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## Maintaining Linguistic Interaction through Pair Work and Group Work

### Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to indicate the significance of pair and group work implementation in the process of language study. The first issue tackled in this article refers to interactive principles leading students to successful achievements in terms of communication. Apart from principles, there is also a short presentation of roles that an interactive teacher takes on in the course of a lesson, and how they change at different stages. The following point validates the use of pair and group work in the classroom despite the presence of certain inconveniences and dangers. Furthermore, there is a description of principles and certain rules which serve as a guidance for teachers on how to organise pairs and groups without any obstacles. On top of that, a wide range of types of interactive activities appropriate for pair and group work is put forward. The last part of the article is a collection of exemplary exercises presented in the form of appendix.

**Keywords:** *interactive principles, interactive teacher's roles, advantages of pair and group work, streaming, friendship, open and closed pairs, activities.*

### Abstrakt

Głównym celem tego artykułu jest ukazanie istotnej roli jaką odgrywa wdrożenie pracy w parach i grupach w procesie nauczania języka obcego. Pierwszym poruszonym aspektem są interaktywne zasady, które mają doprowadzić ucznia do osiągnięcia sukcesu w zakresie komunikacji. Ponadto, w skrócie zostały przedstawione role interaktywnego nauczyciela oraz ich formy na różnych etapach lekcji. Kolejny punkt stanowi argumentacja przemawiająca za pracą w parach i grupach

w postaci szeregu istniejących zalet, pomimo niedogodności i zagrożeń jakie niesie za sobą ten rodzaj pracy. W dalszej kolejności opisane zostały zasady i reguły dobrej organizacji, które mogą stanowić rodzaj instrukcji dla nauczyciela jak z powodzeniem tworzyć pary i grupy. Oprócz tego przedstawiono różnorodne typy interaktywnych zadań, odpowiednich dla pracy w parach i grupach. Ostatnia część artykułu to załącznik, w którym znajduje się zbiór przykładów ćwiczeń.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *interaktywne zasady, role interaktywnego nauczyciela, zalety pracy w parach i grupach, podział uczniów, przyjaźń, pary otwarte i zamknięte, typy zadań.*

## Introduction

"More hands make for lighter work", "Two heads are better than one", or "The more the merrier" are the three proverbs that precisely depict assumptions and objectives of pair and group work. In other words, they can be perceived as synonyms of capability, creativity and motivation. To gain these qualities, teachers need to assign tasks that involve collaboration and self-initiated language. They should settle students in various natural, authentic contexts that require exchange of thoughts, ideas and feelings. Wilga Rivers (in Brown, 2001, p. 165) claims that:

"Through interaction, students can increase their language store as they listen to or read authentic linguistic material, or even the output of their fellow students in discussions, skits, joint problem-solving tasks, or dialogue journals. In interaction, students can use all they possess of the language – all they have learned or casually absorbed – in real-life exchanges. ... Even at an elementary stage, they learn in this way to exploit the elasticity of language."

Therefore, she admits that teachers should implement interactive activities from the very beginning of language study.

Naturally, they should also consider a number of valid interactive principles that would lead to efficient accomplishment of communicative tasks. The first of them is called the *Principle of Automaticity*, which emphasizes the importance of meanings and purposes of language rather than analysis of grammar and other linguistic forms. Another principle, the *Intrinsic*

*Motivation Principle*, refers to students' inner needs, wants and desires. If these aspects are fulfilled, they eagerly participate in interactive activities. When students see the progress in their language acquisition or when they successfully accomplish a task, they can develop a self-rewarding system and self-confidence. Consequently, it prompts them to undertake further actions. Moreover, students need to be aware that communication is about making certain decisions on what to say and how to express thoughts, what language should be used and how to interpret received information. They should also know how to repair a conversation and make it natural when some obstructions appear. Therefore, it means that students need to master language skills in order to be productive and comprehensive interlocutors. To gain this ability, they need to employ a number of styles and strategies in the process of study. The principle dealing with this aspect is called the *Principle of Strategic Investment*. The next issue to be discussed refers to possible failures that students may encounter both productively and receptively. For this reason, teachers are obliged to prepare learners for such circumstances by creating an encouraging atmosphere in the classroom, introducing appropriate techniques and responding positively to students' attempts. The presented description reflects the nature of another interactive principle called the *Principle of Risk-Taking*. Additionally, students must be aware of the fact that language is not a disconnected, isolated item but it is the integral constituent of culture. Accordingly, learners extend their knowledge to issues like customs and beliefs, values, art, history, geography, social aspects, or modes of feeling and acting in everyday situations. The principle that encompasses all cultural facets is known as the *Language-Culture Connection Principle*. Finally, the *Principle of Communicative Competence* needs to be mentioned as it comprises all components of human interaction (organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor) which lead to successful communication (Brown, 2001, pp. 55, 59, 63-64, 68).

