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Principle: Cooperation as a Value

KEY QUESTIONS

How can I get my class started using cooperative learning (CL)?

What classroom management techniques might work well with CL?

How might the room be arranged for CL?

COOPERATIVE LEARNING TECHNIQUES INTRODUCED IN THIS CHAPTER

Find Someone Who

Two Facts, One Fiction

Classroom Classifieds

Cooperative Games

COOPERATION AS A VALUE

This chapter highlights the cooperative learning principle of Cooperation as a Value. In other words, cooperation offers not just a way of learning but also a way of life. Cooperation represents a value that we hope students will come to espouse. This does not mean that students should

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never compete or never work on their own. Both competition and working alone play important roles in life.

Cooperation as a Value means encouraging students to see mutual assistance as a goal to strive for, to view others as potential collaborators, and to choose cooperation as often as possible as a viable alternative to competition and individual work. Dickinson Chan (personal communication to George Jacobs, Hong Kong, October 2001), a primary school language arts teacher, put it beautifully: “The development of cooperation starts in the classroom (a small river), but students take this spirit of cooperation with them as they go out into the wide world (the ocean).”

CL is not just part of the *how* (the method) of learning; it can also be part of the *what* (the content), as cooperation is woven throughout the learning environment. For instance, students can study about how organisms cooperate with one another within and across species (Forest, 2001). Furthermore, cooperation does not stop when a CL group activity ends. To build a learning climate in which students voluntarily choose cooperation, students need opportunities to do things not just as a small group but also as a class working together toward common goals.

Some classrooms seem to be based on principles that discourage cooperation among students. Table 1.1 lists a number of the differences between such classrooms and cooperative classrooms.

What Can I Tell My Students to Get Them to Give Cooperation a Try?

Here are a few talking points for persuading students that CL is worth a go:

Research shows that students working cooperatively learn more. Thus it makes them more successful academically.

Table 1.1 Classroom Cooperation

<i>Classrooms That Discourage Cooperation</i>	<i>Cooperative Classrooms</i>
Eyes on your own paper.	Look at what peers are doing in order to learn from them, help them, and share ideas and materials.
No talking to your neighbor.	Talk to your neighbor in order to exchange ideas, debate, explain, suggest, and question.
Do your own work and let others do theirs.	Share your work with others so that the work you do together becomes better than the sum of its parts.
If you need help, ask the teacher.	If you need help, ask groupmates and others before asking the teacher.
Compete for the teacher’s attention.	Allow each student an opportunity to be spokesperson for the group.
Compete for extrinsic rewards, e.g., grades.	Cooperate for both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards.

Learning to cooperate is important in working with others within a family, with friends and neighbors, on the job, and in life generally.

Cooperation helps students learn how to make friends and to get along with a wide variety of people.

Cooperation makes learning activities more enjoyable.

Some students respond to the honey analogy: A spirit of cooperation helps the class stick together and makes it a sweeter place to be, a place where everyone wants to be. When students like a class, they learn more.

Parents and other caretakers can also help encourage students to work cooperatively. Therefore it is often valuable to inform parents that the class will be using CL and why. This can be done via notes home or on parents' nights. Furthermore, students can get a broader perspective on the value of cooperation by asking their parents and other adults about their experiences working cooperatively in groups at school, at work, and in the community.

BUILDING A CLIMATE OF COOPERATION

Classroom atmosphere forms a key ingredient in the success of cooperative learning. For instance, students need to

- Feel comfortable working with classmates
- Be willing to share ideas, ask questions, take risks

To create such a cooperative atmosphere and to make the principle of Cooperation as a Value come alive, we can do *classbuilding activities*. *Classbuilding* means working to build a feeling of trust and solidarity among all the members of the class. Creating the right environment is crucial. Everyone has experienced how the setting we are in greatly affects what we do and how we feel.

Working with students to develop a set of behaviors, policies, or norms offers one means of promoting Cooperation as a Value. Here are some that various classes have come up with. Note the positive way they are worded, for example, "I listen when others are talking" instead of "Don't talk when others are talking." It is helpful to have these norms posted on the wall for all (including visitors) to see.

- I listen when others are talking.
- I encourage everyone to participate.
- I help others without doing the work for them.
- I ask for help when I need it.
- I am critical of ideas, not people.
- I remember that we are all in this together.

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- I value and respect each person as an individual, as a groupmate, and as part of our class regardless of race, religion, nationality, or academic performance.
- I come to class on time.

We call these norms rather than rules because norms flow from shared values, such as the value of cooperation.

Class Meetings

Classroom norms are one of many possible items for the agenda of class meetings. Some teachers encourage regular class meetings to provide a safe venue for students and the teacher to air feedback—positive and negative—and suggestions on how the class is functioning. In order for students to really feel free to voice their opinions, the classroom norms listed above should also apply to class meetings.

