

COOPERATIVE LEARNING



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What is cooperative learning?

Cooperative learning is a teaching arrangement that refers to small, heterogeneous groups of students working together to achieve a common goal. Students work together to learn and are responsible for their teammates' learning as well as their own. The basic elements of cooperative learning according to Johnson and Johnson are:

- Clearly perceived positive interdependence,
- Considerable promotive (face-to-face) interaction,
- Clearly perceived individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals,
- Frequent use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills, and
- Frequent and regular group processing of current functioning to improve the group's future effectiveness.

Kagan (1994) offers the following basic elements of cooperative learning:

- Positive Interdependence - occurs when gains of individuals or teams are positively correlated,
- Individual Accountability - occurs when all students in a group are held accountable for doing a share of the work and for mastery of the material to be learned,
- Equal Participation - occurs when each member of the group is afforded equal shares of responsibility and input, and
- Simultaneous Interaction - occurs when class time is designed to allow many student interactions during the period (Kagan, 1994).

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How can cooperative learning help your students?

A synthesis of research about cooperative learning finds that cooperative learning strategies improve the achievement of students and their interpersonal relationships. In 67 studies of the achievement effects of cooperative learning, 61% found significantly greater achievement in cooperative groups than in traditionally taught control groups. Positive effects were found in all major subjects at all grade levels, in urban, rural, and suburban schools, and for high, average, and low achievers (Slavin, 1991).

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How can you implement cooperative learning in order to effectively meet the diverse learning needs of students?

Cooperative learning has promise for the field of special education because students with disabilities need quality experiences grappling with academics in social settings. The following guidelines can help special education teachers and general education teachers make instructional decisions:

- What is it that I want students to learn and be able to do?
 - Can I correlate this goal with an IEP, state, or national standard?
 - Will this be important to the students in 1 week, 1 year, and 10 years?
 - Am I spending my teaching time wisely on this concept?
- How will I know when they get there?
 - Are there benchmarks involved?
 - Are the students ready to obtain this idea?
 - Am I going to need assistance from additional resources, technology, or manpower?
- How will I evaluate?
 - Has a rubric or criteria been developed?
 - How will I communicate with the learner about progress?
 - How will I communicate with parents and administrators about progress?
 - How will learners communicate about progress with me?
 - (Sonnier-York & Stanford, 2002)

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What are the different types of cooperative learning?

There are many types of cooperative learning structures. Here are a few examples from Kagan's (1994) book on cooperative learning:

- **Think-Pair-Share** - The teacher poses a question to the class. The students think about their response, and then students pair with a partner to talk over their ideas. Finally, students share their ideas with the class.
- **Rallytable** - Students are working in pairs, within their teams. Students will take turns writing on one piece of paper or completing a task.
- **Numbered Heads Together** - Students within the team number off from 1-4. The teacher poses a question and the students put their heads together to discuss the answer. The teacher randomly calls a number and from each team the student with that number writes the answer on the team response board.
- **Showdown** - Each student writes his answer on his individual response board. When everyone in the group is ready, the leader says "Showdown" and team members compare and discuss their answers.

- **Teammates Consult** - Students all have their own copy of the same worksheet or assignment questions. A large cup is placed in the center of each team, and students begin by placing their pencils in the cup. With pencils still in the cup, they discuss their answers to the first question. When all team members are ready, they remove their pencils from the cup and write their answers without talking. They repeat this process with the remaining questions.
- **4S Brainstorming** - Students in the group have roles: Speed Captain (prompts more ideas), Super Supporter (encourages/recognizes all ideas), Synergy Guru (encourages members to build upon one another's ideas), and Secretary (writes ideas). Members carry out their respective roles while the team generates a variety of possible responses.

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Where can you find more information about cooperative learning?

Research Articles

Emmer, E. T., & Gerwels, M. C. (2002). Cooperative learning in elementary classrooms: Teaching practices and lesson characteristics. *The Elementary School Journal*, 103(1), 75-91.

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Wolford, P.L., Heward, W. L., & Alber, S. R. (2001). *Teaching middle school students with learning disabilities to recruit peer assistance during cooperative learning group activities. Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 16(3), 161-173.

Descriptive Articles

Goodwin, M. W. (1999). Cooperative learning and social skills: What skills to teach and how to teach them. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 35(1), 29-33.

King-Sears, M. E. (1997). Best academic practices for inclusive classrooms. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 29(7) 1-29.

Slavin, R. E., & Cooper, R. (1999). Improving intergroup

- relations: Lessons learned from cooperative learning programs. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(4), 647-663.
- Slavin, R. E. (1999). Comprehensive approaches to cooperative learning. *Theory Into Practice*, 38(2), 74-79.
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- Sonnier-York, C. & Stanford, P. (2002). Learning to cooperate: A teacher's perspective. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 34(6), 40-55.
- Stahl, R. J. (1994). The essential elements of cooperative learning in the classroom. *ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education*. ERIC ID: ED370881.

Books

- Johnson, D. W. & Johnson R. T. (1999). *Learning Together and Alone: Cooperative Competitive, and Individualistic Learning* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Cooperative Learning*. San Clemente, California: Kagan Publishing.
- Slavin, R. E. (1995). *Cooperative Learning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Websites

The Cooperative Learning Center

<http://www.clcrc.com>

This is an informational website about the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota which is co-directed by Roger T. Johnson and David W. Johnson.

Cyber Co-op

<http://204.184.214.251/coop/ecoopmain.html>

This site provides cooperative learning activities and lessons which are organized by subject area for grades kindergarten through fifth.

Teach-nology

<http://www.teach-nology.com>

Teach-nology.com offers teachers free access to 19,000 lesson plans, 5,600 printable worksheets, over 200,000 reviewed web sites, rubrics, educational games, teaching tips, advice from expert teachers, current education news, teacher downloads, web quests, and teacher tools for creating exciting classroom instruction.

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