Apart from interactive principles described above, there should be at least a short mention included about the roles of an interactive teacher. Before the activity he acts as an organiser. He engages students in the task, instructs them and demonstrates how to perform it, and informs when it should be finished. During the activity an interactive teacher becomes an observer since he monitors students' work and gets information about their progress; a prompter and a resource due to the fact that he gives students certain suggestions; or a participant as he becomes a member of a group and takes part in the activity. After, an interactive teacher organises feedback which means that he acts as an assessor (Harmer, 2007, pp. 171-172).

## Advantages of pair work and group work

The ways students work in a classroom environment depends on many factors, for example the size of a class, the number of students, fixed furniture, topic of a lesson, types of tasks and techniques used, or students' preferences. Obviously, the very first association with the words 'teaching' and 'classroom' brings forth a picture of students sitting in orderly rows and a teacher standing in front of them. This is the most common teacher – student correlation. But if teachers aim to maintain linguistic interaction in the classroom, pairing or grouping learners is considered the best option which is proved by the following assets:

- a) students' amount of speaking time is increased,
- b) students work independently, without teacher's guidance,
- c) it promotes cooperation and negotiation,
- d) students become autonomous as they are allowed to make their own decisions,
- e) students share responsibility for successful completion of a task,
- f) the atmosphere in the class is more relaxed (Harmer, 2007, pp. 165-166).

Yet, pairing or grouping students carries some inconveniences and dangers that need to be taken into account. First of all, teachers may feel that they lose control over their class due to noise and misbehaviour. Furthermore, students often change the topic and start to discuss things that are thoroughly unrelated to the subject of a lesson, often in their mother tongue. Besides, the choice of partners may be problematic. Sometimes it happens that students would prefer working with other peers than the ones assigned by the teacher. Finally, students' preferences should be deliberated. Simply it may appear that some of them like better individual work and perceive teacher, not another learner, as the point of reference (Harmer, 2007, pp. 165-166). Yet, these drawbacks should not discourage teachers from organising pair or group work in any way.

## Creating pairs and groups

If teachers decide to have their students working in pairs or groups, they need to give thought to who should work with whom. J. Harmer (2007, pp. 168-171) suggests implementation of the following principles:

- a) Friendship. The idea of this principle is to put friends in pairs or groups. Teachers may ask students to create such arrangements themselves, yet it may be chaotic and time consuming. Another proposition is

to use the so called *sociogram*. Students are asked to write the names of peers they like best on one side of a piece of paper and the names of learners they like the least on the other side. Naturally, teacher is the only person that can read these lists.

- b) Streaming. According to this principle, students should be streamed in agreement with their abilities. It means that pairs or groups comprise a mixture of both weak and strong peers where more able ones would help those less knowledgeable. Alternatively, students may be assigned different tasks with reference to their level. Therefore, there are pairs or groups of weak and strong students created. Such division allows the teacher to help the former ones when necessary whereas the latter ones may be equipped with more challenging tasks. Finally, students may also be streamed in relation to participation. Once again, the best solution is to put weak and strong associates separately so as those weak ones would not hide behind their more talkative colleagues.
- c) Chance. As the name says itself, there are no special requirements as in the case of streaming. For example, students work in pairs or groups as they sit. The teacher may also pair them using the 'wheels' scenario. The whole class is divided into two halves standing in an inner and an outer circle. The first half faces outwards and the other inwards. The outer half circulates in a clockwise direction whereas the inner half in the opposite. When the teacher stops the circles, students work with the colleagues facing them. Moreover, learners may be given letters from A to E where all As, Bs, Cs, Ds and Es form groups. They can also be paired or grouped according to the order of their birthdays, appearance or different occupations (refers to adults).
- d) Changing groups. This principle is also referred to as flexible groups. It suggests that groups change as the activity progresses. For instance, students may work in pairs, then they may form groups of four or eight, till the whole class is united. The opposite order is also possible because students may start the activity in two large groups, then split into smaller ones and complete it in pairs.

