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# STUDENTS' TANDEM (PAIRWORK) AS A MODERN FORM IN TEACHING

Ass. Irena Kitanova  
Pedagogical faculty  
Univerity "Goce Delcev"  
Republic of Macedonia

**Abstract:** The complete movement towards school reform is based upon the need to modernize the traditional educational systems in accordance with the latest requirements of the society. In other words, there is need for a high level of flexibility and adaptability in the system of education by means of including students into social life. Needless to say, these reforms also comprise reforms in the forms of educational work. It is also necessary to introduce new forms of teaching but it should not mean completely throwing away the old forms, but complementing them and maintaining their positive values. That is why the system class-grade is based on working groups that get tasks. In that way, relations student-student, student-teacher, student-group, and group-teacher are created and the social life of the class is strengthened. An inner dynamics among the members of the group is created in the form of dyadic relations (tandem work among students), triadic relations, etc.

**Key words:** tandem work, reform, education, cooperative learning.

A relatively new form of work in teaching is work in pairs. As the term suggests, students work in pairs of two in this form. Such work is very efficient because students can feel, complement, check, and evaluate each other. That is why this form is suitable for all kinds of language exercises, especially dialogues, for joint revision and testing, or for joint making of technical devices and teaching aids. The teacher gives initiative for this work, but the students are independent in its realization. Thus communication going from student toward student and not from student toward teacher and vice versa is developed in the class.

The advantages of this work form are simple communication, necessary cooperation, good motivation, opportunities for competition, mutual control, and involvement of "isolated" students with greater work discipline.

The disadvantages of this form are the following: need for previous learning the technique of independent students' work; level of teacher's preparation; availability of various sources of knowledge and the occurrence of conflicts as a consequence competition and rivalry between students in each pair. Pair work is also important outside teaching, in doing homework, especially when a student wants to express the studied teaching contents verbally in front of another person, being sure that the other person will listen carefully, correct, assess or add something. The precondition for pair work is working discipline of both partners, their respect for agreed upon obligations during work, keeping pace, in a nutshell, teaching tasks should be partners' common preoccupation. That is why joint pair work has most sense in attacking school tasks outside teaching (helping with homework, joint preparation of homework in order to perform self-testing, etc.).

## 1.2 TEACHER IN A TANDEM CLASS

The application of a students' tandem as a form of teaching work in modern school creates space for a different treatment of subjective factors in the educational process. A students' tandem imposes a cooperative relationship between the participants in the learning process, but at the same time it cherishes partner cooperation between the teacher and the student. This is interaction of two subjective factors: one has the function to lead, guide and advise, and the other, respecting this, to improve in learning. Numerous researches show that a student accepts his/her teacher first and foremost as a person. This means that in a teacher a student is looking for an associate who "masters the teaching skills" but who will accept him/her as a subject in teaching. Thus their interaction represents a relation between two relatively equal subjects.

A tandem enables the realization of the following tasks:

- *To develop the ability for self-education in students (functional task);*
- *To develop the need for self-education (educational task).*

Based on this, the teacher's role is changed in the sense that he/she is no longer the basic manager of the educational process. He/she turns into a leader, an adviser who induces and "teaches the student only to learn". Such teacher's role means increased activity that arouses, induces, directs and motivates, and at the same time provides an individual approach to each student and his/her interaction with other students in the students' collective.

A student tandem provides opportunities for the teacher to develop amore flexible relation to students concerning his/her treatment from the aspect of students' cooperation and interaction that do not negate individuality. During students' tandem work the teacher develops a relation in three directions:

- *Relation to the first partner in the tandem;*
- *Relation to the second partner in the tandem;*
- *Relation to the tandem as a whole.*