Team Then Teacher (TTT)

TTT encourages students to see classmates as a resource rather than as competitors and helps students move away from relying exclusively on the teacher. TTT simply means that students should consult with groupmates before asking the teacher. This refers to asking about procedures as well as about content. TTT promotes group autonomy, a concept discussed in Chapter 8. Furthermore, because we want to promote classwide solidarity, students can also consult other groups before going to the teacher. Similarly, groups that finish early can offer to help others who are still working. By helping other groups, students live the principle of Cooperation as a Value.

RSPA

Teachers introducing CL often need a strategy to get students' attention when they are working in groups. For instance, teachers need to get students' attention when it is time to move to another activity or to share a good idea from one group with the rest of the class. Some teachers ring a bell; some bang on the board or switch the lights on and off. We've even heard of a high school teacher who starts to sing. Similarly, some early childhood teachers begin singing a short song and then the children sing along. When the song ends, the whole class is ready to pay attention to what the teacher wants to announce.

Different attention techniques will be right for different teachers. One commonly used signal is **RSPA**. Here is how it works. The teacher claps and raises one hand. When students hear or see these signals, they

- Raise a hand.
- Stop talking.

- **Pass the signal.**
- **Attend to the teacher.**

Pass the signal means that if students notice others who have not seen or heard the teacher's signal, they tap them on the shoulder, whisper *pssst*, or otherwise pass the signal to them.

We should discuss with students why such a signal is needed, just as we explain and involve them in other classroom decisions. Furthermore, students will enjoy using the signal themselves when they are leading the class. RSPA is an example of a class routine that helps classwide cooperation flow smoothly.

Establishing Routines

Classrooms have many routines, such as passing out papers, handing them in, or getting into groups. RSPA and signals like it are useful routines for classes using cooperative learning. Students need to spend time to understand why these routines are important and to figure out how to do them as efficiently as possible. Equally important, students can spend time *practicing* the routines. Additionally, after a period of time, such as a month, the routines may not be working as well as before. If so, we should again spend time with the class to evaluate and renew the routines. This is time well spent, because routines save precious time for learning.

Another way to promote the use of effective classroom routines is for the teacher to call the class's attention to groups that are working well together, for instance, heeding the attention signal. We point out what specific behavior the group is using. In this way, that group becomes a model for the entire class. Some teachers even time how long it takes for the class to come to attention. As an integrated mathematics activity, students can plot the times on a graph to find out if the class is making progress in functioning more smoothly.

Arranging the Classroom for Cooperative Learning

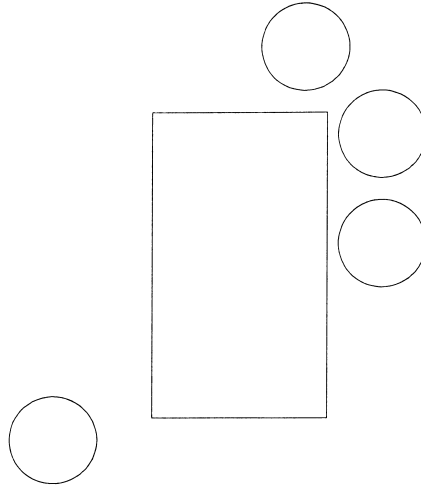
Several points need to be considered in arranging the classroom for effective collaboration. Students need to sit close together. The closer together they are, the easier it is to share materials and to use quiet voices that can't be heard by other groups. In this way, the seating arrangement fosters cooperation. Often, we can see that a group isn't functioning well just by the way a group is sitting. For example, one student is too far away from the rest of the group, or the students at either end of the group are too far away from each other to communicate easily. Figure 1.1 illustrates two kinds of seating plans.

Space needs to be provided for us to circulate around the classroom to visit all the groups. Ideally, we should have space to get between groups and the wall so that when we look up after listening to a group, we can see

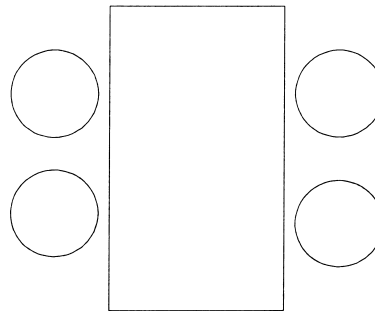
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Figure 1.1 Seating arrangements can foster student cooperation. Effective group seating allows all students in a group to sit close together so they can share material and use quiet voices that can't be heard by other groups.

