

Goals and rewards

Activities using CL need planning to make sure that everyone in the team contributes to achieving the team's goals. This mirrors how successful teams operate in the workplace. Learners must know that they sink or swim together. The CL ethos can be reinforced by boosting individual scores if everyone in the team successfully completes their share of the work.

Ground rules

Ground rules are essential to the success of CL. There are a number of methods that can be used to agree ground rules. However, experienced users of CL notice that ground rules generated by the learners themselves work better than those imposed by the teacher.

Interpersonal and small group skills

Learning these skills forms an explicit part of CL. Individual and team objectives should make specific reference to these skills and learners should be rewarded for demonstrating them. CL opens up opportunities for dual assessment of, for instance, communication skills or working with others, as well as subject knowledge.

Individual and group accountability

CL should be a demanding approach in which nobody gets a free ride. Team and individual objectives should be clear. Teams should be kept small, at three to five learners, depending on the task. Teams should be prepared to present their work to other teams for peer review. Individuals should be prepared to give an account of their work to the team or to the teacher. Individual tests and team tournaments can be used to reinforce the message that learners are accountable for both their own learning and that of the team.

Quick start guide

Co-operative learning (CL)

Group processing

Teams need time and space to allow them to reflect on how well the team is functioning and to identify the behaviours that will help or hinder the team. Teams can then decide on which behaviours they want to change and how they will change them. A final debrief and evaluation are vital.

Careful grouping and team roles

CL works best when learners are in small teams that are as diverse as possible. In addition to taking on their share of the work, each learner can be assigned a team role, such as note taker or discussion leader. Learners can be encouraged to try a different role each time to help them develop a broad range of skills. There are at least 20 possible team roles to choose from. See the role cards in the information technology (IT) section of these resources.

Promotive interaction

This involves learners in developing communication and teamwork skills that enable them to:

- coach or teach their peers
- give effective feedback to their peers
- challenge without negativity
- negotiate and reach consensus
- develop trust
- motivate others.

Team base

Consider establishing an area for each team to have as their team base. They can return to this area for team meetings and peer support. The team might give itself a name and design its own logo. This can be displayed alongside the team ground rules in the area designated as the team base.

Co-operative learning

”Cooperative learning (CL) is an instructional paradigm in which teams of students work on structured tasks (for example, homework assignments, laboratory experiments, or design projects) under conditions that meet five criteria: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face interaction, appropriate use of collaborative skills, and regular self-assessment of team functioning. Many studies have shown that, when correctly implemented, co-operative learning improves information acquisition and retention, higher-level thinking skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and self-confidence.” (Johnson, Johnson and Smith, 1998).

Co-operative learning has been extensively studied. Research shows that it is more effective than individualistic or competitive methods.

It involves much more than learners working in groups. It is a structured process in which the teacher* is ‘the guide on the side’ while the learners take centre stage. Learners may take task-based roles, for instance, each learner might research a different aspect of a topic. They may also take functional roles, for instance, as facilitator, reporter, spokesperson and ‘checker’, whose role is to ensure a shared understanding. In a work-related activity, learners might adopt roles within a workplace case study. The main purpose, however, is mutual support to achieve the learning goal.

* We use 'teaching and learning' and 'teacher' as generic terms to include:

- teaching, training and learning
- teachers, tutors, trainers, lecturers and instructors in the further education (FE) system.

With its emphasis on teamwork, interdependence and accountability, co-operative learning can model effective practice from the workplace. Learning social and interpersonal skills forms an explicit part of the approach. As co-operative learning also provides a framework for group reflection, self-assessment and evaluating effectiveness, it is also a useful tool for developing ‘expert learning’ skills.

Co-operative learning is seen by some as a way to encourage active citizenship and to promote equality and diversity, for instance, by breaking down barriers between learners from diverse backgrounds and promoting the inclusion of learners with disabilities.

Meta-analysis by Johnson and others (2000) identified a continuum of approaches to CL from ‘direct’ to ‘conceptual’.

- Direct: where teachers use a specific and well-defined technique, such as jigsaw in a session.
- Conceptual: where a conceptual framework is used as a template to restructure current activities into co-operative ones. For example, group investigation of a topic or a

problem requiring groups to plan a strategy, deploy resources and support, gather and analyse information, prepare and share a final report.

The research found that ‘conceptual’ approaches make a greater impact on teaching and learning practice because they are robust, adaptable, and have the greatest effect on learner achievement. ‘Direct’ approaches are quicker and easier for teachers to learn and to implement.

Look at the Co-operative learning toolkit for more information.

References

Felder, R. M. and Brent, R. (2001) *Effective Strategies for Cooperative Learning*. Journal of Cooperation and Collaboration in College Teaching, 10(2), 69-75.

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R. and Smith, K. (1998) *Active Learning: cooperation in the College Classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R. and Stanne, M. (2000) *Cooperative Learning Methods: A Meta-Analysis*. University of Minnesota.

Joyce, B., Weil, M., and Showers, B. (1992) *Models of teaching*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

You will find links that exemplify co-operative learning in the National Teaching and Learning Change Programme resources.