



Cooperative Learning for the Middle Level

Debbie Silver, Ed.D.
www.debbiesilver.com
debbie@debbiesilver.com

What is Cooperative Learning?

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that uses small groups of students working together and helping one another on specific learning tasks with an emphasis on group members supporting one another. It is characterized by activities that:

1. **Require students to depend on one another for success.** Having students sit side by side working on something they could just as easily do by themselves in *not* cooperative learning. Students must be required to share materials, knowledge, time, talents, and effort (or any combination of these).
2. **Provide for individual accountability.** Group members share jobs and make group presentations. Group members are tested individually and/or as a group to ensure that each person has mastered the required learning.
3. **Utilizes face-to-face interaction among students.** For all group work students are arranged in close proximity of each other. They can be at tables, in desks or chairs pushed together, on the floor, or virtually anywhere they can do the task at hand separated from other groups.
4. **Focus on interpersonal and group skills.** Tasks are designed to include components of positive interpersonal communication skills such as active listening, building consensus, sharing, supporting, restating, using appropriate eye contact and gestures, and encouraging. Teams learn to stay on task and check each other for understanding.

Traditional Classroom

Learners are passive
Students work alone
Teacher directs work
Silence is valued
Teacher initiates discussion
Some students do not participate
Individual accountability
Independent learners
Affirmations come from teacher
Individual materials needed

Cooperative Classroom

Learners are active
Students work with 1 to 4 partners
Students direct work
Learning noise is appropriate
Students initiate discussion
All students participate
Individual and group accountability
Interdependent learners
Affirmations come from peers
Shared materials

Effective Use of Cooperative Learning Can

1. Increase achievement (at all ability levels)
2. Empower students to take responsibility for their own learning
3. Improve retention
4. Generate more positive feelings towards the subject matter
5. Provide more active learning
6. Focus more time on learning
7. Lower frustration and anxiety among students
8. Enhance a sense of community among students
9. Promote inter-personal communication skills
10. Boost feelings of self-worth

How To Use Cooperative Learning:

Middle School Learners

In working with middle school learners it is important to remember that:

- Group members are responsible for the performance of each individual learner.
- Group members are individually accountable and must be able to report on or explain the team's results.
- The groups are to be assigned by the teacher. Their make-up should be heterogeneous with respect to sex, race, socioeconomic status, ability/learning styles, cliques, and other important factors.
- Leadership is shared on a rotating basis. Each team member has a job and responsibilities.
- The teacher is a resource; students are in charge of their own learning.
- Time must be allowed for group processing and self-evaluation.

The job assignments I use for traditional grouping are these:

Group Leader

1. Reads all directions to group
2. Leads the discussions
3. Checks the data sheet
4. Helps with clean-up
5. Is the only one who can ask a question of the teacher

Materials Manager

1. Is responsible for collecting and returning all materials & supplies to the appropriate place(s)
2. Is the only one who can get up for materials and supplies
3. Makes sure the everyone in the group has equal access to the materials and supplies
4. Checks the data sheet
5. Helps with clean-up

Time Keeper

1. Holds the team stopwatch (or watches the clock)
2. Keeps group on task and reminds them about time
3. Is responsible for getting the group to finish on time
4. Checks the data sheet
5. Helps with clean-up

Data Collector

1. Collects the data for the activity
2. Records data on the appropriate form or sheet
3. Returns data sheet to teacher and/or records group data on class data sheet
4. Makes sure all other team members check the data sheet
5. Helps with clean-up

Since this is not a perfect world, and all class populations are not divisible by four, I have a fifth job that can be assigned in a group:

Encourager

1. Monitors other team members to make sure they do their own jobs
2. Takes responsibility for praising and affirming jobs that are well done
3. Records comments and actions that show positive interpersonal communication
4. Reports recorded data to group at de-briefing session
5. Helps with clean-up

If a group of four has one member absent, two of the jobs can be combined for that day.

Part of the group's participation grade is based on how well each team member performs her/his job. Points are deducted if one team member does another team member's assigned responsibility.

Group Participation Number Line																				
Date: _____																				
Group Number: _____																				
Group Members Present: _____																				

100	95	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15	10	5	0
Participation Points Earned: _____																				

There is nothing chaotic about cooperative learning that is well-planned and well-managed. Teachers should plan activities that are challenging and yet doable if the group members work together. Tasks should require the concentrated efforts of all team members doing their jobs and working within the allotted time. Materials and supplies should be out and sorted before students arrive. During the cooperative learning activity it is the responsibility of the teacher to monitor the students and:

- Give immediate feedback and reinforcement for learning
- Re-teach certain concepts if necessary
- Clarify directions
- Encourage oral elaboration
- Affirm positive interactions and efforts
- Informally assess student learning and collaboration

Another way to ensure that the cooperative learning activity is organized and has a smooth closure is to allow time after clean up and whole group information sharing to ask the groups to evaluate how they interacted

with one another. Either verbally or in their journals students can answer questions like these:

- Tell how involved each of your team members was in the decisions your group made.
- How do you feel about the work your group did today? Why?
- What would you would like to tell your teammates about how you felt during today's activity or the way you feel now?
- What could your team do to improve the way you get along and/or work together?
- What is your favorite thing about being on this team?

