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# The Cooperative Link



## Cooperative Learning

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### Greetings From The Johnsons

Greetings! Here we are again! We have had a busy year, both nationally and internationally.

Roger, David, and Edythe continue to do cooperative learning training. Cooperative learning in Spain continues under the direction of Nicolas Muracciole and Javier Bahon.

We are waiting for staff development to be revived in K-12 schools in the U.S. We continue to encourage colleges and universities to train their faculty in cooperative learning procedures.

The theme of this newsletter is teaching students the social skills they need to cooperate with others. This issue was originally published in 1996, but it is still as relevant today as it was then.

We hope all of you are helping classrooms become cooperative places where students care about each others' success. An essential aspect of doing so is ensuring that students are learning the social skills needed to be work cooperatively with others.

Roger, David, and Edythe

### Teaching Social Skills

**1. Social Skills Must Be Learned:** Placing socially unskilled students in a group and telling them to cooperate does not guarantee that they are able to do so. We are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Interpersonal and small group skills do not magically appear when they are needed. You must teach students the social skills required for high quality cooperation and motivate students to use the skills if cooperative groups are to be productive.

**2. Every Cooperative Lesson Is A Lesson In Social Skills As Well As Academics:** In cooperative learning groups, students must learn both academic subject matter (**taskwork**) and the interpersonal and small group skills required to function as part of a group (**teamwork**). Cooperative learning is inherently more complex than competitive or individualistic learning because students have to simultaneously engage in taskwork and teamwork. If group members are inept at teamwork, their taskwork will tend to be substandard. The greater the members' teamwork skills, the higher will be the quality and quantity of their learning.

| When We Work In Groups We |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>G</b>                  | Give Encouragement   |
| <b>R</b>                  | Respect Others       |
| <b>O</b>                  | Stay On Task         |
| <b>U</b>                  | Use Quiet Voices     |
| <b>P</b>                  | Participate Actively |
| <b>S</b>                  | Stay In Our Group    |

**3. Understand The What And How Of Teamwork Skills:** In teaching students teamwork skills you need to understand what skills to teach and how to teach social skills.

#### 4. Follow The Three Rules Of Teaching Teamwork Skills:

- 1 Be specific.** Operationally define each social skill by a T-Chart.
- 2 Start small.** Do not overload your students with more social skills than they can learn at one time. One or two behaviors to emphasize for a few lessons is enough. Students need to know what behavior is appropriate and desirable within a cooperative learning group, but they should not be subjected to information overload.
- 3 Emphasize overlearning.** Having students practice skills once or twice is not enough. Keep emphasizing a skill until the students have integrated it into

their behavioral repertoires and do it automatically and habitually.

### What Skills To Teach

Numerous interpersonal and small group skills affect the success of cooperative efforts. To coordinate efforts to achieve mutual goals, students must (a) get to know and trust each other, (b) communicate accurately and unambiguously, (c) accept and support each other, and (c) resolve conflicts constructively (Johnson, 1991, 1993; Johnson & F. Johnson, 1994). What cooperative skills you emphasize in a lesson depends on what skills your students have and have not mastered. There are four levels of cooperative skills:

- **Forming:** The skills needed to establish a cooperative learning group, such as "stay with your group and do not wander around the room," "use quiet voices," "take turns," and "use each other's names."
- **Functioning:** The skills needed to manage the group's activities in completing the task and maintaining effective working relationships among members, such as giving one's ideas and conclusions, providing direction to the group's work, and encouraging everyone to participate.
- **Formulating:** The skills needed to build deeper-level understanding of the material being studied, to stimulate the use of higher-quality reasoning strategies, and to maximize mastery and retention of the assigned material. Examples are explaining step-by-step one's reasoning and relating what is being studied to previous learning.
- **Fermenting:** The skills needed to stimulate reconceptualization

of the material being studied, cognitive conflict, the search for more information, and the communication of the rationale behind one's conclusions. Examples are criticizing ideas (not people) and not changing your mind unless you are logically persuaded (majority rule does not promote learning).

|          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| <b>K</b> | Keep On Task         |
| <b>I</b> | Include Everyone     |
| <b>S</b> | Six-Inch Voices      |
| <b>S</b> | Stay With Your Group |
| <b>E</b> | Encourage Everyone   |
| <b>S</b> | Share Ideas          |

### How To Teach Skills

When police evaluate potential suspects, they look for the joint presence of three characteristics: opportunity, motive, and means. Engaging in an interpersonal action requires the contact opportunity with other people for the act to occur, a reason sufficient to motivate the act, and access to a method or procedure whereby the act can occur. For students to work as a team, they need (a) an opportunity to work together cooperatively (where teamwork skills can be manifested), (b) a motivation to engage in the teamwork skills (a reason to believe that such actions will be beneficial to them), and (c) some proficiency in using teamwork skills. After providing students with the opportunity to learn in cooperative groups, you must provide students with the motive and means for doing so.

**The first step is to ensure that students see the need for the teamwork skill.** To establish the need for the teamwork skill, you can:

- 1 Ask students to suggest the teamwork skills they need to work together more effectively. From the skills suggested, choose one or more to emphasize.

- 2 Present a case to students that they are better off knowing, than not knowing the chosen skills. You can display posters, tell students how important the skills are, complement students who use the skills.
- 3 Setting up a role play that provides a counter-example where the skill is obviously missing in a group is a fun way to illustrate the need for the skill.