As for pairs, Hanna Komorowska (1999, p. 80)<sup>1</sup> offers work in open and closed pairs. Open pairs are organised at random. A pair of students appointed by the teacher presents a dialogue in front of the class under his supervision. But the very first and thus exemplary one is performed by the teacher and a leading student in order to present the appropriate

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<sup>1</sup>All excerpts selected from Komorowska (1999). *Metodyka Nauczania Języków Obcych*. Warszawa: WSiP are translated by the author of the article.

pattern. Additionally, he nominates weaker learners to make sure they cope well with the task. Open pairs can be perceived as a prelude to closed pairs. If students' performance is satisfactory, they can move forward with an activity and work without teacher's control. Therefore, the concept of closed pairs reveals when all students in the classroom conduct a dialogue and neither teacher nor the rest of the group can hear a particular pair as they work simultaneously. Komorowska (1999, p. 80) also suggests that closed pairs can be organised in two ways:

- a) students sitting by the same table,
- b) or students sitting one after another in the same row of tables.

She also recommends that pairs of students should constantly be changed so as not to make them work with the same colleague each time. The following instructions may appear very helpful in this matter:

- a) work with a person that you like the most,
- b) choose a person that you enjoy working with,
- c) work with a person that you can learn something from,
- d) work with a person that is linguistically weaker and can learn something from you,
- e) work with a person that is better than you in general (these skills do not have to be related to school requirements),
- f) work with a person that you have not cooperated yet (this week or month).

Hence, these guidelines help teachers to differentiate pair organisation in the classroom and are in favour of miscellaneous lessons and integrity among students.

### **Rules of pair and group work organisation**

H. Komorowska (1999, pp. 82-83) claims that certain steps should be undertaken in order to organise group work. Naturally, appropriate adjustment of these rules would lead learners to effective and successful accomplishment of tasks. Therefore, the teacher should:

- a) practise the material with students before group work and write an outline, a model or key expressions on the blackboard. Simply, it prevents them from making and repeating mistakes all the more that the teacher is no longer a controller.
- b) give clear and explicit instructions. Otherwise, there is a danger that students would constantly ask questions and thus hinder the course of an activity.

- c) give students clear aims of an activity so as to prevent them from taking unproductive actions.
- d) determine students' roles within each group, for example time keeper, resource manager, encourager, note-taker, linguistic controller and spokesman. Hence, all students are important members of groups because they share responsibility for the tasks assigned.
- e) give appropriate amount of time to complete a task otherwise the problem of misbehaviour may appear.
- f) organise additional activities like flipping through foreign-language magazines, reading comic books or simple jokes for those who finish earlier. Naturally, these need to be perceived in terms of reward for students' diligence.
- g) allow his students to speak in an undertone only. If not, chaos and indiscipline may emerge.
- h) always organise feedback.
- i) prepare additional exercises in the form of revision.

As for pair work, M. Lewis and J. Hill (2002, p. 46) claim that it is most effective if teachers:

- a) divide the group into pairs themselves and ensure that all students know who they are supposed to work with and which role they are assigned.
- b) verify that everyone knows what to do.
- c) monitor students, guide them and correct if necessary.
- d) stop the activity when it is completed.
- e) organise feedback and comment on mistakes or give suggestions for alternatives. Then ask students to perform this activity again, possibly reversing roles.
- f) should not abandon pair work even if some students sit back and do nothing.

