

The Instructor's Role in Cooperative Learning

Based on material from: Johnson, David W., Roger T. Johnson and Karl A. Smith.
Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 1991.

1. Before the activity
 - a. Decide on academic and collaborative objectives – specify objectives that are both academic and collaborative in nature
 - b. Decide on group size, composition, roles
 - i. Group size depends on the class/task
 - ii. Heterogeneous instructor-assigned groups are strongly recommended. They can be completely random or “stratified” and random – sort the students into categories and randomly pick one student per category for each group.
 - iii. To promote positive interdependence and ensure individual accountability, it is a good idea to assign roles like summarizer, facilitator, recorder, etc.
 - c. Structure positive interdependence – students must “sink or swim” together
 - i. Materials interdependence – only one copy of materials per group
 - ii. Rewards interdependence – group grading
 - iii. Information interdependence – each student has some of the necessary information
 - d. Structure individual accountability – assess individual performance frequently through observation of participation, randomly selecting students to explain answers, etc.
 - e. Explain the task to the students
 - i. Explain objectives of the lesson
 - ii. Give clear and specific instructions
 - iii. Explain criteria for success
 - iv. Ask questions to ensure understanding
2. During the activity
 - a. Monitor students' behavior – find out what they do/don't understand
 - b. Provide task assistance
 - i. Clarify instructions
 - ii. Do an interview
 1. What are you doing?
 2. Why are you doing it?
 3. How will it help you?
 - c. Intervene to teach collaborative skills - intervene minimally, but check in with groups to make sure cooperation is happening

3. After the activity
 - a. Provide closure
 - i. Summarize task
 - ii. Answer questions
 - iii. Ask students review questions
 - b. Process group functioning - in groups or in the whole class, discuss how the cooperation went, what could be improved, etc.
 - c. Evaluate student learning
 - i. Individual score + group score based on:
 1. All members attaining some sort of criteria
 2. Lowest member score
 3. Group average
 4. Improvement scores
 - ii. Group score - are group scores fair? Research shows:
 1. At the conclusion of the project, most students think that group grades are fairest
 2. Students with experience in group learning prefer group grades
 3. Achievement is higher with group grades