Ineffective Group Seating



Effective Group Seating

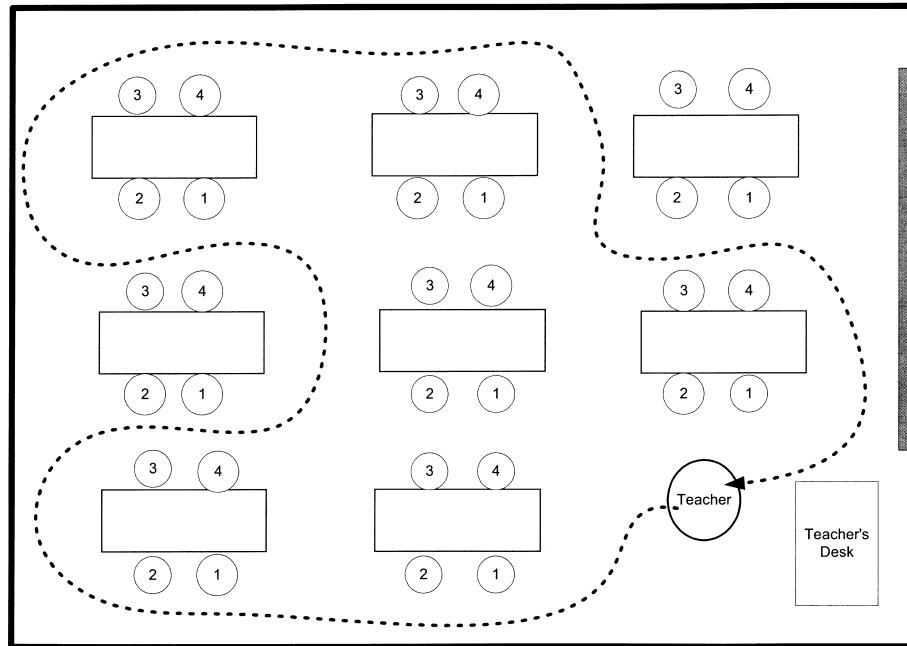


the entire class (see Figure 1.2). Also, students need room to visit other groups and to get any materials they might need. (See Part II for tips on observing students at work.)

Preferably, students should be sitting with their groupmates all the time, and they should not have to move to get into groups. However, sometimes movement will be necessary. This is another instance where routines can be useful.

For some CL activities, all students have numbers—1, 2, 3, 4. If all the students with that same number, that is, all the number 1's, are seated in the same place in their groups, such as in the southeast corner of their group, it is easier for the students and for us to know who in each group has which number.

Figure 1.2 Space needs to be provided for teachers to circulate around the entire classroom to visit all groups.



If students need to have their backs to the front of the class when working in their groups, when the class shifts to whole-class interaction, they should quietly turn their chairs to face the front of the room. Otherwise, students will feel very uncomfortable having to turn their heads 180 degrees, or they won't bother turning around and, as a result, won't be able to follow what we or others are saying or showing. Perhaps the best seating arrangement for avoiding this problem is for students to sit sideways to the front of the room, two groupmates shoulder to shoulder, facing their two other groupmates.

If furniture does need to be moved, tape on the floor or other kinds of aids can help students quickly rearrange the desks in an orderly manner when switching between group work and whole-class instruction.

In preschool, kindergarten, and younger elementary classes, students sometimes sit on the floor. In these settings, during CL, all members of the same group should either be on the floor or sitting in chairs or at desks. If some are on the floor and others at desks, it makes it difficult for us to monitor the activity, and some students have to look up to see their groupmates.

WHAT ARE SOME FUN CLASSBUILDING ACTIVITIES TO GET MY CLASS STARTED?

Find Someone Who

This activity offers a good way for students to get to know their classmates. Here is how it works.

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Step 1. Students begin in pairs. Each person has a Find Someone Who table (Table 1.2 is an example). Students take turns reading the rules. Number 1 reads the first rule, number 2 paraphrases (or repeats) the rule.

Rules:

- Walk up to a classmate and ask a question from the sheet. If the person doesn't answer yes to that question, keep asking questions until they answer yes to a question.
- Have the person sign her or his name in the appropriate box. Ask the person a follow-up question and write the answer in the box.
- After someone says yes to a question, move on to another person. Each classmate should be in only one box.
- Try to fill in all the boxes.

Step 2. After about 10 minutes, students rejoin their partners and check their partner's Find Someone Who table to see if it is properly filled in and to offer suggestions about where to find people to fill in the empty boxes.

Step 3. When a couple of students have completed the table, the partners again check each other's tables.

Step 4. The teacher goes through the table, calling on students to name a person for each box. Students use their partner's sheet to respond, including their partner's follow-up question.

In designing the Find Someone Who table, teachers use their knowledge of students to make it likely that at least one student in the class will be able to write her or his name in each box and that every student will be able to say yes to at least one question. Also, some boxes can be left blank so that students can think of their own questions. Please note that space is left in each box for the person's signature and the short answer they give to the follow-up question.