### **Pair and group work activities**

The last but not least component of this part of the article is the introduction of a wide range of interactive activities that students perform in pairs and groups. As for the first type of learners' work, they can practise dialogues, ask and answer question (see ex. 1)<sup>2</sup>, brainstorm activities (see ex. 3), study a text or predict the content of it, write and compare notes, complete information-gap activities (see ex. 2), and prepare for joining

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<sup>2</sup>References to examples of activities described in appendix.

in larger groups. Obviously, these "tasks are (a) short, (b) linguistically simple, and (c) quite controlled in terms of the structure of the task" (Brown, 2001, p. 182). In case of groups, which are more complex and involving, the activities like games (see ex. 3), group stories, discussions (see ex. 8), debates (see ex. 6), simulations and role-plays (see ex. 7), presentations, projects, jigsaw technique, or problem solving (see ex. 5) and decision-making (see ex. 4) can be organised.

## Summary

In conclusion, the above elaboration proves the usefulness of pairing and grouping students. The choice of this type of work is strengthened by a number of interactive principles. Students perceive language as a medium of communicating information both productively and receptively and if they are successful, their motivation increases rapidly. Moreover, they eagerly employ their own styles and strategies in language study and are ready to take certain risks in its use when working in pairs or groups. Also, they are knowledgeable about the nature of language and do not perceive it as an isolated item but one of many valid constituents that comprise culture. Furthermore, students become less teacher dependent as they are allowed to make their own decisions and solve problems through cooperation and negotiation. Naturally, to make learners' work effective teachers need not forget about appropriate organisation of pairs and groups. It should be conducted in a skilful manner so as not to evoke chaos in the classroom and misbehaviour among students. Even if there are some inconveniences and dangers connected with pair or group work, it should not be abandoned. Conversely, teachers are recommended to employ this type of work in the classroom environment. Simply, they should adjust principles and rules described above so as to mitigate the whole procedure. All in all, pairing and grouping students gives a tremendous opportunity to practise authentic language in situations that students encounter every day through implementation of a scope of effective and worthwhile tasks.

## Appendix

**I. Work in pairs and find out about two modern explorers. Student A reads about Marek Kamiński and Student B reads about Helen Thayer. Make a table for the information about your partner's explorer. Then ask questions.**

### A TABLE

Nationality:
Age:
Expeditions:
Greatest journey:
Method of travel:
Aims of expedition:
Other activities:

### Marek Kamiński

**Born:** 1964, Poland (Gdańsk).

**Expeditions:** The Sahara Desert, Spitzburgen, Mexico, Greenland, the North Pole, the South Pole.

**Greatest journey:** 1995 – the first person to go to two poles in one year: the North Pole (23 May), the South Pole (27 December).

**Travelled:** With Wojtek Moskal to the North Pole; to the South Pole on his own; both trips on skis (no dogs).

**Aims of expedition:** To be the first person to go to both poles in the same year; to collect money for charity.

**Other activities:** Businessman; organises expeditions to different places in the world.

### Helen Thayer

**Born:** 1938, New Zealand; now lives in the USA.

**Expeditions:** The North Pole, The Amazon jungle, Mexico, the Sahara Desert.

**Greatest journey:** 1988 – First woman to travel alone to the North Pole (aged 50).

**Travelled:** On skis; with dog, Charlie.

**Aims of expedition:** To get the North Pole; to write a book about the expedition ('Polar Dream', a bestseller).

**Other activities:** Writes travel books; gives talks to schools; collects information about and takes photos for educational materials.

**Example 1:** Ask and answer session (Harris, Mower, Sikorzyńska, 2000, pp. 9, 111).

**II. Work with a partner to complete a text about Sigmund Freud. Take turns to ask and answer questions. Prepare your questions first.**

**Student A**

1) \_\_\_\_\_ was born on 6th May 1856 in Freiberg, Moravia. He went to the University of 2) \_\_\_\_\_ and studied medicine. He graduated in 3) \_\_\_\_\_ as a Doctor of Medicine. He lived in Vienna for 47 years. In 1907 the psychiatrist Carl Jung was introduced to Freud and together they formed the International Psychoanalytical Association. 4) \_\_\_\_\_ was its first president. Most of Freud's family emigrated to London. 5) \_\_\_\_\_ lost all his property when he left Vienna. Freud lived in a house in Hampstead, London. He died in 6) \_\_\_\_\_.

