

## COOPERATIVE LEARNING

*This article is about what's cooperative learning why and how to use it in the English language classroom, the elements of cooperative learning. Also you can find here techniques and strategies used to teach cooperative learning.*

What is a cooperative learning?

Cooperation is working together to accomplish shared goal. Within cooperative activities individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members. Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. The idea is simple. Class members are organized into small groups after receiving instruction from the teacher. They then work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. Cooperative efforts result in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts ( Your success benefits me and my success benefits you), recognizing that all group members share a common fate ( We all sink or swim together here), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (We can not do it without you ),and feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement (We all congratulate on your accomplishment!). In cooperative students situations there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments; students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals. A team member's success in creating a multi-media presentation on saving the environment, for example, depends on both individual effort and the efforts of other group members who contribute needed knowledge, skills and resources. No one group member will possess all of the information, skills and resources necessary for the highest possible quality presentation.

Why use Cooperative learning?

Students' learning goals may be structured to promote cooperative, competitive, or individualistic efforts. In contrast to cooperative situations, competitive situations are ones in which students work against each other to achieve a goal that only one or few can attain. In competition there is a negative interdependence among goal achievements; students perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other students in the class fail to obtain their goals. Norm-referenced evaluation of achievement occurs. The result is that students either work hard to do better than their classmates, or they take it easy because they do not believe they have a chance to win. In individualistic learning situations students work alone to accomplish goals unrelated to those of classmates and are evaluated on a criterion-referenced basis. Students' goal achievements are independent; students perceive that the achievement of their learning goals is unrelated to what other students do. The result is to focus on self-interest and personal success and ignore as irrelevant the successes and failures of others.

There is a long history of research on cooperative, competitive and individualistic efforts. Since the first research study in 1898, nearly 600 experimental studies and over 100 correlational studies have been conducted. The multiple outcomes studied can be classified into three major categories: achievement/ productivity, positive relationships and psychological health. The research clearly indicates that cooperation compared with competitive and individualistic efforts, typically results in a) higher achievement and greater productivity, b) more caring, supportive and committed relationships, and c) greater psychological health, social competence, and self-esteem. The positive effects that cooperation has on so many important outcomes makes cooperative learning one of the most valuable tools educators have.

What makes cooperative groups work?

Educators fool themselves if they think well-meaning directives to "work together", "cooperate" and " be a team", will be enough to create cooperative efforts among group members. Placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not in and of itself

result in cooperation. Not all groups are cooperative. Sitting in groups, for example, can result in competition at close quarters or individualistic effort with talking. To structure lessons so that students do in fact work cooperatively with each other requires an understanding of the components of cooperation allows teachers to:

Take existing lessons, curricula, and courses and structure them cooperatively.

Tailor cooperative learning lessons to meet the unique instructional circumstances and needs of the curricula, subject areas, and students.

Diagnose the problems some students may have in working together and intervene to increase the effectiveness of the student learning groups.

The essential components of cooperation are positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group skills and group processing. Systematically structuring those basic elements into group learning situations helps ensure cooperative efforts and enables the disciplined implementation of cooperative learning for long-term success.

The first and most important element in structuring cooperative learning is positive interdependence. Positive interdependence is successfully structured when group members perceive that they are linked with each other in a way that one can not succeed unless everyone succeeds. Group goals and tasks, therefore, must be designed and communicated to students in ways that make them believe they sink or swim together. When positive interdependence is solidly structured, it highlights that a) each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success and b) each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources and / or role and task responsibilities. Doing so creates a commitment to the success of group members as well as one's own and is the heart of cooperative learning. If there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation.

The second basic element of cooperative learning is promotive interaction, preferably face-to-face. Students need to do real work together in which they promote each other's success by sharing resources and helping, supporting, encouraging and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. There are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that can only occur when students promote each other's learning. This include orally explaining how to solve problems, teaching one's knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts being learned, and connecting present with past learning. Each of those activities can be structured into group task directions and procedures. Doing so helps ensure that cooperative learning groups are both an academic support system (every student has someone who is committed to helping him or her learn) and a personal support system (every student has someone who is committed to helping him or her as a person). It is through promoting each other's learning face-to-face that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their mutual goals.

The third basic element of cooperative learning is individual and group accountability. Two levels of accountability must be structured into cooperative lessons. The group must be accountable for achieving its goals and each member must be accountable for contributing his or her share of work. Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual in order to ascertain who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in learning. The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her right. Students learn together so that they subsequently can greater individual competency.