Teachers need to keep a close watch on the personal interactions going on within groups. Happy well-functioning groups matched with appropriate tasks and given adequate time constraints run smoothly.

Alternative Ways to Use Cooperative Learning

- 1. Within a lecture or presentation:**
The teacher is discussing, modeling, or explaining something. S/he pauses to ask small groups to summarize, categorize, debate, describe, or otherwise react to the presented material.
- 2. With higher level questioning:**
The teacher asks small groups to come up with a team consensus on something to do with analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of the concept being discussed.
- 3. As practice reinforcement:**
The teacher asks students to get with their groups to practice, memorize, or review the given concepts.
- 4. Decision-making/problem solving:**
The group is to reach a decision or solve a problem presented by the teacher. The teacher is leading a class discussion on the separation of church and state in the United States Constitution. She asks small groups to meet and decide whether or not to include the words, "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance. Groups are to figure out a way for students to say the Pledge without violating the spirit of the law.

5. **As a review:**
The teacher asks a question. Team members put their heads together to discuss the answer. The teacher calls out a color, and the person who has that color dot will answer the question as the teacher whips through the groups.
6. **In a tournament or game format:**
There are several models for using cooperative learning in a tournament or game format. Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) and Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) are two of the more popular ones.
7. **With peer editing:**
Team members proofread each other's work and offer suggestions for improvement. This practice helps both the "corrector" and the "correctee."
8. **As an assessment:**
A Gallery Walk (sometimes called Carousel Walk) is a way to assess students in groups. The teacher puts large pieces of newsprint around the room. On the top of each is a question for which there are several answers. Student groups are given different colored markers and asked to write one correct answer to each question. Answers cannot be repeated on a page. The teacher can informally assess student learning by listening to them as they "think out loud" in their groups (Slavin calls this *oral elaboration*). Or teachers can more formally assess the answers by noting the flow of answers used by each colored group.
9. **Research projects or group investigations:**
Group work on projects can promote sharing of the load and commitment to a time line. Often times students who are procrastinators when it comes to doing their own work will get motivated by their peers to finish their part of the assignment.
10. **Checking homework:**
Even though homework is for independent practice, many teachers have limited time for checking and correcting it during a rushed day. Group members can check each other's work for accuracy.

For more information on the specific techniques mentioned in this chapter or for lessons designed around particular age groups and subject areas consult your local bookstore or the Internet. Cooperative learning

strategies abound. Using small group interactions is a powerful teaching tool that can be used to enhance the learning cycle and most other effective teaching strategies. Different marchers hearing different songs still need to learn to work successfully in groups when the need arises. Learning interpersonal communication skills helps students to become better citizens. Working in groups helps students "get better together."

Recommended Reading List

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., & Holubec, E.J. (1994). *The new circles of learning: Cooperation in the classroom and school*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).



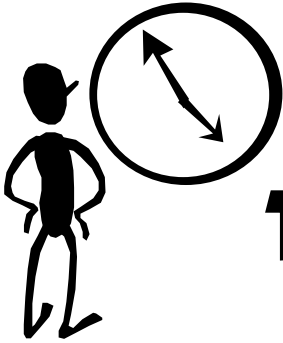
Group Leader

- 1. Reads all directions to group.**
- 2. Leads the discussions.**
- 3. Checks the data sheet.**
- 4. Helps with clean-up.**
- 5. Is the only one who can ask a question of the teacher.**



Materials Manager

- 1. Is responsible for collecting and returning all materials & supplies to the appropriate place(s).**
- 2. Is the only one who can get up for materials and supplies.**
- 3. Makes sure the everyone in the group has equal access to the materials and supplies.**
- 4. Checks the data sheet.**
- 5. Helps with clean-up.**



Time Keeper

- 1. Holds the team stopwatch (or watches the clock).**
- 2. Keeps group on task and reminds them about time.**
- 3. Is responsible for getting the group to finish on time.**
- 4. Checks the data sheet.**
- 5. Helps with clean-up.**



Data Collector

- 1. Collects the data for the activity.**
- 2. Records data on the appropriate form or sheet.**
- 3. Returns data sheet to teacher and/or records group data on class data sheet.**
- 4. Makes sure all other team members check the data sheet.**
- 5. Helps with clean-up.**



Encourager

- 1. Monitors other team members to make sure they do their own jobs.**
- 2. Takes responsibility for praising and affirming jobs that are well done.**
- 3. Records comments and actions that show positive interpersonal communication.**
- 4. Reports recorded data to group at de-briefing session.**
- 5. Helps with clean-up.**

Cooperative Learning (Reaching Consensus)

What is your team's name?

What is your team's logo?

What is your team's favorite movie?

What is your team's favorite food?

What is your team's favorite place to visit?

What is your team's favorite season?

Team Consensus Processing Guide

Now that your team has completed the Reaching Consensus Sheet, take a few minutes to look back at the interactions of your group. Each of you should write some notes, thoughts, or ideas on this form before you discuss how your group worked together. Look for any patterns in the perceptions of your team members.

- 1. Tell how involved each of your team members was in the decisions your group made.**
- 2. Do you feel good about the decisions your team made? Why or why not.**
- 3. Is there something you would like for your team members to know about the way you felt during the interactions or the way you feel now?**
- 4. How well did your team do in getting along and making joint decisions? What could you do to improve?**