A Living Educational Theory approach to enhancing Pakistani literature students' critical thinking and engagement through cooperative learning

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Abstract

In this paper I show how I have used a Living Educational Theory approach to improve my teaching and literature students' learning, as I generate knowledge whilst exploring the question, "How do I improve what I am doing?" I report a classroom-based Living Educational Theory Research study conducted in a university in Pakistan, where I teach English literature classes. I aim to improve students' motivation to learn and develop their cognitive abilities, with the implementation of two cooperative learning strategies in a fourth (final) year class. Two cooperative learning strategies were implemented throughout a semester through action-research cycles. Data was collected through lesson-feedback forms, interview and class observation, and analysed thematically. My understanding is that the methodology of Living Educational Theory Research can be a very effective approach for identifying practitioners' living contradictions in their practice, which leads to their research focus. It also clarifies the values they embody in their practice and which they draw on as their explanatory principles and standards of judgement. Hence, the use of Living Educational Theory Research may assist teachers in their own educational professionalism and also student motivation to learn literature and develop their cognitive abilities with English literature learning.

Keywords: **Living Educational Theory Research; teaching literature; values-led HE teaching; cooperative learning**

Introduction

This paper presents a narrative of using this inquiry with a large group of final-year graduate students whom I teach the subject *World Literature* in English translation. Since I have taken on a Living Educational Theory methodological approach, I ruminate on the educational influences both on my own teaching and learning, and on my students' learning. The question *how do I improve my teaching and my students' learning* leads me "to integrate both self-evaluation and student evaluation…" (Walton, 2011, p.1). Being a teacher in higher education, I have chosen a Living Educational Theory Research approach in asking and answering the following question: *'How can I improve my teaching practice and student learning in a university literature class where I teach the subject World Literature?'*

The idea of the present study stems from my own research *i.e.* Panhwar (2016; 2020) in which I attempted to enhance student engagement and learning with language support classes through the adoption of cooperative learning within the framework of Action Research and Living Educational Theory Research. In the present study, I examine my response to students' lack of engagement and critical thinking. These students were enrolled for literature as their major and they were in their final year (fourth year). I observed that my students did not engage in the learning process and did not ask me questions, which made me ponder that they were not becoming critical thinkers even though they were in their final year, which was a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1989) for me.

Being a graduate of a literature course, I followed the methods my professors used in our class, which I thought were effective methods. I mostly lectured for about 40 to 45 minutes and 5 to 10 minutes were for students' questions (one class in our context is of 50 minutes). However, mostly, students did not ask questions and those last minutes were spent on talking about the next topic or something else in hand. It is here I realised I needed to change methods and tried to involve students with question-and-answer sessions, but response was not good.

Slavin (1995) argues that the teaching-learning method that engages students with the learning process is likely to improve student engagement and cognitive abilities. McLaughlin and Heredia (1996) argue that learning is a cognitive process in which students need to use an information processing approach. They suggest that students need to be made to work through the activities that emphasise the information-processing approach for the development of critical thinking power. According to Slavin (1995) learning processes are very much cognitive because these aim to involve inner representations, which direct and lead performance. Karmiloff-Smith (1987) argues that when performance progresses there occurs steady restructuring, since students simplify, fuse and achieve growing power over their inner demonstrations. The above process of automatisation and restructuring is thought to be a fundamental component for development in critical thinking. For example, Warsah *et. al*. (2021) found that the use of collaborative learning had a significantly positive impact on university learners' critical thinking in Indonesia. According to Johnson and Johnson (2007), a socially-mediated process helps students learn more effectively because it is dependent on face-to-face interaction and shared processes, such as joint problem solving and discussion. Moreover, Ramdani and Susilo (2022) by conducting a meta-analysis on the impact of collaborative learning on students' critical thinking found that the use of

collaborative learning has a substantially positive impact on students' cognitive, metacognitive and critical thinking skills.

I reflected on what I had learned when I had previously engaged in Living Educational Theory Research to improve teaching-learning in my language classes (Panhwar, 2020). I then began using similar methods to enhance the engagement of my literature students, with the aim of improving their motivation to learn and develop their critical thinking and cognitive skills.