**Student B**

Sigmund Freud was born on 6th May 1856 in 1) \_\_\_\_\_. He went to the University of Vienna and studied 2) \_\_\_\_\_. He graduated in 1881 as a Doctor of Medicine. He lived in Vienna for 3) \_\_\_\_\_ years. In 1907 the psychiatrist 4) \_\_\_\_\_ was introduced to Freud and together they formed the International Psychoanalytical Association. Jung was its first president. 5) \_\_\_\_\_ emigrated to London. His brother lost all his property when he left Vienna. Freud lived in a house in 6) \_\_\_\_\_. He died in 1939.

**Example 2:** Information-gap (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2008, pp. 8, 158, 160).

**III. In pairs, think about what is in the news at the moment. Use the clues below to help you. Then form a group with another pair. Take turns to say sentences in the Passive. The students who say the most correct sentences win!**

team or player beaten by ...; person or people killed or injured in ...; robbers, terrorists or famous person arrested ...; meeting, conference or exhibition held in ...; plan, law or decision announced by ...; houses, buildings or areas destroyed by ...

**Example 3:** Game proceeded by brainstorming (Harris, Mower, Sikorzyńska, 2000, p. 49).

**IV. Work in groups of three. Each student is assigned a letter A, B, and C. Read and remember the end of your story in two minutes. Tell it to the rest of your group and together decide which one is true. Then listen to the story and check your answer.**

**STORY 1 Student A**

Terri left the bar. Then she caught a train to Canada. When she arrived in Montreal she met Chris. Chris was Terri's sister. She was a doctor. They went to Chris's house. They talked for a long time. Then Chris phoned John. John got the first plane to Montreal. John said, 'I love you. Please come back with me to London.' Terri said, 'I need more time.' Two months later Terri went back to John in London.

**STORY 2 Student B**

Terri left the bar. Then she caught a train to Canada. When she arrived in Montreal she met Chris. Chris was a girl in Terri's class at school. They were good friends. Chris was the editor of a newspaper. Terri said, 'I want to start a new life in Montreal.' Chris said, 'I have a job for you.' Terri never went back to London. She never saw her husband again.

**STORY 3 Student C**

Terri left the bar. Then she caught a train to Canada. When she arrived in Montreal she met Chris. Chris was Terri's first boyfriend. They met in Prague ten years ago. He was an American journalist. They kissed. He said, 'Ten years is a long time.' She said, 'I love you.' Terri never saw her husband again.

**Example 4:** Decision-making (Oxenden, Seligson, 2002, pp. 120, 123).

**V. The perfect murder You are going to try and solve a crime. Work in groups of six. You are police detectives and each of you knows only the information on your card. Read the newspaper report below, and the information on your card, and discuss who committed the crime and how it was committed.**

*This morning the body of beautiful millionairess Susan Shapiro was found on the banks of Lake Minoria. The police know from the autopsy report that the victim died last night between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. The small lake and surroundings have been searched extensively by police and divers and no murder weapon has been found. It appears that she was stabbed in the chest.*

**Student A role card:**

Rex Peterson, an army veteran, has been hacking into the victim's computer and monitoring the victim's whereabouts for the last year. He has many photos of the victim, and the victim has complained about him to the police.

**Student B role card:**

Julie Barriskell used to be a school friend of the victim but became jealous of her success. Julie was the last known person to see the victim. She sent a text message to the victim and invited her to the lake at 5 p.m. Police have a record of the text message. She is a friend of Dr Drake Ramorey. She has an alibi from 8 p.m.

**Student C role card:**

Martha Smith is 75 years old and walks her dog by the lake every morning. She found the body and police have not been able to find any connection between her and the victim. She was a judge before she retired and is a well-respected member of the community.

**Student D role card:**

Professor Ewan Shapiro is the father of the victim. He has a water-tight alibi. He hosted a large dinner party from 6 p.m. till 11 p.m. last night and was seen by 14 people. He will inherit a small amount (one quarter) of his daughter's money.

