the informal norms? The follow up activity might look like these:

### **1st Assignment:**

You are welcome back to the class. Now, form a team of four groups as follows.....

In each group discuss what you observed in your excursion based on the pre-discussed questions on the conformity of people, did you notice elements of isolation or non-conformity in certain individuals?

### **2nd Assignment**

Apply your knowledge of what you saw in the excursion and your group discourse to attempt the following:

**Drives, eats, paid, believe (the odd one?)**

Tolu \_\_\_\_\_ traveled overseas before Funke was born.  
*add, heard, hard, had* (Fill the gap)

**Do not stand up now unless you want your teacher to see you. This means that:**

- A. if you stand up now you will not be seen
- B. if you stand up now you will be seen
- C. if you do not stand up now you will be seen
- D. if you do not stand up now you will not be seen

- (A) illogical, illegal
- (B) practice, preview
- (c) rewrite, replay
- (D) cooperate, (Collude? Concise?)
- (E) understand, (Underrate? Underestimate?)

#### **Activity 4**

**Power influence in group formation applied to ‘power words’ in sentence structures.**

*Ask your EFL class to mention some four people they would like to join if the whole class were to be divided into four*

Follow up on this by asking them to advance reasons for their choices and decisions. It is most likely you are confronted with the problem of *power* and *influence*. No one however myopic, expect a few imbeciles, will want to associate with less ‘powerful’ individuals who could not wield any influence. People, including school children and university undergraduates do see a relationship between influence and security. Power in the group can be traced back to French and Raven’s *bases of power*: coercive, reward, referent, legitimate, expert, informational.

*Write sentences like the following on the board and let students in their various teams identify the ‘power words,’ giving reasons for their answer:*

- (a) He speaks English fluently like a native speaker
- (b) That he is a celebrity does not surprise anyone
- (c) They have the potential of becoming international figures.

- (d) Winning! Wining! Winning! This was her exact word when Mrs. Clinton was asked about her expectation in the forth coming primary election of her party.
- (e) You are well-able to go into the moons.
- (f) Technology has made the world a global village.

### **Conclusion**

While this paper will not claim to have fully exhausted the various applications to which elements in group formation can be applied, it is essential the EFL teacher realize that learners have in them bundles of energy waiting to explode. The EFL teacher, no doubt has the prerogative to develop, a style which is comfortable for him to teach but at the same time his method should be challenging for the students. The world today is focus-driven and the EFL classroom cannot be less motivated to participate in the global moves that will merge electronic language with verbal communication in due course. Group dynamics will release the untapped potentials in EFL learners to learn English better and faster.

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*Dr Oladunjoye S.A.O is a specialist in TESOL. He is into teaching and research in the language unit of the Department of Curriculum studies and Instructional technology of the Faculty of Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria. He is a member of International Association of Teachers of English as Foreign language (IATEFL) and British Association of Lecturers of English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP). He has publications in reputable national and international journals.*