This paper is a Living Educational Theory Research study (Whitehead, 2008) in which I attempted to improve my teaching and students' learning. Since in literature courses the views and ideas of different writers are studied and discussed, students need to be critical to understand them. My personal interaction with and observation of my students of literature suggests that few students appear to be critical thinkers and motivated to learn, and the majority remain dependent and unengaged. I believe that students cannot develop their critical thinking propensity, and motivation in learning only by listening to the teachers' lecture and answering a few questions asked by some teachers. I realised that my cooperative learning values of teaching English literature effectively are negated in my practice because in my teaching of English literature I could not help students develop critical thinking and motivation to learn and enjoy literature. This issue appeared to be a living contradiction faced by me during my teaching, which led me to embark on this Living Educational Theory Research. Through this research, I generate my own living-educational-theory about how cooperative learning could improve my pedagogical practices in the context of enhancing student critical skills. Therefore, a different teaching method (different than lecturing) is needed, which may involve students in such a way that they are required to think and discuss simultaneously. In this study, I aim to investigate the effects of the use of cooperative learning strategies such as Think Pair Share and STAD, on students in a literature class. In the course of my research, I clarified my embodied meaning of cooperative learning as a value, which forms my explanatory principles and standards for improvement in this explanation for my educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of my students and in learning of the university, which is the context of my practice.

The ontological stance of the study flows from my initial understanding of the Living Educational Theory Research approach and Action Research which led me to discover that due to my own traditional teaching practices (lecturing mostly) which rarely involved students in the learning process, the students were rendered dependent and were not given opportunities to process the information through interaction and discourse. Therefore, the majority of students were not very critical and motivated to learn. I found that there existed passivity in many students. Therefore, I tried to investigate how to reduce their passivity by mainly addressing the following research question:

> How can I change my teaching practice to improve students' motivation to learn and develop their cognitive ability in my university English literature classes?

According to Whitehead and McNiff (2006), the initiating point of a Living Educational Theory Research approach is when, "…we experience ourselves as living contradictions when our values are denied in our practice" (p. 25). It was when I thought that it was a consequence of my pedagogical approach, which was lecturing and requiring

students to just listen to me without being involved in discussion and argument. I accepted McLaughlin and Heredia's (1996) argument that information-processing through interaction and discussion is helpful in enhancing students' cognitive capabilities. So, with this in mind I decided to research and change my pedagogy to enable my students to better process the information. This present paper advances the ideas in my previous paper published in EJOLTs (Panhwar, 2020), by deepening and extending my understanding of cooperative learning and using these understandings in generating my evolving explanations for my educational influences in learning – my living-educational-theory.

Ontology and Epistemology

My approach to learning and teaching is informed by my ontological view of Vygotskian concept of learning. Do sociocultural and collaborative methods of teaching and learning motivate my students to learn effectively and develop cognitively? Vygotsky's ideas of learning promote the belief that the sociocultural context exercises a gradual effect on the learner's cognitive development through collaboration and interaction (Daniels, 2001; McCafferty, Jacobs & DaSilva Iddings, 2006). Vygotsky suggests that one learns first through one-to-one interactions and then personally with the help of an internalisation process which leads to deeper understanding of phenomena (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986; Blake & Pope, 2008). Thus, Vygotskian theory espouses gradual changes in the mental development of an individual through social interaction and language. Vygotsky's views on learning led me to my question, 'How can inclusion of cooperation and collaboration, in the form of cooperative learning, help my students enhance their learning, critical thinking abilities and motivation within the framework of collaborative approach based on Vygotsky's ideas?'

I believe it to be essential to adopt such an approach to education in Pakistan, in order to transform the current out-dated and disadvantageous educational practices, which I believe are detrimental to students' learning. They are detrimental because they focus on teacher-centred pedagogical approaches. Therefore, learners remain passive and dependent, and do not become autonomous. My ontological stance here is that traditional lectures do not motivate students to learn and be critical. Therefore, through my epistemological stance, I have attempted to generate my own living-educational-theory within the framework of the Living Educational Theory Research methodology to have a transformative effect, with cooperative values, on my teaching and students' learning (Sullivan, 2006).

Cooperative Learning

I use Johnson and Johnson's, (2007) definition of cooperative learning as a structured approach to group work, and that its strategies focus on information-processing in which two or more learners interact, cooperate, and discuss to finish a shared learning task. I consider it a suitable approach to address the living contradictions faced by me during my teaching English literature to the university students. I came to the same conclusion (Panhwar, 2016; 2020) reached by Karmiloff-Smith (1987), that, when learners are involved in face-to-face interaction and shared processes, they might feel more motivated to learn, and their cognitive abilities improve because they process information during discussion. Like Slavin (1995, 2010), I have also concluded (Panhwar, 2016) that the processes and

procedures embedded in cooperative learning strategies, help students master subjects at all levels and are found to be very effective in assisting students to expand their critical thinking powers and achievements.