**Student E role card:**

Dr Drake Ramorey was engaged to marry the victim. Surprisingly, he was already in the victim's will. He will inherit most (three quarters) of the victim's money. He is an expert on chest and lungs. He has a history of violence with his previous girlfriend.

**Student F role card:**

Encourage people to talk about how the crime was committed. Do not reveal this information till near the end: ice melts.

**Example 5:** Problem solving (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2008, pp. 127, 160, 164, 166, 167, 168).

**VI. You are going to hold a debate about language. This is the motion:**

*The government should spend more money on promoting languages used by a minority of the population.*

**Divide into two groups to prepare arguments. Choose a spokesperson to present your basic views, then decide who will say what to support the views.**

**Group A (for the motion):**

- a) Lose a language – lose a lot of knowledge.
- b) Like losing an animal.
- c) Language is linked to identity.
- d) Huge cultural contribution (e.g. music, film).
- e) Helps a community.
- f) Can teach you about other languages.

**Group B (against the motion):**

- a) Costs a lot of money to keep a language alive (schools, teachers, books, road signs, festivals).
- b) If very few people speak the language, why bother keeping it?
- c) A lot of effort for little use.
- d) If English continues to be dominant, people will never become bilingual in their minority language.
- e) Will continue to decline if language community is not economically viable.
- f) Already too much in curriculum for schoolchildren to learn without learning a useless language.

**Now hold the debate. Follow the debate procedure.**

1. The spokesperson from group A speaks for the motion.
2. The spokesperson from group B speaks against the motion.
3. Other people from both groups can speak and give their opinions for or against.
4. The groups vote on the motion. You can change your mind at this stage.

**Example 6:** Debate (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2008, pp. 43, 158, 161).

**VII. Role-play the meeting in groups of four. Spend five minutes preparing what you are going to say.** (*This activity is based on the article titled: "I'll Go to Jail Before I Let My Runaway Son Set Foot in My House Again"*)

**The situation**

At a preliminary counselling session with Gary involving his parents and a social worker, a decision has to be made about what the next steps in

dealing with Gary should be. The social worker acts as chairman and should steer the discussion towards a final decision about Gary's future.

### **Student A**

You are Gary's loud and outspoken mother. Try to dominate the discussion, making sure your husband always agrees with you. You don't trust the social worker and should prepare reasons as to why Gary should go to a special school. Your language is informal and emotional.

### **Student B**

You are Gary's father, a timid man, frightened of his domineering wife and the social worker's professional competence. Prepare to say if asked for an opinion. Your language is full of hesitations and you tend to agree with whoever spoke last.

### **Student C**

You are Gary. You disagree with everyone, often loudly and abusively and show contempt for your parents. You are a little frightened of the social worker, but often sulk and refuse to answer questions. Although you hate your home, you do not want to go to a special school and you should prepare reasons for not going.

### **Student D**

You are the social worker and must remain in control of this discussion, eliciting everyone's opinions and steering things towards a conclusion. You are a professional and have had this sort of discussion many times before, so your language should be polite but firm. Try to control Gary and his mother and allow the timid father to give his opinion. Prepare arguments to persuade people that Gary should stay at home and that both he and his parents should receive professional counselling.

**Example 7:** Role-play (Side, 1994, pp. 143, 145, 165).

## **VIII. Work in groups. Look at this chart of people who died before their time. Discuss with your partners:**

- a) what each person achieved during their life
- b) if their characteristics matched the supposed characteristics of their star signs (see 10.4)
- c) how old they would be today if they hadn't died (except the first four)
- d) what they might have achieved if they had lived longer

	<i>Born</i>	<i>Star sign</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>Age</i>
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	1756	Aquarius	1791	35
Vincent Van Gogh	1853	Aries	1890	37
Rosa Luxemburg	1871	Aries	1919	47
John F. Kennedy	1917	Gemini	1963	46
Marilyn Monroe	1926	Gemini	1962	36
Martin Luther King Jr.	1929	Sagittarius	1968	39
Elvis Presley	1931	Capricorn	1977	42
James Dean	1931	Aquarius	1955	24
Buddy Holly	1936	Virgo	1959	22
John Lennon	1940	Libra	1980	40

**Example 8:** Discussion (Jones, 1994, p. 97).

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