

# Cooperative Learning: Changing Paradigms of Higher Education Teaching

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# Abstract

The failure of higher education teaching to involve students actively in the learning process has been closely associated with the inability of the students to engage in a continuing acquisition of knowledge and understanding. The continuing acquisition of knowledge requires students to be active participants in a community of learners. Cooperative learning provides the opportunity for students to maximize their own and each other's learning. Carefully structured cooperative learning ensures that students are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge while at the same time encouraging each other to achieve their learning goals.

This paper presents the “WHY”, “WHAT” and “HOW” of using cooperative learning in higher education teaching. The benefits of the use of cooperative learning in the classroom includes higher achievement, more positive relationships, and better psychological adjustment. To reap these benefits, teachers should be able to distinguish cooperative learning groups from traditional classroom groups and capitalize on using the first one. A cooperative lesson should apply certain basic principles- - cooperative management, task structure, individual and group accountability, teachers’ and students’ roles, and group processing. A wide variety of cooperative learning techniques have been developed to help improve the effectiveness of group activities.

# Introduction

The quality of higher education teaching largely depends on the quality of instruction in the classroom. To improve the quality of instruction, faculty need to understand the 'what' as well as the 'how' of the teaching-learning process. Yet, many faculty members ignore the pedagogical aspects of higher education teaching. Teaching is considered a routine function that anyone can do. If a faculty member has a Ph. D., it is assumed that he or she is qualified to teach. In other words, anyone who has content expertise can teach. The faculty's job is to transmit information and the student's job is to memorize and then recall it. Thus, students are passive recipients of knowledge and the faculty own the knowledge.

This assumption is based on the old paradigm popularized by John Locke. An untrained student mind is regarded as a blank sheet of paper waiting for the instructor to write on. Student minds are viewed as empty vessels into which instructors pour their knowledge and wisdom. Along the same line, the predominant atmosphere is a competitive organizational structure in which students work to outperform their classmates and faculty work to outperform their colleagues.

Many faculty members consider the old paradigm the only alternative. Lecturing while requiring students to be passive, silent, isolated, and in competition with each other seems the only way to teach. However, way of higher education teaching is changing. Theory and research show that students actively construct their own knowledge. Students do not passively accept knowledge from the instructor or curriculum. They activate their schemata or existing cognitive structures or construct new ones to subsume the new input.

# The Potential Benefits of Using Cooperative Learning in the Classroom

1. Students can enhance their social skills
2. Students have more chance to appreciate differences
3. There can be more individuation of instruction

- 4. Student participation can increase
- 5. Anxiety can decrease
- 6. Motivation and positive attitude toward class can increase
- 7. Self –esteem and self-direction can increase
- 8. Academic achievement can increase

# The Principles of Cooperative Learning

In spite of all those benefits, cooperative learning has not been widely used. Many teachers and students tried group activities and gave up for many reasons such as noisy class, students being off-task, unequal participation and unfair contribution in the group. Actually, these problems do not need to arise if teachers can distinguish cooperative learning from traditional group activities. In traditional group activities, students are given a task and asked to work on it on groups without any attention paid to group processing and task structure. Whereas, in cooperative learning, teachers carefully plan, prepare, monitor, and facilitate the activities for maximum group effectiveness.

To achieve the potential benefits, teachers should recognize and apply the following basic principles fundamental to cooperative learning:

- 1. Cooperative Management
- 2. Task Structure
- 3. Individual and Group Accountability
- 4. Teacher's and students' Roles
- 5. Group Processing

# Implementing Cooperative Learning in Higher Education

Different proponents have different definitions of cooperative learning. Each has offered approaches and methods to implement cooperative learning. Very experienced cooperative learning teachers draw from all approaches and methods, modify some, and adopt them as part of their repertoire of teaching methods and techniques. Depending on how intensively teachers plan to use cooperative learning in their classroom, they first need to be familiar with a variety of cooperative learning skills. Below are some of the techniques proposed by different cooperative learning proponents.

- 1. Think- Pair- Share
- 2. Roundrobin/ Roundtable
- 3. Three Stay, One Stay
- 4. Roving Reporters
- 5. Talking Chips

- 6. Jigsaw
- 7. Group Investigation
- 8. Paired Storytelling

# Conclusion

Implementing cooperative learning in the classroom starts with planning and carrying out cooperative lessons. During each lesson, the students work together to complete the assignment. Their actions can be loosely or highly prescribed. It makes sense for teachers who wish to use cooperative learning to try one of the techniques at a time. As they go along, they may improvise procedures and modify some of the skills. Each teacher has to adapt and refine cooperative learning to fit an idiosyncratic situation. Each class many require a different adaptation in order to maximize the effectiveness of cooperative learning.

Thank You !