

Cooperative Learning Roles for Students

Leader

Your job is to begin the discussion, you are to try to find connections between talking points.

Discussion Director:

Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about a particular book or topic—younger students may need the teachers help developing questions. You are to read the questions and help others have a chance to talk about their thoughts and ideas.

Literary Luminary (Special Reader)

Your job is to find a few special sections in the book or story to read aloud. If you are discussing a topic, your job is to highlight needed information or important information.

Illustrator

Your job is to draw some kind of picture that represents the book, story, or topic. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, or stick-figure scene. It may be something directly from the book or story. You can also choose to draw something that you are reminded about as you read or discuss. It could also be about a feeling you got during the discussion. You must label the drawing and be able to explain why you drew the picture.

Connector

Your job is to find connections with the book, story, or topic with other books, stories, topics or the world around us. This means that you are to think about how the information in the discussion is connected to your life, school, home, community, or other experiences you have had.

Summarizer

Your job is to prepare a brief summary of the discussion or reading. Your group will count on you to report the key information that was shared in your group to the whole class. Make a list during the discussion to help you.

Vocabulary Enricher

Your job is to look for or listen for a few important words in the reading or discussion. Write down words that your group has difficulty with or thinks puzzling. Discuss these words with your group and then with the whole class.

Travel Tracer (books and stories)

Your job is to keep track of the characters and places mentioned in the book or story. Be able to describe each character and scene.

Investigator

Your job is to find background information about the topic, book, or story. This may include:

- Geography—weather—or history about the topic
- Information about the author
- Information about time period in the book or story
- Pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate a part of the story or book
- Other interesting ideas of your own

This is not a research paper or formal report. You are to try to find information that will help your group understand the information better.

Timer

Your job is to help the discussion director make sure that everyone has a time to share ideas. You are responsible also for making sure that you finish the assignment on time.

Collector

Your job is to collect all the materials your group will need as it begins the assignment or discussion. These may include: paper, crayons, markers, paint, or other items. Your job is to put away these materials at the end of the assignment.

Encourager

Your job is to give praise to individual group members. Make sure each member is told that he or she is doing a great job.

Checker

Your job is to check the progress of the group and turn in the assignment to the teacher.

- Encourager -- The encourager gives compliments related to how the group is working, such as "That was a great answer!"
- Checker-- This member checks and hands in the work for the group

ERIC Identifier: ED370881

Publication Date: 1994-03-00

Author: Stahl, Robert J.

Source: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education Bloomington IN.

The Essential Elements of Cooperative Learning in the Classroom. ERIC Digest.

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Over the past decade, cooperative learning has emerged as the leading new approach to classroom instruction. One important reason for its advocacy is that numerous research studies in K-12 classrooms, in very diverse school settings and across a wide range of content areas, have revealed that students completing cooperative learning group tasks tend to have higher academic test scores, higher self-esteem, greater numbers of positive social skills, fewer stereotypes of individuals of other races or ethnic groups, and greater comprehension of the content and skills they are studying (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1993; Slavin 1991; Stahl and VanSickle 1992). Furthermore, the perspective of students working as "academic loners" in classrooms is very different from that of students working cooperatively and collaboratively in and as "cooperative learning academic teams" (see the chapter by Stahl in Stahl and VanSickle 1992).

Even with its increasing popularity, a large majority of the group tasks that teachers use, even teachers who claim to be using "cooperative learning," continue to be cooperative group tasks-not cooperative learning group tasks. For instance, nearly all "jigsaw" activities are not cooperative learning jigsaw activities. Merely because students work in small groups does not mean that they are cooperating to ensure their own learning and the learning of all others in their group (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1993). This emphasis on academic learning success for each individual and all members of the group is one feature that separates cooperative learning groups from other group tasks (Slavin 1990).

To be successful in setting up and having students complete group tasks within a cooperative learning framework, a number of essential elements or requirements must be met. The exact number, name, and order of these requirements vary from one author to another. However, nearly all agree that, in one way or another, the elements listed below are essential.

A CLEAR SET OF SPECIFIC STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME OBJECTIVES

Cooperative learning and cooperative learning groups are means to an end rather than an end in themselves. Therefore, teachers should begin planning by describing precisely what students are expected to learn and be able to do on their own well beyond the end of the group task and curriculum unit. Regardless of whether these outcomes emphasize academic content, cognitive processing abilities, or skills, teachers should describe in very unambiguous language the specific knowledge and abilities students are to acquire and then demonstrate on their own.

ALL STUDENTS IN THE GROUP "BUY INTO" THE TARGETED OUTCOME

It is not sufficient for teachers to select outcome objectives: students must perceive these objectives as their own. They must come to comprehend and accept that everyone in the group

needs to master the common set of information and/or skills. In selected strategies where groups select their own objectives, all members of each group must accept their academic outcomes as ones they all must achieve.