The abovementioned three models of interactive relations between a teacher and student partners in a tandem provide conditions for permanent, continuous feedback information through which the teacher monitors their work, and at the same time evaluates its quality. During this, the teacher's activity is various and many-sided. It most often depends on the nature of the problems the partners meet. The interactive relationship of the teacher with the tandem and its members has not only an internal but also an external character; it means that a class does not disintegrate into micro-social structures that will disturb its harmony. The teacher has been prescribed the role of a coordinator who takes care of internal cohesion of the students' community that is seemingly disturbed by the very existence of students' tandems. According to this, we can notice a number of models and teacher's roles when student tandems are applied: teacher-student in a tandem (the teacher controls, monitors and guides the activity of the student-partner); teacher-

tandem (the teacher unites individual activities of partners, tries to strengthen cooperation by their complementing, induces, motivates and evaluates joint work); teacher-class (tandem character – the teacher coordinates the tandems' work, induces their mutual cooperation, enhances the level of class cohesion).

The social dimension of joint learning as partners can be viewed from the aspect of developing and nurturing cooperative behavior of the teacher. The students' acts and manners of working should be constantly recorded, as well as their success in coping with the difficulties during joint working, the speed and pace of progress, etc. The teacher's attention should be directed towards each tandem, towards each student-partner, he/she should observe all their manifestations of behavior, the quality of their reactions, etc. Basic points of the teacher's attention, observation and activity are:

- **whether the students-partners understand their joint goal;**
- **how respective members of a tandem feel;**
- **how they accept each other; and**
- **whether they complement each other successfully.**

While monitoring the work of a tandem, the teacher should inform them about the success of their work. Students' initiative for working with teachers are developed and nurtured through student tandems. The cooperation realized between the teacher and the students (tandem) should have purposeful and timely character and the help should be balanced, not intrusive and suggestive. The teacher will perform his/her educational duty by directing help towards tandem's independent activity, motivating the tandem's members to have creative attitude to learning.

### **1.3 STUDENT – PARTNER IN A TANDEM**

The role of a student as a subject in the teaching process while applying tandem work should be seen from the aspect of his/her individuality, as well as his/her interactive relation in a tandem. This means that a student in tandem work is defined as a person who acts independently, but also as part of a small interactive structure within which the student cooperates with the partner. Consequently, the student-partner gets a bi-functional role – as a member of a students' collective and as a partner in a tandem. In the first mentioned case, the student's role is dimensioned as his/her being a member in a bigger students' community from where it is more difficult to separate the quality and quantity of his/her interaction with other students and mark it as purposeful communication. On the other hand, partnership in a tandem constantly expresses the student's role in the frames of a dyadic infrastructure; he/she appears not only as a member but also as an active participant and cooperator.

Within a students' collective where a student is its member, it is more difficult to stand out as an individual in relation to other students, because he/she has the same tasks and obligations as other students. The role of a partner in a tandem creates broader space for the student to express his/her individuality

because his interaction is directed towards a concrete associate and his activity is clearly defined. However, such an approach to defining the role of a student-partner can disturb the natural psycho-social balance existing among students in one class.

The student as a subjective factor gathers his social motives from his membership in the students' collective and from his partnership in a tandem. This means that these two dimensions should not be isolated and opposed. Not always the student loses his personality in a student collective, and partnership in a tandem not always provides mutual cooperative relationship. The partner's role in a tandem establishes the student as an associate, who actively participates in the realization of concrete tasks, builds his activity into the joint effort and, at the same time, nurtures the model of concrete and friendly behavior. He helps the partner to learn, gets familiar with his qualities and shortcomings. Beside the relation towards the student-partner, the student creates a relationship towards the teacher. The student-partner requires instructions and guidelines from the teacher about work, finding solutions for tasks. On the other hand, the teacher gets closer to the student and establishes natural relation, observes him, analyzes the student and gets deeper into his individuality and particularity.

In respective teaching situations and models partnership in a tandem enables the student to apply this form of teaching work as secondary and primary source of knowledge of his classmate. He passes over his knowledge onto the partner and performs a wide range of activities that are directed towards performing respective tasks. In tandem work the teacher monitors the student's work and activity and is able to see which students have the same interests and affinities, which in turn creates conditions for successful guidance of students.

