

CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING

Background

Research verifies that students' results improve with co-operative learning as opposed to individual learning (Hattie, 2009). With co-operative learning, students have the opportunity to see other perspectives, there are more opportunities to discuss, debate and challenge the material being learnt and there are greater opportunities for peer tutoring.

Process

If students are working in an unstructured interaction, then this is group work and NOT co-operative learning. Co-operative learning activities must have all four of the following elements:

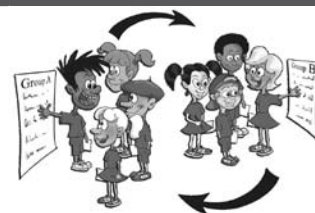
Positive Interdependence:

The activity or task cannot be completed by one person. There is positive interdependence where the group must sink or swim together, i.e. it is everyone's responsibility to learn the material for the group to be successful. There must be a clear and common accepted goal.



Individual Accountability:

In a co-operative learning task there is no place to hide as the task must involve an individual public performance.



Monitor the Groups:

What percentage of students are actively engaged in the activity? How well is each group functioning? What co-operative learning skills, such as listening, compromising and negotiating are lacking?



Equal Participation:

The activity must be structured so that one person is not allowed to dominate. For example, if students were working in pairs, half the students (Students A) could be allocated one minute to discuss the topic at hand with their partner. After one minute and at the signal from the teacher, the other half (Students B) have their allotted one minute (see Think:Pair:Share p.27). It may not always be possible to ensure that each person in the group has exactly the same participation in the activity, but it is important that it is reasonably equitable.



Observation

The co-operative learning tools in the *innovative teachers' companion*[®] include; **Silent Card Shuffle** (p.116), **Round Robin and Hot Potato** (p.112), **1:4:P:C:R** (p.100), **Pairs & RAS Alert** (p.186), **Jigsaw** (p.104) and **Judge Jury** (p.108).

Acknowledgment: Adapted from Johnson, D & Johnson R, *Learning Together and Alone*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983 and the International Association for the Study of Co-operation in Education (IASCE) Conference, 2010.

Examples

Senior and Middle Primary

Think:Pair:Share

This versatile co-operative learning structure is ideal as a consolidating activity and therefore should be used frequently in the classroom. It involves students working in pairs (Student A and Student B) and it has 3 stages:

1. Think:

This is where students are given individual quiet time, such as one minute, to address the question or task at hand. A variation on the set allocated time is that once a student has had the time to reflect on the task, the student places his/her pen on the table. Once both students in the pair have their pens on the table, they move to the 'Pair' stage.

Note: Since we should always be specific with the language of thinking, it is better to replace the word 'Think', as used in the name of this co-operative learning tool, with the specific thinking verb from the task or question. For example, if you are asking the students to decide 'which is the more important...' or 'which is the best...', the activity would be a 'Decide:Pair:Share'. If you asked the students to 'state 3 facts about ...' it might be called a 'Recall:Pair:Share'.



2. Pair:

Students now discuss their thoughts. Since it is important that both students participate equally in the activity, allow one minute of timed conversation each. The cues for this stage are:

- "Student A – you have one minute to state..... ". After one minute, signal the end of the allocated time.
- "Student B - thank Student A by stating – 'The part that I liked most about your discussion was ... OR "The most interesting point you made was ...' ". This is important as it ensures that Student B was actually listening and therefore honours Student A. It also fosters good interpersonal skills.
- Repeat the process so that Student B talks for one minute followed by Student A thanking Student B for his/her contribution.

Note: Stress to the students that they cannot interrupt their partner during their allocated one minute, even if they pause or cannot complete their allocated time.

3. Share:

This involves feedback to the teacher and/or the class. Depending on how much time you wish to allocate to this stage, will determine how many responses you wish to be shared. The following are some possible structures:

- 100% sharing: This involves students sitting in groups of 4. After the 'Think' stage, each student is allocated one minute to share their thoughts with the group of 4.
- 50% sharing: Nominate one person from each group (Student A or Student B) to summarise the pair's discussions with the class.
- 25% sharing: If students are sitting in groups of 4, nominate one person from the group of 4 to share.