**The second step is to ensure that students understand what the skill is, how to engage in the skill, and when to use the skill.** To give students a clear idea of what the skill is and how and when to perform it, you can:

- Operationally define the skill into actual verbal and nonverbal behaviors so that students know specifically what to do. It is not enough to tell students what skills you wish to see them use during the lesson (*"Please encourage each other's participation and check each other's understanding of what is being learned."*). What is encouraging to one student may be discouraging to another. You must explain exactly what they are to do. One way to explain a social skill is through a T-Chart. The teacher lists the skill (e.g., encouraging participation) and then asks the class, *"What would this skill look like (nonverbal behaviors)?"* After students generate several ideas, you ask the class, *"What would this skill sound like (phrases)?"* Students list several ideas. You then display the T-Chart prominently for students to refer to. An example is:

#### Encouraging Participation

| Looks Like  | Sounds Like         |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Smiles      | What is your idea?  |
| Eye Contact | Awesome!            |
| Thumbs Up   | Good idea!          |
| Pat On Back | That's interesting. |

- Demonstrate and model the skill in front of the class and explain it step-by-step until students have a clear idea of what the skill sounds and looks like.
- Have students role play the skill by practicing the skill twice in their groups before the lesson begins.

**The third step is to set up practice situations and encourage mastery of the skill.** To master a skill, students need to practice it again and again. You can guide their practice by:

- 1 Assigning the social skill as either a specific role for certain members to fulfill or a general responsibility for all group members to engage in.
- 2 Observing each group (and utilizing student observers to do likewise) and recording which members are engaging in the skill with what frequency and effectiveness.
- 3 Periodically cueing the skill throughout the lesson by asking a group member to demonstrate the skill.
- 4 Intervene in the learning groups to clarify the nature of the social skill and how to engage in it.
- 5 Coach students to improve their use of the skill.

|          |                                       |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>S</b> | Show Need For Skill                   |
| <b>T</b> | T-Chart Skill                         |
| <b>E</b> | Engage Students In Practice           |
| <b>R</b> | Reflect On Success                    |
| <b>N</b> | Practice Until Using Skill Is Natural |

**The fourth step is to ensure that each student (a) receives feedback on his or her use of the skill and (b) reflects on how to engage in the skill more effectively next time.**

Practicing teamwork skills is not enough. Students must receive feedback on how frequently and how well they are using the skill. On the basis of the feedback received and their own assessment of their skill use,

the students reflect on how to use the skill more effectively in the future.

- 1 Report data to class, group, individuals.
- 2 Chart/graph the data on students use of the skill.
- 3 Have students analyze/reflect on the data.
- 4 Ensure every student receives positive feedback on use of skill.
- 5 Have students set improvement goals.
- 6 Have groups celebrate their hard work.

**The fifth step is to ensure that students persevere in practicing the skill until the skill seems a natural action.** With most skills there is a period of slow learning, then a period of rapid improvement, then a period where performance remains about the same, then another period of rapid improvement, then another plateau, and so forth. Students have to practice teamwork skills long enough to make it through the first few plateaus and integrate the skills into their behavioral repertoires. There are stages most skill development goes through:

- 1 **Self-conscious, awkward engaging in the skill.**
- 2 **Feelings of phoniness while engaging in the skill.** After a while the awkwardness passes and enacting the skill becomes more smooth. Many students, however, feel inauthentic or phony while using the skill. Students need teacher and peer encouragement to move through this stage.
- 3 Skilled but **mechanical use** of the skill.
- 4 **Automatic, routine use** where students have fully integrated the skill into their behavior repertoire and feel like the skill is a natural action to engage in.

Encourage students to continuously improve their teamwork skills by refining, modifying, and adapting them.

### Other T-Charts

#### Checking For Understanding

| Looks Like      | Sounds Like                                  |
|-----------------|--|
| Eye contact     | Explain that to me.<br>Can you show me?      |
| Leaning forward |  |
| Interested look | Tell us how to do it.<br>Give me an example. |
| Open gestures   |  |

#### Contributing Ideas

| Looks Like      | Sounds Like   |
|-----------------|---|
| Leaning forward | My idea is...   |
| Open gestures   |   |
| Taking turns    | I suggest...<br>We could...<br>I suggest we...<br>What if we... |

#### Summarizing

| Looks Like          | Sounds Like   |
|---------------------|---|
| Leaning forward     | Let's review.<br>Our key ideas are...<br>At this point, we...<br>Our thinking is... |
| Pleasant expression |   |
| Open gestures       |   |

### Introducing Group Roles

| Role          | What Happens When One Doesn't Do Job |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| Center        |                                      |
| Quarterback   |                                      |
| Guard         |                                      |
| Wide Receiver |                                      |

One way to teach social skills is to assign them to students as group roles. You may introduce the concept of group role through the analogy of a sports team.

- 1 List several of the roles on a sports team. In football, for example, the

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quarterback (who passes or runs the ball) relies on the center (who hikes the ball to the quarterback), guard (who blocks opposing players from tackling the quarterback), and wide receiver (who catches the pass thrown by the quarterback) as well as all the other members of the team.

- 2** Ask students to explain why it is important for each player to do his or her job and what happens if one or two players do not do their jobs.
- 3** Point out that you are going to organize the class into cooperative learning groups and each member will have a key role to perform.

#### Join The AERA SIGs

Members of the American Educational Research Association should make sure they are members of the **Cooperative Learning** and the **Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention** Special Interest Groups.

#### Visit Our Web-Site

[www.co-operation.org](http://www.co-operation.org)

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