

# COOPERATIVE LEARNING ROLES



## WHAT IS IT?

Cooperative learning is a versatile procedure that structures the learning process in small group format to facilitate students in accomplishing a shared goal within their group. To accomplish this goal, students within each group are assigned individual roles with unique responsibilities that contribute to the completion of the whole group's task (i.e., shared goal).

## WHY DOES IT WORK?

Cooperative learning roles increase student learning because working together towards a shared goal produces higher achievement and greater productivity than when working alone. This higher achievement and greater productivity is shown as students who work in these role defined groups display process gains (i.e., increased higher-level reasoning, increased frequency in production of new ideas and solutions, and etc.), greater transfer across different task related situations (i.e., group to individual transfer, content transfer, and etc.), and an increase in their active and meaningful engagement with content and learning. However, for these student achievements to occur, cooperative learning groups and their roles must be structured around five essential elements: 1) Positive interdependence; 2) Individual accountability; 3) Face-to-face promotive interaction; 4) Social skills; and 5) Group processing.



## WHO DOES IT WORK FOR?

Due to cooperative learning (i.e., groups and roles) being an inclusive teaching strategy, this instructional approach works for all learners, including students with mild disabilities, English Language Learners, and students in general education classrooms.

## GROUPS AND ROLES: A CLOSER LOOK

Cooperative learning groups and the roles within them depend on the type of cooperative learning that the assigned task calls for. The two major types of cooperative learning are formal and informal.

### FORMAL COOPERATIVE LEARNING:

Formal cooperative learning consists of students working together in small, heterogeneous groups during one class period or throughout several weeks. During this time, students work toward the shared goal by completing tasks or assignments. This type of cooperative learning is used to teach specific content and results in student produced work (i.e., projects, reports, etc.)

#### Potential Project Based Roles:

- **Leader/Editor:** Student is in charge of facilitating the behavior and engagement of the group members, while also being responsible for organizing the final product (i.e., rubric evaluations, completeness, etc.).
- **Recorder/Secretary:** Student is in charge of taking note of group meetings, tracking group data, sources, or materials, and distributing these notes to all group members.
- **Checker:** Student is in charge of evaluating data, sources, graphics, or other product information for accuracy and reliability.
- **Presenter:** Student is responsible for organizing the technical details of the presentation (i.e., summarizations, key points, and etc.).

### INFORMAL COOPERATIVE LEARNING:

Informal cooperative learning consists of students working together toward a shared learning goal in temporary, ad-hoc groups during a few minutes or throughout one class period. This type of cooperative learning is used to ensure active cognitive processing of information presented in a lecture or lesson and frequently takes the form of discussion based tasks.

#### Potential Discussion Based Roles:

- **Facilitator:** Student is in charge of maintaining the flow of conversation, as well as the engagement of all group members in the discussion. This student will often pose questions to the group to drive the discussion.
- **Timekeeper:** Student is in charge of ensuring the group stays on track with the allotted time in aims to cover the necessary material and operate efficiently.
- **Summarizer:** Student is in charge of making note of key points through out the discussion and providing a summary of those points after the discussion is complete.
- **Elaborator:** Student is in charge of making connections between points made by individual group members, as well as connections between the topic of discussion and past topics or themes learned in the classroom.

# USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING ROLES TO TEACH CONTENT

## PRE-IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

### 1 Objectives

Before implementing cooperative learning roles, you must specify your instructional objectives (i.e., academic and social) for the cooperative learning activity; meaning, you must explain its use, benefits, and its intended results for the content and students.

### 2 Groups

After defining your objectives, determine the appropriate group size and assign students to groups. Group sizes range from 2-4 students, depending on the task. Students are assigned in heterogeneous groups to mix student abilities, backgrounds, or etc.

### 3 Arrange

After constructing your groups, arrange your classroom to optimize the space for cooperative learning. This arrangement should allow students to easily interact with their group, as well as efficiently move around the room to access materials.

### 4 Plan

Following your classroom arrangement, be sure to plan your instructional materials to foster interdependence within the groups. This allows students equal responsibility within their roles so that each role contributes to the success of the group.

### 5 Roles

Once your instructional materials have been planned, proceed by assigning each student a role within their group. There are a variety of role sets to select, so be sure to select sets that are most appropriate for your instructional goals and content.

### 6 Task

After assigning student roles, proceed by assigning the task (i.e., student produced product). This task should be matched to standards and the intended content. When assigning the task, procedures should be clearly explained to the students.

### 7 Criteria

Once the task has been assigned, allow time to explain the criteria (i.e., expectations) for success in the task, as well as for the behaviors and responsibilities expected for each role. Role behaviors can be explicitly taught, modeled, or provided on student cards.

## IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

### 8 Work

Once the cooperative learning activity has been implemented, students will begin working in their groups. In addition to their specific roles, students should be working cohesively, listening to one another, and being actively engaged with the task.

### 9 Monitor

While students are working in their groups to fulfill their roles, monitor the groups by circulating around the classroom. During this time, you should monitor behavior, intervene when necessary, and provide assistance and praise when appropriate.

## POST-IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

### 10 Closure

Depending on the length of the cooperative learning activity, closure may be given at the end of the class period or weeks later once the task is complete. This closure should provide students with opportunities to share work, learn from others, and summarize key ideas.

### 11 Evaluate

The product produced by each group should be evaluated using a rubric to assess student learning. Students should also evaluate one another in their role contributions to the group using a student rubric. After evaluations, feedback is given.

### 12 Reflect

Following the evaluations, you should reflect on what worked, what did not work, and why. Record these observations and use them to guide your future instructional decisions for similar activities.

## REFERENCES

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