The fourth basic element of cooperative learning is teaching students the required interpersonal and small group skills. Cooperative learning is inherently more complex than competitive and individualistic learning because students have to engage simultaneously in taskwork (learning academic subject matter) and teamwork (functioning effectively as a group). Social skills for effective cooperative work do not magically appear when cooperative lessons are employed. Instead, social skills must be taught to students just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills. Leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills empower students to manage both teamwork and taskwork successfully. Since cooperation and conflict are inherently related, the procedures and skills for managing

conflicts constructively are especially important for the long-term success of learning groups.

The fifth basic element of cooperative learning is group processing. Group processing exists when group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what member actions are helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about what behaviors to continue or change. Continuous improvements of the processes of learning results from the careful analysis of how members are working together and determining how group effectiveness can be enhanced.

Cooperative learning structures and techniques

Three step interview.

Three step interviews can be used as an ice breaker for team members to get to know one another or can be used to get to know concepts in depth, by assigning roles to students. Faculty assigns roles or students can “play” themselves. Faculty may also give interview questions or information that should be “found.”

A interviews B for the specified number of minutes, listening attentively and asking probing questions.

At a signal, students reverse roles and B interviews A for the same number of minutes.

At another signal, each pair turns to another pair, forming a group of four. Each member of the group introduces his or her partner, highlighting the most interesting stories.

Roundtable

Roundtable structures can be used to brainstorm ideas and to generate a large number of responses to a single question or a group of questions.

Faculty poses question.

One piece of paper and pen per group

First student writes one response, and says it out loud.

First student passes paper to the left, second student writes response, etc.

Continues around group until time elapses

Students may say “pass” at any time.

Group stops when time is called.

The key here is the question or the problem you’ve asked the students to consider. It has to be one that has the potential for a number of different “right” answers. Relate the question to the course unit, but keep it simple so every student can have some input.

Once time is called, determine what you want to have your students do with the lists...they may want to discuss the multitude of answers or solutions or they may want to share the lists with the entire class.

Focused listing

Focused listing can be used as a brainstorming technique or as a technique to generate descriptions and definitions for concepts. Focused listing asks the students to generate words to define or describe something. Once students have completed this activity, you can use these lists to facilitate group and class discussion.

Example: ask students to list 5-7 words or phrases that describe or define what a motivated student does. From there, you might ask students to get together in small groups to discuss the lists or to select the one that they can all agree on. Combine this technique with a number of the other techniques and you can have a powerful cooperative learning structure.

Structured problem-solving

Structured problem-solving can be used in conjunction with several other cooperative learning structures.

Have the participants brainstorm or select a problem for them to consider.

Assign numbers to members of each group (or use playing cards). Have each member of the group be a different number or suit.

Discuss task as a group.

Each participant should be prepared to respond. Each member of the group needs to understand the response well enough to give the response with no help from the other members of the group. Ask an individual from each group to respond. Call on the individual by number (or suit).

One minute papers

Ask students to comment on the following questions. Give them one minute and time them.

This activity focuses them on the content and can also provide feedback to you as a teacher.

What was the most important or useful thing you learned today?

What two important questions do you still have; what remains unclear?

What would you like to know more about?

You can use these one minute papers to begin the next day's discussion, to facilitate discussion within a group or to provide you with feedback on where the student is in his or her understanding of the material.

Paired annotations

Students pair up to review/learn same article, chapter or content area and exchange double-entry journals for reading and reflection.

Students discuss key points and look for divergent and convergent thinking and ideas.

Together students prepare a composite annotation that summarizes the article, chapter, or concept.

Structured learning team group roles

When putting together groups, you may want to consider assigning (or having students select) their roles for the group. Students may also rotate group roles depending on the activity.

Potential group roles and their functions include:

Leader- the leader is responsible for keeping the group on the assigned task at hand. She/he also makes sure that all members of the group have an opportunity to participate, learn and have the respect of their team members. The leader may also want to check to make sure that all of the group members have mastered the learning points of a group exercise.

Recorder- the recorder picks and maintains the group files and folders on a daily basis and keeps records of all group activities including the material contribute by each group member the recorder writes out the solutions to problems for the group to use as notes or to submit to the instructor. The recorder may also prepare presentation materials when the group makes oral presentations to the class.

Reporter – the reporter gives oral responses to the class about the group's activities or conclusions.

Monitor- the monitor is responsible for making sure that the group's work area is left the way it was found and acts as a timekeeper for timed activities.

Wildcard (in group's of five) - the wildcard acts as an assistant to the group leader and assumes the role of any member that may be missing.

Send-A-Problem

Send-A-Problem can be used as a way to get groups to discuss and review material, or potential solutions to the problems related to content information.