Conceptual Framework: Cooperative Learning

The present study uses Vygotsky's ideas as its theoretical framework. This is because the structure and aim of cooperative learning is based on socio-cultural theory (McCafferty, Jacobs & DaSilva Iddings, 2006) propounded by Vygotsky (1978; 1986). The study derives its conceptual framework from Slavin (1995; 1996; 2010). I use Slavin's Integrated Model (Slavin, 1995; 1996; 2010) for cooperative learning in my study, following the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). I explain how social interaction is connected to motivation to learn and to cognitive development. For students' mental/cognitive development, their motivation for learning is very important, and cooperative learning strategies are designed to keep students motivated to learn and develop mentally. Slavin (1995) argues that social interaction is directly connected to student motivation for learning, and to their (students') cognitive development.
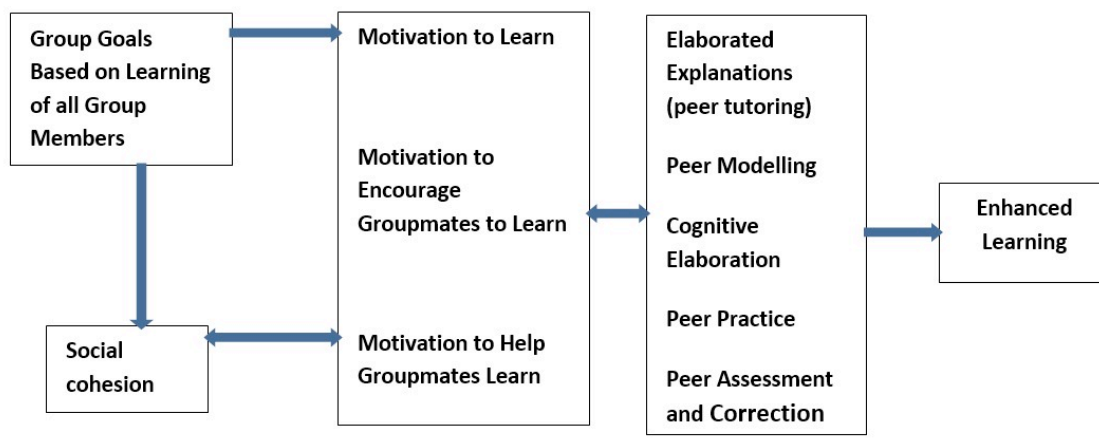

Figure 1: Integrated conceptual model of Cooperative Learning (adapted from Slavin, 1995)

The model of cooperative learning suggested by Slavin (1995; 1996; 2010) is based on the assumption that motivation to learn, and encouraging and assisting others to learn, stimulates cooperative activities that results in enhanced learning. This would embrace both the motivation to complete tasks and the motivation to interact with others in the group. Group motivation is a key value, which is being clarified through my research. Group motivation is in line with 'cooperation' as one of the key values that have emerged and been clarified through my Living Educational Theory Research. I draw on cooperation as my explanatory principle and standard of judgement as an avenue, or vehicle to improve my practice. The motivation to support other individuals and groups, leads to learning more individually in order to help other group members. Thus, strengthening the group cohesion, in turn, enables group interactions that produce enriched learning and academic attainment. All these elements are associated. For example, the motivation to a task in cooperative learning groups leads to the development of the group cohesion, and the improvement

supported through group cohesion may strengthen the task motivation. Similarly, cognitive development may naturally get expanded and lead to the increased task motivation and group cohesion (Slavin, 1995; 1996; 2010).

Based on the above model, I implemented cooperative learning as an effective teaching and learning method for literature classes in Pakistani universities. In Pakistani universities, English Literature is taught as an important subject. However, the teaching methods used in Pakistani universities are traditional. They focus on the transfer of knowledge only and neglect information-processing approach (Bughio, 2013). Therefore, teachers need to use appropriate teaching methods for teaching literature, which focus on information-processing techniques. In cooperative learning, learners master the subject on the one hand and develop cognitive skills on the other (Kagan & Kagan, 1998; Kagan, 2014). They achieve the mastery of the subject and develop cognition through interacting, hypothesising, deciding and categorising through team and individual efforts (Slavin, 1980; Kagan, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 1999a; 1999b; Johnson, Johnson & Stanne, 2000). Thus, cooperative learning has been found, and suggested to be, an effective solution to a wide range of academic problems. Cooperative learning is composed of teaching-learning techniques that stress higher-level thinking skills and increasing "higher-order learning as an alternative to ability grouping, remediation, or special education; as a means of improving race relations; and as a way to prepare students for an increasingly collaborative work force." (Slavin, 2010. pp. 135-136).

