



Small Groups as a Cooperative Learning Approach

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Olena Pometun, D.Ed., Professor

Cooperation is working together to achieve common goals.

Cooperative learning is a type of interactive education, where participants work in small groups united by a common learning goal, thus ensuring an effective learning process for themselves and their peers.

Reasons for using cooperative learning

In the learning process the learners' goals stimulate their joint efforts, rather than individual efforts or competition.

This *determines*: the learning achievements/performance, positive relationships and psychological wellbeing of the learners.

Principles of learning

- **“I benefit from your success, as you do from mine”.**
- **“We either sink or swim, but together”.**
- **“We can't do without you”.**

Factors that enable effective group work

- A positive interdependence between group members.
- Personal interaction that stimulates activity.
- Individual and group responsibility.
- Interpersonal and group communication skills.
- Feedback.

Positive interdependence between group members

- The input of each member of the group is needed and integral for the success of the whole group.
- Each group member makes a unique contribution to the joint efforts of the group thanks to his/her capabilities and/or role and responsibilities in performing the task.
- While striving for own success, each group member wants his/her peers to succeed as well, and it is the essence of cooperative learning.

Personal interaction that stimulates activity

- Group members work together facing each other.
- They are engaged in real work, where each is trying to succeed individually and facilitate the success of the others
- Such organization of teaching and learning serves both as a learning support and a personal support system.
- Different types of activities are possible, e.g.: oral explanation of problem solving strategies, sharing own knowledge, checking for understanding, discussion of concepts that are being studied, integrating the new content into existing knowledge.

Individual and group responsibility

- Each member of the group is responsible for their part of the group work.
- The group as a whole is responsible for achieving its goals.
- The work of every group member is evaluated by the group and by him/her to determine who needs help, support or encouragement in the learning process.

Skills for interpersonal and group communication

- It is important to specifically develop the communicative abilities and skills of the participants, in the same way as their learning skills.
- The participants should complete the given task and in the same time perform the task of functioning effectively as a group.

Feedback

- The ongoing improvement of learning occurs only when the group results are presented and thoroughly analyzed.
- In the concluding part of the group work the process and results are debriefed to determine the aspects of the group interaction that worked well and those that did not, as well as what needs to be changed.

Key stages

- Making small groups
- Setting a task (briefing)
- Group performance of the task
- Shared presentation of group results

WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS (1)

Quickly allocate the roles in the group.

Manager (Speaker)

reads the group task, organizes the process, invites the group members to speak in turns, motivates the group to work, summarizes the group's conclusions, nominates the reporter by agreement with the group.

Note-taker

takes short and easy-to-read notes of the group results; as a member of this group, he/she may be prepared to express the idea of the group when the conclusions are summarized or help the reporter.

Time-keeper

keeps the time;

motivates the group to work.

Reporter

gives a report on the group's results;

clearly presents the ideas and conclusions reached by the group.

WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS (2)

- At first, start speaking at will and then take turns to speak.
- Follow the rules for active listening and, most importantly, avoid interrupting each other.
- Discuss ideas, not the individual students who put forward a particular idea.
- Refrain from judging or insulting group members.
- Try to reach a general consensus in the group, though in some situations there may be a dissenting opinion, which is, too, valuable in its own right.

Stage 1. Creating small groups

- It is best to have groups of 3 to 6 members (even/uneven number of participants).
- Groups can be made:
- on voluntary basis;
- at the draw, e.g.; by seasons of the year, flowers (you can use cards of different colours, various objects), etc.;
- according to the list prepared in advance.

Stage 2.

Briefing: the task and time schedule

The task may be:

- **the same for all groups** (regardless of group composition) *in its content and method (process)* of completion;
- **different for different groups** *in its content*: complementary or consistently linked to the tasks of the other groups within one logical content framework; this approach helps to consider an issue from different perspectives;
- **different for different groups** *in its process*.

However, the task should always involve a possibility (mandatory requirement) for performing it together, discussing together and for everyone to contribute. For example:

- make up a list of causes, characteristics...;
- give an answer to a problem-based question and substantiate it (evaluate something);
- develop a plan, a hypothesis, etc.

Stage 3. Group performance of the task

- Remind the rules.
- Assign the roles in the groups.
- Consult the groups, as required.
- Observe the time schedule.

Stage 4. Shared presentation of the group results

- Ask the groups to finish their work.
- Facilitate a presentation of results (the sequence of group reports, format, e.g.; collecting ideas from each group or back-to-back group presentations on the issue).
- Stick to the time limits for presentations.
- Reflect on the group results and process. What was happening? Are you satisfied with the results? How did you feel working in a group? What needs to be changed?

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information engender in you?
Why did we include it into the
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Was it helpful to you?

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FOR YOUR ATTENTION*