The student in a tandem can choose methods of teaching work, procedures, and manners of performing the set tasks. Tandem interaction creates conditions for the student to take over the personal and joint responsibility in work. The work cannot be left to someone else; each partner has his own tasks, but he also has tandem tasks. The evaluation of tandem work has wider significance and dimension as it is being performed in the entire course of partners' work, and not only based upon the final results.

## **2. FORMATION OF STUDENT TANDEMIS**

The ways of forming student tandems directly depends on the starting fundamental criteria, i.e. the starting criteria that should be respected during the creation of the dyadic microstructure. The definition of the criteria is closely related to the answer to the question: what is meant by the concept of successful forming of student tandems? The successful formation of a tandem is conditioned by numerous factors that can be viewed from the following aspects: tandem's success as a whole; success of each individual member of a tandem; and success of only one member of a tandem. The formation of tandems is closely related to defining the immediate educational goals and tasks that are to be realized. That is

why it is unacceptable practice to put the same students always into the same tandems, and according to the same criteria.

Forming student tandems always consisting of the same students-partners is stereotypical in inflexible and that is why such results are at a satisfactory level. A common practice of teachers to form tandems made up of students at different levels of knowledge or different level of abilities only disturbs the foundations upon which modern tandem work is built. This criterion should be understood only as one of student tandem models which should be combined with other models. The level of general abilities of students-partners can be a starting criterion in forming student tandems. Goldman's research (1965) of this issue showed the following:

- **a student with higher intelligence level who works in a tandem with a partner with a lower level of intelligence enhances the effects of work compared to individual work;**
- **a student with average level of intelligence enhances the success of tandem work if he works with a partner having higher or mean level of general abilities;**
- **students with a low level of intelligence enhance the effects of tandem work approximately the same when they work with partner having higher or mean level of intelligence;**
- **the success of a tandem consisting of partners with general abilities is conversely proportionate to those abilities.**

The criterion for forming student tandems can also be the sex of the partners. According to Shell, tandems with a homogenous sex structure are more successful. However, younger students can cooperate more successfully in tandems regardless of their sex. Heterogeneous tandems can show greater success if they are made up of older students when the interest for the opposite sex is greater and the desire for cooperation is more expressed.

The factors such as partners' extroversion, introversion and timidity can influence the success of tandem work.

As for the question who forms student tandems, it can be seen that, most often then not, it is the teacher but students as well. When forming tandems, the teacher should usually use his/her experience, knowledge, familiarity with students and intuition. The socio-metric method and the drawing method are used as well.

The socio-metric method can be helpful during choosing the criteria for forming student tandems. Using this method we can collect indicators of interpersonal relations of students and of the social structure of the students' collective. This method can also contribute to changing the relations inside the collective, or for improving the social status of respective individuals. It can also be the means of developing good tandem cooperation among students. This can be achieved if the teacher succeeds in motivating the students properly in their choice of partners, and making the students' wishes purposeful and spontaneous. If the

wishes of students in choosing a partner are not fulfilled, it leads to losing motivation for working in tandems and consequently the results are poorer. The imposed partner can cause tension leading to giving up cooperation and disintegration of the tandem.

The method of joint drawing is also pointed out as one possible method with which the participation of either of the partners in a tandem, their cooperation and possible domination are determined by means of these criteria:

- **good joint work without domination;**
- **good joint work with slight domination;**
- **good joint work with strong domination;**
- **poor joint work without domination;**
- **poor joint work with slight domination;**
- **poor joint work with strong domination.**

The essence of this method is the fact that either student draws on his/her part of the sheet of paper. One week later the students draw the same object on a sheet of paper but either student draws in only one color. During the third phase of research, the students are supposed to draw just one object together.

## **CONCLUSION**

All the above mentioned leads to the conclusion that the formation of student tandems is an important and complex issue. The application of student tandem as a form of teaching work is conditioned by the need for permanent insight into the concrete work conditions, clear defining of goals and tasks, specifics of the teaching material, complexity of tasks, etc. All these criteria can serve as a starting point in forming student tandems. The correlation of all these criteria can have positive effects and it contributes to the requirements of modern teaching

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