In the research-based literature, it is found that cooperative learning has been a very effective method in enhancing students' cognitive abilities. The majority of students in Basta (2011) agreed that cooperative learning helps in attaining long-term learning skills, including critical thinking. A recent study by Tadesse, Gillies and Manathunga (2020) found that cooperative learning has achieved extensive attention in present times, but it is marginally used in higher education classrooms, particularly in the developing countries context. Tadesse *et al*. (2020) conducted a non-equivalent control group study with a sample of 340 undergraduate students from Jimma University, Ethiopia. The results of the study suggested that higher thinking power of learning satisfaction is connected with cooperative learning rather than traditional lecturing. The present study attempts to use cooperative learning, at the higher education level, to explore if it might help in enhancing student motivation to learn and increase critical thinking ability. Loh and Ang (2020) found that cooperative learning allows learners to study problems through numerous viewpoints, and this may assist them to think in a more critical way. Johnson, Johnson and Stanne (2000) argue that many studies have found that peer interaction through cooperative learning enhances students' critical thinking abilities because it enables them to connect, analyse, synthesise, reason and explain information from multiple sources (Johnson *et al.* 2014). Friendly cooperation generated by cooperative learning helps shy learners, who are hesitant to ask questions from teachers, have their queries answered by their classmates (Loh & Ang, 2020). Liao (2006) found that the university students were motivated to gain and improve their capabilities by collaborating with others through cooperative learning.

I present Cooperative Learning as a value that I want to live more fully in my teaching literature and want to communicate the findings in order that other teachers, facing similar kind of contradictions, might find their value of living. I claim that encouraging cooperation in teaching and learning enhances students' motivation to learn and enhances their critical

thinking powers. I also claim that it improves teacher-researchers' practices, their students' learning and the quality of education in the institute where teacher-researchers work.

Methodology

For this inquiry, I collected qualitative data generated through student interviews, lesson evaluation forms, class observations, and pictures (See Section 5) as evidence of my practices. I used a thematic analysis method, as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006).

The methodological influence on my inquiry is Living Educational Theory Research. According to Whitehead (2008):

> A living-theory is an explanation produced by an individual for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formation in which they live and work (p. 104).

In discussing the notion of Living Educational Theory Research, Whitehead (2008, p. 112) explains that an action research cycle can be initiated when the teacher-researcher notices a discrepancy between their educational values and how they believe education, and their actual practice, should proceed. In the process of investigation, the practitioner articulates and clarifies their own values they embody in their practice; these "...values flow with a life-affirming energy and are expressed in the relational dynamics of educational relationships" (Whitehead, 2008, p. 112). This view underscores the significance of the distinctiveness of each individual's living learning and teaching theory in refining practice and producing knowledge (Whitehead, 1989; 2008).

Action Research cycles utilised as a research method in Living Educational Theory research emphasise the prominence of 'individual creativity' in contributing to enhancing the practitioner's practice and understanding of, "… historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual's life and work" (Dadds & Hart, 2001, p.166, Whitehead, 2008, p. 103). In my case, I emphasised my individual creativity by understanding students' need in a particular social context. For example, I selected the Living Educational Theory Research approach because my awareness indicated that, although I believe that students' motivation to learn and develop their cognitive abilities comes when they learn through practice with interaction, I could not enable the majority of them to interact with one another in order to improve their critical thinking ability in my classroom. I intended to improve my teaching and students' learning in relation to the acceptance of the fact that these cannot be separated from societal values and norms. As a Living Educational Theory Researcher, I am examining the educational influences on my own learning and the learning of my pupils. My research is also intended to have an educational influence in the social formation – the university I work within. I probed into my own practices and searched for better models of teaching that would fit my context. When I investigated the English literature teaching and learning practices at the institution where I teach, I found that the existing pedagogical methods could not significantly improve both students' motivation to learn and their critical skills and concluded that an adapted student-centred approach (cooperative learning) could help enhance students' learning of learning (See Section 5 for evidence).