Each member of a group generates a problem and writes it down on a card. Each member of the group then asks the question to other members.

If the question can be answered and all members of the group agree on the answer, then that answer is written on the back of the card. If there is no consensus on the answer, the question is revised so that an answer can be agreed upon.

The group puts a question on the side of the card with the question on it.

Each group sends its question cards to another group.

Each group member takes one question from the stack of questions and reads one question at a time to group. After reading the first question, the group discusses it.

If the group agrees on the answer, they turn the card over to see if they agree with the first group's answer.

If there again is consensus, they proceed to the next question.

If they do not agree with the first group's answer, the second group writes their answer on the back of the card as an alternative answer.

The second group reviews answers each question in the stack of the cards, repeating the procedure outlined above

The question cards can be sent to a third, fourth, of fifth group, if desired.

Stacks of cards are then sent back to the originating group. The sending group can then discuss and clarify any question.

Variation: A variation on the send a problem is to use the process to get groups to discuss a real problem for which there may be no one set answer.

Groups decide on one problem they will consider. It is best if each group considers a different problem.

The same process is used, with the first group brainstorming solutions to a single problem. The problem is written on a piece of paper and attached to the outside of a folder. The solutions are listed and enclosed inside the folder.

The folder is then passed to the next group. Each group brainstorms on the problems they receive without reading the previous group's work and then place their solutions inside the folders.

This process may continue to one or more groups. The last group reviews all the solutions posed by all the previous groups and develops prioritized list of possible solutions. This list is then presented to the group.

#### Value Line

One way to form heterogeneous group, is to use a value line.

Present an issue or topic to the group and ask each member to determine how they feel about the issue (could use a 1-10 scale; 1 being strong agreement, 10 disagreement).

Form a rank-ordered line and number the participants from 1 up (from strong agreement to strong disagreement, for example).

Form your groups of four by pulling one person from each end of the value line and two people from the group (for example, if you had 20 people, one group might consist of persons 1, 10, 11, 20).

#### Uncommon Commonalities

Uncommon Commonalities can be used to foster a more cohesive group.

Groups get together and first list individual things about themselves that define them as people. Groups then discussed each item, finding things that 1, 2, 3, or 4 of them have in common.

When the group finds an item that all of them have in common, the list that item under 4; when they find something that 3 of them have in common, the list that item under 3, etc.

#### Team Expectations

Some of the common fears about working with groups include student fears that each member will not pull their weight as a part of the group. Students are scared that their grade will be lower as a result of the group learning vs. learning they do individually. One way to address this issue is to allow the group to outline acceptable group behaviors (expectations) they expect from each individual, each pair and as a group as a whole.

#### Double Entry Journal

The Double Entry Journal can be used as a way for students to take notes on articles and other resources they read in preparation for class discussion.

Students read and reflect on the assigned reading(s).

Students prepare the double entry journal, listing critical points of the readings (as they see them) and any responses to the readings, in general, or specific critical points. Students bring their journal notes to class.

Once in class, students may use their double entry journal to begin discussion, to do a paired annotation, or for other classroom and group activity.

#### Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning

The goal of this activity is to generate discussion among student groups about a specific topic or content area.

Faculty conducts a brief (10-15 minutes) lecture on a topic or content area. Faculty may assign a reading or written assignment as well.

Instructor then gives the students a set of generic question stems.

Students work individually to write their own questions based on the material being covered.

Students do not have to be able to answer the questions they pose. This activity is designed

to force students to think about ideas relevant to the content area.

Grouped into learning teams, each student offers a question for discussion, using the different stems. Sample question stems:

What's the main idea of...?

What if ...?

How does....affect...?

What is a new example of...?

Explain why...?

Explain how...?

How does this relate to what I've learned before?

What conclusions can I draw about...?

What is the difference between...and...?

How are...and...similar?

How would I use...to...?

What are the strength and weaknesses of...?

What is the best...and why?

### **References:**

1. Demchenko Yu. V. Cooperative and contributive learning-the real choice to push professional education in networking informational technologies, 1997.

2. Solomon R., Davidson N., & Solomon E. Relationship activities for Cooperative and Colleague learning, 1992.

3. Cohen E.G. Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups 1994.

4. Cooper J. Cooperative learning and cloege teaching: tips for the trenches, 1990.

5. Davis J. R. Better teaching more learning. Phoenix, AZ: the Oryx press

6. Kagan S. Cooperative learning. Resources for teachers. 1992

7 "Forum English teaching" #1, 2009.

8. [http://www gmail.com](http://www.gmail.com).