CLEAR AND COMPLETE SET OF TASK-COMPLETION DIRECTIONS OR

INSTRUCTIONS

Teachers need to state directions or instructions that describe in clear, precise terms exactly what students are to do, in what order, with what materials, and, when appropriate, what students are to generate as evidence of their mastery of targeted content and skills. These directions are given to students BEFORE they engage in their group learning efforts.

HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

Teachers should organize the three-, four-, or five-member groups so that students are mixed as heterogeneously as possible, first according to academic abilities, and then on the basis of ethnic backgrounds, race, and gender. Students should not be allowed to form their groups based on friendship or cliques. When groups are maximally heterogeneous and the other essential elements are met, students tend to interact and achieve in ways and at levels that are rarely found in other instructional strategies. They also tend to become tolerant of diverse viewpoints, to consider others' thoughts and feelings in depth, and seek more support and clarification of others' positions. (A limited number of proven cooperative learning strategies allow teachers academically sound alternatives to maximal heterogeneous groups. If these strategies are not used, then maximal heterogeneity along the above criteria is needed.)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS

Every student must believe that he or she has an equal chance of learning the content and abilities, and earning the group rewards for academic success, regardless of the group he or she is in. In other words, the student must not feel penalized academically by being placed in a particular group.

POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE.

Teachers must structure learning tasks so that students come to believe that they sink or swim together--that is, their access to rewards is as a member of an academic team wherein all members receive a reward or no member does. Essentially, tasks are structured so that students must depend upon one another for their personal, teammates', and group's success in completing the assigned tasks and mastering the targeted content and skills.

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION.

Students need to arrange themselves so that they are positioned and postured to face each other for direct eye-to-eye contact and face-to-face academic conversations using "12 inch voices."

POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

Merely because students are placed in groups and expected to use appropriate social and group skills does not mean students will automatically use these skills. To work together as a group, students need to engage in such interactive abilities as leadership, trust-building, conflict-management, constructive criticism, encouragement, compromise, negotiation, and clarifying. Teachers may need to describe the expected social interaction behaviors and attitudes of

students and to assign particular students specific roles to ensure that they consciously work on these behaviors in their groups.

ACCESS TO MUST-LEARN INFORMATION

Teachers must structure the tasks so that students have access to and comprehend the specific information that they must learn. The content focus of learning tasks must be aligned directly with the specific outcome objectives and the test items that will be used to measure their academic achievement.

OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPLETE REQUIRED INFORMATION-PROCESSING TASKS.

For students to be successful, each must complete a number of internal information-processing tasks aligned with targeted objectives, such as comprehending, translating, making connections, assigning meanings, organizing the data, and assessing the relevancy and uses of the information they study. Assigned group tasks direct students to complete the relevant internal processing tasks they need to complete.

SUFFICIENT TIME IS SPENT LEARNING

Each student and group should be provided the amount of time needed to learn the targeted information and abilities to the extent expected. Without students' spending sufficient time learning, the academic benefits of cooperative learning will be limited (Stahl 1992). (Many of the positive affective, social skills and attitudes, and academic benefits of cooperative learning tend to emerge and be retained only after students have spent four or more weeks together in the same heterogeneous group.)

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The reasons why teachers put students in cooperative learning groups is so all students can achieve higher academic success individually than were they to study alone. Consequently, each must be held individually responsible and accountable for doing his or her own share of the work and for learning what has been targeted to be learned. Therefore, each student must be formally and individually tested to determine the extent to which he or she has mastered and retained the targeted academic content and abilities.

PUBLIC RECOGNITION AND REWARDS FOR GROUP ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Only members of groups who meet or surpass high levels of academic achievement receive ample rewards within formal public settings. The specific awards must be something valued by the students.

POST-GROUP REFLECTION (OR DEBRIEFING) ON WITHIN-GROUP BEHAVIORS

Students spend time after the group tasks have been completed to systematically reflect upon how they worked together as a team in such areas as (a) how well they achieved their group goals, (b) how they helped each other comprehend the content, resources, and task procedures, (c) how they used positive behaviors and attitudes to enable each individual and the entire group as a group to be successful, and (d) what they need to do next time to make their groups even more successful.

Every one of the preceding elements does not have to be used every time the teacher assigns students to work in groups. However, teachers who fail to include these requirements report far more difficulties with

their students and their group activities, and far less student academic achievement gains than do teachers who meet them. As a general rule, unless a well-researched strategy is used that allows for an alternative to one or more of these elements, teachers serious about implementing effective cooperative learning activities need to ensure that these requirements are met for each cooperative learning strategy they use-- otherwise they are using structured cooperative groups. More importantly, unless these elements are used frequently and correctly, teachers should not expect the many positive long-term results of cooperative learning that can be achieved.