I assess my teaching and my students' learning by following Whitehead's (2009) idea of a Living Educational Theory approach. I generate my own living-educational-theory, starting with the values that affected my students and me during the teaching-learning processes of studying literature. I draw upon my embodied value of cooperation, clarified in the course of my research, to form my explanatory principles in explanations for my educational influences in learning. Thus, I engage in an investigation into how those values might be experienced and practiced more effectively. I evaluate my actions with respect to the value of cooperation. I submit accounts of my teaching and my students' learning to peer validation, using evidence gained from interviews with students and photographs taken during the process of their inquiry. Hence, by adopting a Living Educational Theory approach to my research, I offer an account elaborating what concerned me, and why; what I selected to do and how I assessed the educational influences of my actions of my actions; and, lastly, what I conclude and what the results of my evaluation were, and what evidence I could offer to authenticate my results (see Findings and Discussion) (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

Action and Its Narrative

The present inquiry is based on the data of the intervention of two cooperative learning strategies. The strategies I chose were Student Team Achievement Division (STAD) (Slavin, 1980) and Think Pair Share (TPS) (Lyman, 1987). In adaption, I took the basic stages of STAD as a foundation for the regular routine of my classes. I planned that I would start the STAD class (the class in which STAD is implemented) with a short (five-minute) mini-lecture given by me, in which I would introduce the text to be studied and clarify the task to be carried out. Then the students would work in groups to complete the tasks provided by me in the form of questions or general topics included in their course. Rather than finishing the class with a quiz, however, I decided to finish with five-minute student presentations, in which group representatives, chosen at random, would present the answers agreed by their group or, where relevant, an account of their group discussion.

My second choice of strategy (TPS) (Lyman, 1987), is based on student pair work. This activity also promotes cooperation, which is a value I wanted to live in order to improve my students' motivation to learn. In the TPS class, I gave students a topic or a question with a specific time to think individually, then discuss the topic in pairs, and finally share their thinking and discussion with the whole class in the form of presentation (*cf.* McTighe & Lyman, 1988). Think Pair Share was chosen to maximise chances for all students to participate in the classes.

I oriented students before the intervention. In the orientation, I introduced and trained the student-participants about how the contextually-formulated cooperative learning strategies would be implemented. The main participants were the students of my own English literature class in which I was teaching them the subject *World Literature*. The student-participants numbered about 80 students. Those 80 students were divided into a total of 13 groups, each group having six members on average. I formed mixed-ability groups based on all students' scores from the previous semester. Each group normally included one high achiever, two average achievers and three low achievers, so that they could learn from one another. Each had a group leader in order to manage the group.

Based on my experience, I was aware that within Pakistan's cultural context, some female students would be unwilling to work in groups with male classmates and might even

stop attending classes if forced to do so. To address this, I brought up the issue during the orientation session. While most male students supported mixed-gender groups, many female students were opposed to the idea. Unfortunately, inappropriate behavior by some male students, such as persistent staring, can make female students uncomfortable. Additionally, families might disapprove of their daughters or sisters collaborating with male peers. Since these issues fell outside the scope of my study, and my primary goal was to enhance overall participation, I opted to avoid measures that might discourage attendance. As a result, I decided to implement single-gender groupings.

Intervention-evaluation

In the action stage of the study, I implemented cooperative learning throughout a semester (16 weeks). In each class, I implemented STAD and TPS alternatively to bring balance in the use of these and then used information from various sources in my reflections and evaluation. These sources of information included student qualitative lesson feedback forms, student interviews, video recordings of the classes, and my own subjective experiences recorded in a diary. Using these various instruments, I observed, reflected on, and evaluated the process of implementation with my teacher colleagues and students, and finally planned the next cycle based on our combined reflection and evaluation. These well-organised cycles allowed me to investigate the classes stepwise. The flexibility of involving participants' views and reflection is likely to be the most effective aspect of action research to allow me to understand the phenomenon in a better way (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Elliot, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). The views and suggestions from students did not influence the course of my research, but rather guided me to take the proper decisions while changing/improving the cycle and re-implementing it.

Findings and Discussion

Which pedagogical method should be used?

During intervention, I received very constructive comments from the students about the reality pertaining to their learning and our teaching. Students' comments pointed out that their lack of motivation to learn and argue, was mostly due to the methods used by teachers. The commonly-used teaching methods supported authoritarianism in which they listened to teachers and did not feel encouraged to ask and participate in the learning process. For example, the following comments emphasise the reality that existed:

> All the time lecture of the teacher is not effective. It is boring because in it, one person speaks and we listen to. And it is not sure who is listening and who is not. But in cooperative learning especially in TPS we are bound to listen to our friends and share our ideas (Student ALM4, Interview 4).

> Lecture should be there but not all the time. When teacher is speaking all the time that is not good too and it becomes boring (SLF3, Interview 3).

> …as the lecture method is concerned, it sometimes restricts the input of the students during the learning process (Student MLM2, Interview 2).

However, the students also did not consider that lecture should completely be halted. They actually wanted some part of the lecture included in the process of teaching-learning of English Literature. For example, the following students recommended that lectures should not be taken away completely:

> I recommend that these all methods should be used; but lecture's frequency should also be increased. You gave only 5 minute lecture before these activities. I suggest that you should also take some classes with lectures (Student JLM1, Interview 1).