Two Facts, One Fiction

This is another classbuilding activity to help students get to know each other better. It can be used at any time but is especially effective for classbuilding in the first weeks of school.

Step 1. All group members think of two things about themselves that are true (facts) and one that is not (the fiction).

Step 2. One at a time, each student tells groupmates the three self-descriptive statements without saying which is fiction and which are nonfiction. A student might say, "I have a dog. I live in an apartment. I can juggle."

Step 3. Groupmates ask questions to try to figure out which statement is fiction, such as "What kind of dog food does your dog eat?"

Step 4. Groupmates work together to guess which statement is fictitious and give reasons for their guesses.

Table 1.2 Find Someone Who . . .

Read a good book recently.	Visited a museum in the last 6 months.	Knows the formula for calculating percentage.	Has a relative or neighbor who is a teacher.
Knows a good Web site to visit.	Takes public transportation to school.	Can spell a word with more than 11 letters.	Plays volleyball.
Is a vegetarian or would like to be one someday.	Is good at growing plants.	Helped build a Web site.	Participates in recycling.
Has met a famous person.	Sent an e-mail in the last week.	Has at least one living grandparent.	Did volunteer work this year.
Prefers learning alone.	Prefers learning in groups.	Likes many kinds of music.	Walks to school.
Woke up more than 90 minutes before school.	Has a suggestion for improving our school.	Has a suggestion for improving our country.	Knows which continent Singapore is on.
Knows the stages in a butterfly's life cycle.	Can play a musical instrument.	Has participated in a band, chorus, or other musical group.	Can stand on her or his shoulders or head.
Is thinking of becoming a teacher.	Likes to eat sandwiches made of weird combinations.	Slept 10 hours or more last Sunday.	Can juggle.

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Step 5. Groupmates share with the class something interesting they learned about each of their group members.

The teacher should get the ball rolling by modeling the process. For example, a teacher uses these three self-descriptive statements: "I was on my high school tennis team. I was on my high school debate team. I was on my high school wrestling team."

This activity is a good way for students to learn about their classmates and to develop a sense of trust by revealing things about themselves. Two Facts, One Fiction, as well as Find Someone Who, can be used not just for classbuilding but also to teach content. For instance, instead of students coming up with three statements about themselves, their statements can relate to topics the class is studying.

Two Facts, One Fiction can be called Two Truths, One Exaggeration or, for younger children, Yes, Yes, No.

Classroom Classifieds (Sapon-Shevin, 1999)

In Classroom Classifieds, students write short classified advertisements with things that they can teach or help with, or things they want to learn or need some help on. Examples of areas in which students can help one another are making origami, becoming better organized, finding a partner for chess, getting along with parents, and learning a new language. This activity can be an ongoing one, continuing throughout the year.

A related idea from Sapon-Shevin's (1999) inspiring book is Classroom Yellow Pages, in which students list what they can teach or share. By helping classmates and receiving help from classmates, students build stronger ties. Also, students who may be weaker than average academically get a chance to be the helper instead of always being the one receiving help.

Cooperative Games

Everyone enjoys playing games, but many games stress competition over cooperation. At the end of competitive games, one person or one team is the winner, and everyone else is a loser. In contrast, cooperative games combine the fun of games with the principle of Cooperation as a Value. Some of these cooperative games are traditional games, others are modifications of competitive games, and still others are newly invented. Three books (Grineski, 1996; Orlick, 1978, 1981) that describe cooperative games are included in the Resources section of this book.

One example of a cooperative game that was created by modifying a competitive game is Cooperative Musical Chairs (Luvmour & Luvmour, 1990, p. 27). In competitive Musical Chairs, one by one the chairs are removed, and with each chair removed, out goes another player. However, with Cooperative Musical Chairs, the goal is inclusion, not exclusion.

When the music stops, everyone must find a way to share chairs so that everyone stays in the game. Players can share seats, link arms, or use whatever device they can think of to keep everyone playing. Creative problem solving comes in handy here. Cooperative Musical Chairs wouldn't be appropriate for all students, but we can find ways to transform almost any game from competitive to cooperative.

Marc Hegelsen (personal communication, December 18, 2001, e-mail from Japan) suggests another way of keeping everyone in Musical Chairs. Whoever is *it* (the one left without a chair when the music stops) contributes an idea to the group. The idea could be on a topic the group is discussing, a task the group is doing, a story the group is composing, or just something about the person who is *it*.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

This first chapter offered ideas on how to foster a cooperative spirit among students. This spirit provides an important groundwork for the principle to be discussed in Chapter 2, Heterogeneous Grouping. This principle concerns the formation of small groups of students that are representative of the different types of students found in the class.