REFERENCES AND ERIC RESOURCES

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2842; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1440 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from the UMI reprint service.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement,
U.S. Department of Education, under contract RR93002014. The opinions expressed do not necessarily
reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.

Title: The Essential Elements of Cooperative Learning in the Classroom. ERIC Digest.
Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071);
Guides---Non-Classroom Use (055); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text
(073);
Target Audience: Researchers, Teachers, Practitioners
Descriptors: Cooperative Learning, Elementary Secondary Education, Group Activities, Group
Discussion, Group Dynamics, Grouping (Instructional Purposes), Intergroup Relations,
Interpersonal Relationship, Learning Strategies, Small Group Instruction, Student Educational
Objectives
Identifiers: ERIC Digests

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Many instructors voice legitimate concerns or objections about adapting cooperative learning in their
classrooms. Here are the most common:

1. "*I can't cover as much content in my lectures.*" It is certainly true that time spent in cooperative
learning groups is time away from the lecture. Many of us feel that we already have too much content to
teach in the forty to forty-five contact hours per term available in many courses. However, the information

in our disciplines is only going to increase in amount and complexity. Because we cannot teach everything in any discipline, we must start teaching a more limited number of overarching concepts with wide-ranging applicability. Thus, we are covering less content via the lecture in our cooperative learning-taught classes. However, the retention rates for material that is presented in lecture and practiced in small groups is increased substantially. Courses taught using cooperative learning result in content being learned at a higher level of mastery and being retained longer relative to the case with more traditionally taught classes. Thus, the content is available for generalizing to new situations because it has been modeled, discussed, and critiqued in highly interactive small groups. Compare this cooperative form of learning difficult material with a more traditional procedure in which the student hears a lecture on a given topic, then memorizes as much of this content as possible for an exam given several weeks after the lecture (Johnson and Johnson, 1989).

2. *"I don't have time to prepare cooperative learning activities."* The first time an instructor converts a course to include cooperative learning activities, there is an additional time commitment involved. However, the power of cooperative learning is such that students become highly involved, even in such easily accessible material as old exams, exercises from instructor or Student manuals, and simple problem sets. The pleasure of watching students actively engage in solving the problems is so exciting that it makes whatever additional time is required for preparation seem like time well spent. Once the instructor becomes more skilled at identifying the major concepts within his or her courses, and observing what works and what doesn't in small groups, he or she becomes more interested in constructing materials that are more challenging, more exciting, and more tightly linked to his or her own course goals.

3. *"What happens when some people work and others don't?"* This objection is partially handled by making students individually accountable. Almost all the course grade in cooperative learning courses is still determined by individually completed tests, papers, and so on. To deal with a sandbagger who will not contribute, we suggest keeping close tabs on groups as they work. During cooperative learning class time, the instructor should remain in the classroom, moving from team to team, monitoring group progress. If there is a noncontributing group member, the instructor may take that person aside, outside of class, and attempt to remedy the problem. Failing this, the instructor may intervene within the group setting. Only if a student repeatedly and intentionally refuses to contribute to the group would we recommend dismissal from the group. This rarely happens, especially if the teacher states on the first day of the class and in the syllabus that all students are expected to participate in group activities.

Cooperative Group Rubric

Achieving the Goals of the Group

- 4 Participates actively and even helps lead the group in setting goals. Does the assigned job better than expected.
- 3 Participates in group discussions and demonstrates high level concern about group goals. Completes the assigned job.
- 2 Participates in group discussions and demonstrates concern about group goals. Does not complete the assigned job.
- 1 Does not participate in group discussions or demonstrate concern about group goals. May demonstrate opposition to group goals.

Communication with other Group Members

- 4 Encourages good communication among group members. Ensures that each member shares ideas. Demonstrates concern and care for other members' feelings and ideas.
- 3 Participates in group discussions without being asked. Shares ideas and demonstrates concern and care for other members' feelings and ideas.
- 2 Participates in group discussions when asked. Shares ideas, but does not demonstrate care and concern for the feelings and ideas of others.
- 1 Does not participate in group discussions even when asked. Shares ideas in ways that demonstrates unconcern and uncaring attitude about others.

Cooperative Spirit within the Group

- 4 Encourages others to evaluate how well we are as a group. Attempts to involve each member in thinking of ways to make the group work better. When changes are made, tries to ensure that they help group members work together.
- 3 Participates in discussions of how well group is working together. Suggests ways to improve. Works on making changes that have been agreed to by all.
- 2 Participates in discussions about working together when asked. Does not suggest ways to improve. Makes little effort to make changes.
- 1 Does not participate in discussions about group cooperation. Refuses to make changes others agree to make to improve the group.

Job Assignments

- 4 Performs many jobs within the group well.
- 3 Performs two jobs within the group well.
- 2 Attempts to perform two jobs, but does not perform both well.
- 1 Does not try to perform more than one job in the group,