> …there should be also a lecture of 10–15 minutes by teacher to give more information (SEL7, Lesson 7)

> I don't consider lecture method useless. It is very important too because it is a kind push for those students who lag behind. So, for knowledge, lecture should not be ignored, it should go along with other interactive methods. Lecture method is good when we need some new information (Student MLM2, Interview 2).

On the whole, students recommended that there should be the combination of the methods. Since Pakistani universities, both technologically and pedagogically, are not very up-to-date, it would not be easy to shun the traditional teaching methods all of a sudden. So many students wanted lectures to be used alongside STAD and TPS:

> I attended the lecture today because it helps in increasing my knowledge. And I learn so many new points. So lecture should also be implemented (SEL 3, Lesson 3).

> I recommend that these all methods should be used; but lecture's frequency should also be increased. You gave only 5 minute lecture before these activities. I suggest that you should also take some classes with lectures (Student JLM1, Interview 1).

> I think that the activity which is followed by you in this semester is better but not on daily basis. You should give gap or provide some knowledge by yourself to students. You should deliver lecture once or sometimes twice in a week (SEL 2, lesson 2).

Following students' comments and suggestions I integrated cooperative learning strategies in combination with lecturing. For example, in the beginning, I only gave a five-minute lecture before the beginning of STAD or TPS. Later I increased it to 10–15 minutes, which was favoured by the students. Furthermore, in some lessons when my students and I felt that they (students) needed information on the topic, I implemented whole class teaching and lecturing because it was also suggested by many students.

I wanted to engage my colleagues as critical friends, but due to their busy schedule at the university and other engagements, they were not able to be observers or could not help me in addressing the changes and suggestions in my intervention process. This left me to depend on my own, and students' reflections for improvement in my intervention. The process of reflection involved three steps. First, I documented my observations in diary notes, then reviewed feedback from my students, and finally combined my reflections with the participants' comments. The reflective aspect of the action cycle allowed me to adopt an inquisitive approach, critically examining my teaching practices. With the input of my students, I continually evaluated the methods used to address the issue before, during, and after the action cycles (*cf.* Schön, 1995). Reflection is a cornerstone of the action cycle

(Mckernan, 1991; Elliot, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010), as it enables researchers to assess the effectiveness of their practices. According to Elliott (1991), continuous reflection is essential for improving professional practices. Consequently, this study not only enhanced my teaching and increased students' engagement with language learning but also deepened our understanding of these practices (*cf.* Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

Suggestions from students actually helped me to generate my epistemology of using the teaching methods, which both helped them to learn and me to teach. Hence, these strategies also enabled me to more fully identify and embody my living values in my practice. Their suggestions enabled me to generate my living-educational-theory, incorporating cooperation as an explanatory principle and standard. I understood that the present values *i.e.* my use of traditional methods of teaching affected my teaching and my students learning because it created a passive environment of teaching and learning. Therefore, the Living Educational Theory Research helped me engage in an inquiry to answer how those values might be experienced and practiced more effectively. I evaluated my actions through the accounts I provided of my teaching and students' learning, using evidence gained in the process of my inquiry to validate my account. By adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach in this inquiry, I offer a narrative explaining what affected me, and why; what I decided to do and how I evaluated educational influence of my own actions in the learning of others; and lastly, what I concluded and what the results of my evaluation were, and what evidence I could offer to authenticate my results (*cf.* Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Therefore, based on students' comments and feedback, and my own reflection, I used all the three pedagogies *i.e.* STAD, TPS and Lecture in parallel, which was helpful in many ways. In the following sections, I describe and discuss what advantages this democratically devised pedagogy yielded.

Think Pair Share (TPS) and Student Team Achievement Division (STAD)

Although from the data findings, it is clear that students did not want the lecture mode of teaching to be stopped, their comments clearly show that cooperative learning strategies had a greater positive influence on their learning than lecturing. Perhaps, the most preferred cooperative learning techniques as reported by students was TPS. In Image 1 you can see students working together using TPS. According to the students, TPS was easy to follow and it motivated them to get engaged in the learning process. Moreover, since there were only two students working in each group, it was easy to listen to and speak and discuss, which made them critical and think deeply because it made them to think first, which improved their thinking power. The following comments by students indicate how it helped them:

> Think Pair Share was perhaps more suitable in between the lecture method and STAD because so far as the lecture method is concerned, it sometimes restricts the input of the students during the learning process. TPS in one way, forces those two to work upon the study going on because it is about two people, and these two people have to be involved in the process whether they like it or not. I favour think pair share along with lecture (Student MLM2, Interview 1).

