

Five Basic Elements of Cooperative Learning

Effective small group learning means that all group members see and value the importance of working together and interacting in helpful ways. These five basic elements contribute to the effectiveness of cooperative activities and these elements set cooperative learning apart from group work.

A. Positive Interdependence – “Sink or swim together” Team members perceive that they need each other in order to complete the group’s task. Instructors may structure positive interdependence by establishing mutual goals (maximize own and each other’s productivity), joint rewards (if all group members achieve above the criteria, each will receive bonus points), shared resources (members have different expertise and limited resources are given to them) and assigned roles (summarizer, encourager of participation, and elaborator) When all members of a group feel connected to each other in the accomplishment of a common goal, they work towards that goal more successfully. Where all individuals must succeed for the group to succeed, the links between group members affirm the advantages of the group working together.

B. Individual Accountability – “No hitch-hikers” One of the purposes of a cooperative group is to maximize the learning of each member. A group is not cooperative if members are “hitch-hikers,” who let the others do all of the work. Observing the participation patterns of each group member, giving tests, randomly selecting members to explain answers, having members edit each other’s work, having students teach what they know to someone else, and having students use what they have learned on a different problem are ways to structure individual accountability. When every member of the group is held responsible to demonstrate accomplishment of the learning, the group will only succeed if each person fulfils their obligations.

C. Group Processing – “How we doin?” Groups need time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships among members. Instructors structure group processing by assigning such tasks as listing at least three members’ actions that helped the group be successful and listing at least one action that could be added to make the group even more successful the next time. Instructors also need to monitor the groups and give feedback on how well the groups are working together. By reflecting upon group interaction, group members can assess their collaborative efforts and target improvements. By assessing learning tasks together, members of groups can achieve their goals more effectively.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING PLANNING

COOPERATIVE LEARNING ELEMENT

HOW INCORPORATED IN THE ASSIGNMENT

Positive Interdependence

Individual Accountability

Face-to-Face Interaction

Social Skills

Processing

The Teacher's Role in Cooperative Learning

Make Pre-Instructional Decisions

Specify Academic and Social Skills Objectives: Every lesson has both (a) academic and (b) interpersonal and small group skills objectives.

Decide on Group Size: Learning groups should be small (groups of two or three members, four at the most).

Decide on Group Composition (Assign Students to Groups): Assign students to groups randomly or select groups yourself. Usually you will wish to maximize the heterogeneity in each group.

Assign Roles: Structure student-student interaction by assigning roles such as Reader, Recorder, Encourager of Participation and Checker for Understanding.

Arrange the Room: Group members should be "knee to knee and eye to eye" but arranged so they all can see the instructor at the front of the room.

Plan Materials: Arrange materials to give a "sink or swim together" message. Give only one paper to the group or give each member part of the material to be learned.

Explain Task And Cooperative Structure

Explain the Academic Task: Explain the task, the objectives of the lesson, the concepts and principles students need to know to complete the assignment, and the procedures they are to follow.

Explain the Criteria for Success: Student work should be evaluated on a criteria-referenced basis. Make clear your criteria for evaluating students' work.

Structure Positive Interdependence: Students must believe they "sink or swim together." Always establish mutual goals (students are responsible for their own learning and the learning of all other group members). Supplement, goal interdependence with celebration/reward, resource, role, and identity interdependence.

Structure Intergroup Cooperation: Have groups check with and help other groups. Extend the benefits of cooperation to the whole class.

Types of Groups

Base Groups

Base groups are long term groups (lasting for at least a year). These groups are heterogeneous groups with stable membership. The primary purpose of a base group is to provide support for each other, help each other out, encourage each other, and assist each other as needed to progress in each members academic objectives. Base groups provide students with long-term, committed relationships.

Formal Groups

Formal Groups last from one class period to several weeks. These groups ensure that students are actively involved in the intellectual work of organizing material, explaining the material, summarizing the material and integrating the material into conceptual structures. These groups are at the heart of cooperative learning.

Informal Groups

Informal groups are short lived groups lasting from a few minutes to one class period. Normally used during direct teaching (lectures, demonstrations, films, videos) to focus student attention on the material they are to learn, set a mood conducive to learning, help set expectations as to what the lesson will cover, ensure that students cognitively process the material you are teaching, and provide closure to an instructional session.

How To Establish A Positive Group Climate

1. Model it by being positive with your students.
2. Emphasize expected group behaviors (chart) daily: Listen Carefully.
Encourage Others
Ask For Help
Remain On Task
NO Free Rides !
3. Discuss the negative effects of put-downs on classroom contributing. Enforce the rule of no put-downs allowed with the 2 compliment rule (if they give a put-down, they immediately owe that person two compliments).
4. Have students routinely tell group members:
"I'm glad you are here."
"I'm glad you were here."
"Thanks for helping."
5. Have students give each other positive feedback each time they work as a group:
"It helped when you..."

"Three ways we did well were..."

"One way each member contributed was..."
6. When groups have problems, help them perceive them as interesting problem-solving situations. Work them through the steps: Define problem in specific terms, brainstorm possible solutions, try each one until the problem is solved.
7. Emphasize the successes of the group (even small ones) and have them Celebrate them often (congratulate each other, high fives!)