> TPS is very easy and clear. Its steps were easy and it increased our communication. Its title itself is witness that it aims for sharing and gaining. In STAD, students become chaotic and

noisy sometimes, but in TPS, you know who you are talking or listening to. In TPS, you easily understand and argue, and this makes you more argumentative (Student SLF3, Interview 3).

I like sharing from the activity of Think Pair Share because it enhances our knowledge and ideas (SEL9, Lesson 9).

Image 1. Students working in Think Pair Share (TPS)

However, students did not negate the benefits of STAD and many favoured the approach (See Image 2). Image 2 is given as a piece of evidence showing students working in groups with interest and motivation. Although Students favoured working in TPS, they also preferred STAD for reasons as shown in the following comments from students' interviews. Students liked STAD because it was based on group work in which there are more than two people working together which meant more minds and more ideas. It was the second most preferred choice for students. For example, students favoured this approach because:

I liked STAD more because in it we have more different ideas; in TPS, only two people share ideas and in STAD more people share; therefore it is more beneficial (Student JLM1, Interview 1).

But STAD was good also because it gave us more ideas because there were more students. In STAD, the main benefit is that you get many ideas at a time. And when we shared, other friends appreciated…(Student ALM4, Interview 4).

Image 2. Students working in Student Team Achievement Division (STAD)

Advantages of using cooperative learning strategies

Since during the intervention, the comments of students on their feedback forms and interviews guided me that they actually liked both the cooperative learning strategies *i.e.* TPS and STAD should be implemented and integrated with lecturing. Hence, the teaching methodology I generated through my Living Educational Theory Research was mixed (See sub-section *Which Pedagogical method should be used?* above). The educational influence on my teaching was not one-sided but two-pronged in which the main stakeholders, the students' views were taken on board. Therefore, we narrate our story how we, through a reflective and democratic process, selected a method that helped both students and myself. Hence, the combination of these methods *i.e.* the cooperative learning strategies and action research cycle, as my living values assisted me in enhancing student learning and knowledge about the subject, developed their critical thinking ability, motivated them to learn, and improved their confidence and communicative skills.

Enhanced student motivation, engagement and critical thinking

Students' comments on the lesson feedback form, and as reported in the interviews, revealed that students felt that cooperative learning with contextual modifications, enhanced their learning and knowledge about the subject. The reasons given were that during the process of thinking, sharing and discussing, students understood better and gained knowledge about the subject from different perspectives:

Thinking and sharing for I come to know different ideas shared by partners and other speakers (SEL3, Lesson 3).

By discussing, we could understand each other's' point of view which helped us in learning (SEL11, Lesson 11).

I like cooperative learning, because I learn many things from group discussion (SEL6, Lesson 6)

Think pair share was beneficial…through this we enhanced our knowledge (JLM1, Interview 1).

The activity think pair share. I like the sharing process because it increases knowledge and help to develop ideas (SEL2, Lesson 2).

Critical thinking ability

The use of the cooperative learning strategies TPS and STAD helped students to think, share and receive knowledge, which improved their cognitive abilities because they summarised, discussed and argued critically in group settings. They believed that literature is based on the ideas of writers and aims for us to be critical. Therefore, discussion and thinking processes, promoted by the pedagogical approach used by me, actually helped them develop their critical thinking abilities.

I help my teammate's sharing ideas and providing them valid arguments. [We] by summarising the novel, group discussion and trying to have general approach of the novel (SEL 3, Lesson 3).

I helped my teammates through my ideas and thoughts and my mind developed (SEL8, Lesson 8).

We shared and discussed and understood the novel more deeply (SEL8, Lesson 8)

[It] is more effective because it makes think first and discuss then share. This process develops our mind and we become mentally strong because we get ideas and discuss … TPS gives us self-development, because we think and discuss more and more effectively. We also developed knowledge and became more argumentative (Student ALM4, Interview 4).

Literature because it teaches us to be critical thinker and forces not to believe everything on its face values but it encourages to think about its positive and negative aspects. So, we need these activities because they force us to discuss and debate (Student MLM5, Interview 5).

Motivation to learn

The use of TPS and STAD not only improved students' knowledge and made them critical thinkers, but it also motivated them to learn. Students reported that teaching methods, such as lecture and Grammar Translation Method used previously, or by other teachers, are boring, and did not engage them in the teaching-learning processes, but rather disengaged them. Moreover, in cooperative learning, the feedback and reinforcement from the teacher to groups, pairs or individual students was encouraging and inspiring which supported their learning. The opportunities of interaction enhanced by cooperative learning activities developed their communicative skills which in turn made them confident.

Teachers-students interaction makes the lesson better … students become more interested in it. So, teacher's cooperation is more important for students (SEL3, Lesson 3).

I like cooperative learning activities because by those we get confidence (SEL7, Lesson 7).

STAD built our confidence (SEL8, Lesson 8).

It [the methods used] really encouraged us and we became confident. So, the strategies were motivating because in it you asked us to speak and share and appreciated our presentation which was very motivating on your part (Student JLM1, Interview 1).

These activities … encouraged me and gave me confidence to speak and share in front of the whole class. Before, your methods, we were shy and never shared (Student ALM4, Interview 4).

Cooperative learning techniques were easy to follow therefore, they were motivating. We followed … it and completed the task effectively (Student MLM5, Interview 5)

Development in Communicative skills

The use of cooperative learning strategies encouraged students to be very active in terms of communication. The teaching methods such as lecturing or grammar translation method used by other teachers made students feel passive and neglected. The inclusion of presentations after the end of every lesson, further enhanced their communication skills.

It did give us a chance to interact with each other and enhance our communication skill (SEL3, Lesson 3).

TPS is very easy and clear. Its steps were easy and it increased our communication. Its title itself is witness that it aims for sharing and gaining (Student SLF3, Interview 3).

It developed our confidence and speaking power because we were encouraged to speak through these activities (Student JLM1, Interview 1).

Conclusion

In this present inquiry utilising the Living Educational Theory Research methodology, I have attempted to improve my own teaching of literature, aiming at enhancing the motivation to learn and develop the critical thinking skills and the self-esteem of final year university students in Pakistan. By following Whitehead (2008, p. 118), I created my living-educational-theory by addressing an identified living contradiction between my values and practice, in the passivity of my students. As such, I drew on my clarified values of cooperation, students' motivation, their self-esteem, their critical thinking and cooperative learning improved. I examined the problem of passivity in my students and how I addressed this. In the process I found that I was able to both live my values of cooperation and understand them more fully. Whitehead states:

We can all help each other, whatever age, to create our own living educational theories in which we account to ourselves for living our values and understandings as fully as we can (Whitehead, 2008, p. 118).

By developing experience, confidence and learning to challenge, interact, probe and rationalize my lived practices and experiences (*cf*. Whitehead, 2008; 2009), I brought change in my teaching approaches, beliefs, perceptions, concepts and principles. As with my previous study, (Panhwar, 2020), I drew on Living Educational Theory Research methodology (Whitehead, 1989) and created my own living-educational-theory by narrating my experience of engaging my students in the learning of literature, through the use of cooperative learning and action research cycles. I began this research, as before, guided by Whitehead's (2008; 2009) question, "How do I improve what I am doing?". In the process of creating this account of my practice and research as a professional educator, I have progressed. The question that has emerged, which this account offers an answer to, is *'How can I improve my teaching practice and students' learning in a university literature class where I teach the subject World Literature?'* I created this account of my living-educational-theory by narrating my experience of engaging my students in the learning of literature through TPS and STAD to improve not only their cooperative learning and critical thinking skills, but also to enhance the motivation, self-esteem and active engagement in learning of each student. As my research continues I shall focus on:

i) Gathering and analysing data that will enable me to produce an evidence-based description that shows what deeper, values-laden changes researching my teaching strategies have had in my students' learning, and that of my own learning as a professional educator,

ii) Creating a validated evidence-based explanation that connects changes in my students' learning to my claim to be having an educational influence, with values of human flourishing, in their learning.

In the present study, I could not involve my colleagues or other professionals as critical friends to test the trustworthiness of my knowledge claims and strengthen my research further. It was because of the busy schedule and indifferent attitude of my colleagues. In Pakistani culture, teachers mostly avoid involving themselves as critical friends, under the pretexts such as they are busy, they have to run for something else, or they have meeting *etc*. As my Living Educational Theory Research to improve my practice as a professional educator continues, I will try to involve critical friends to test the trustworthiness of the findings of my research and strengthen it, even if I have to look for help outside my immediate circle.

Living Educational Theory Research has proved again to be a very effective methodological approach for helping me develop my professionalism. It has helped me to clarify the values I embody in my practice, which I draw on as my explanatory principles and standards of judgement. It has helped me to identify where I experience myself as a living contradiction, where my values of cooperation are contradicted by others, and it has helped me to focus my research on what I can do to improve my students' motivation to learn literature and develop their cognitive abilities with English literature learning, Hence, I recommend other professional educators explore the use of Living Educational Theory Research to develop their own educational professionalism.

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