

## Handout 3: Cooperative Learning Planning Template with Tips

Cooperative learning may be used in various academic subjects, including reading and writing, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, and physical education. Furthermore, teachers may use cooperative learning for a variety of different purposes, including supporting students to:

- learn specific knowledge,
- cognitively process what they learn,
- engage in inquiry-based/problem-solving activities,
- engage in higher-order thinking, or
- develop a group product or performance. (Gillies, 2014)

This handout includes:

- tips and considerations for planning cooperative learning;
- a comprehensive planning template that features the five elements of cooperative learning, nine steps, and prompts;
- additional information and brief overview of seven cooperative learning methods; and
- relevant resources for teachers planning cooperative learning activities.

**Directions:** Use any or all nine steps with prompts and questions below to create a lesson that incorporates cooperative learning groups.

## Step. 1. Identify the Content Area, Standards, and Objectives

### Tips and Considerations for Identifying Academic Standards and Objectives

To start the cooperative learning lesson planning, we suggest that teachers identify the content, standards, and objectives. Resources that are available include:

- [The Tennessee Academic Standards](#)
- [The Tennessee ACCESS Differentiation Handbook](#)

| Step 1. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify the content area for the lesson.</li><li>• Identify the Tennessee Academic Standards for the lesson.</li><li>• Delineate the objectives of the lesson.<br/>What should students know, understand, and be able to do?</li><li>• In what ways will you need to plan for differentiated content?</li><li>• Identify the prerequisite skills.</li><li>• Determine the time needed.</li></ul> |               |

## Step 2. Determine Group Size, Membership, and Arrangement

The second planning step is to think about group size, formation, membership, and the type of group you want to use.

### Tips and Considerations for Forming Groups

- Intentionally form groups of three to five students that match your goals for your students. Teachers often form heterogeneous groups by assigning students based on factors like gender, ability or performance level, race/ethnicity, student personalities, etc. Mixed groups have the greatest potential for success.
- Seat students around a table, arrange their desks close to each other, or have them use some other type of collaborative workspace. This kind of structure encourages students to become sensitive to each other's non-verbal language, respond to social clues, hear what is being discussed, and contribute to the group. (Gillies, 2016)
- Groups need to remain together long enough for students to get to know and trust each other and learn how to work together and support each other. This should be considered when estimating time for implementation.

### Types of Cooperative Learning Groups

- **Informal Groups** - temporary, ad hoc groups of students that meet for a few minutes to one class period to:
  - Share ideas and opinions;
  - Focus attention on the material to be learned;
  - Process content, particularly relating the content to past students' background knowledge; and
  - Provide closure to an instructional session. (Clark & Baker, 2015)
- **Formal Groups** - assigned groups of students, that meet for one class period to several weeks, that can be used for:
  - Learning, processing, and reviewing content, concepts, and/or skills;
  - Inquiry-based/discovery-based projects;
  - The development of higher order thinking skills (e.g., analytical, critical, and creative thinking);
  - Group projects that include the creation a group product or performance; and/or
  - Problem solving and perspective taking of issues.
- **Cooperative Base Groups** - longer-term groups of students who meet regularly to provide support, or encouragement..

| Step 2. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type(s) of cooperative learning group will you use (e.g., informal, formal, or cooperative base groups)?</li> <li>• Group size (two to five) _____</li> <li>• How will you assign students to groups (e.g., heterogeneously, random, student interest)?</li> <li>• How will you arrange the classroom to promote group interactions?</li> <li>• How long will the groups be together (duration)?</li> </ul> |               |

### Step 3. Structure Positive Interdependence

#### Tips and Considerations for CL Element 1: Structure Positive Interdependence

- Establish group goals that are open-ended and complex, require a variety of skills and abilities, so that students must interact to accomplish the group goal. Group goals typically require students to use the higher order skills of analyzing, synthesizing, hypothesizing, and/or evaluating (Clark & Baker, 2015).
- Identify shared resources (e.g., each student has only part of the materials or resources required to complete the goal).
- Think about the roles that may be assigned to students, such as facilitator/moderator, recorder, illustrator, timekeeper, resource or source manager, summarizer, checker of understanding, reflector, etc. You may need to review or teach these roles to students. Furthermore, the task cannot be completed unless each member completes his or her role. Rotate roles so each student can experience each role.
- Identify shared rewards (e.g., each student receives the same reward when the group achieves the group goal). (Gillies, 2014; Slavin, 2014)

| Step 3. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the group goal?</li><li>• How will you structure the group goal?</li><li>• Identify and define student roles in the group.</li><li>• How will you review, explain, and/or teach these roles?</li><li>• For which shared materials/resources will each group be responsible?<br/>How will you arrange these?</li><li>• What criteria will you call on to assess the achievement of the group goal?</li><li>• What incentives or rewards will you give to groups for accomplishing the goals and objectives?</li><li>• How will you structure a group reward?</li></ul> |               |

## Step 4. Identify Social and Personal Competencies

### Tips and Considerations for CL Element 2: Applying Social and Personal Competencies

Teachers can engage students in a variety of activities to support the development of social and personal competencies in cooperative learning. For example, a teacher can implement the following strategies:

- Provide introductory or ice-breaker activities where students get to know each other and learn to trust each other.
- Target specific social and personal competencies that will be the focus of the learning experience. For example, students need to learn active listening skills, how to attune to what others are saying instead of thinking of what they are going to say next or ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak. Other competencies may include those found under relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Start small so that you do not overload students with the competencies they must learn at one time.
- Provide pre-teaching of competencies and offer feedback on specific competencies rather than trying to develop and reinforce multiple relevant competencies.

| Step 4. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>What are the targeted social and personal competencies for this lesson?</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Refer to the Tennessee Department of Education's <a href="#">K-12 Social and Personal Competencies Resource Guide</a>.</li></ul></li><li>• <b>How will you explain these competencies to your students?</b></li><li>• <b>Will you need to teach these competencies to your students? If yes, how will you teach them?</b></li></ul> |               |

## Step 5. Structure Individual Accountability

The fifth step in the cooperative learning planning is to address CL Element 3, the structuring of individual accountability.

### Tips and Considerations for CL Element 3: Structure Individual Accountability

Multiple strategies exist that a teacher can use to support individual accountability within cooperative learning. For example, a teacher can implement the following strategies (Pennsylvania State University, 2017):

- Assign students to tasks within the group. For example, they are responsible for a specific section of the report or need to prepare a step/process in a science experiment. Students, then come back together to put the pieces together.
- Hold students responsible for teaching their group members targeted information. Students are held accountable for the information that their peers learned about their assigned information. Tell students in advance that one person will be chosen to report out what the group learned.
- Reward students based on all group members completing their tasks and roles.
- Have students reflect on what they individually learned and contributed to the group, as well as describe what they learned from their peers and how they supported their own learning.

| Step 5. Prompts  | Teacher Notes |
|--|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the criteria for individual mastery?</li><li>• How will the criteria for mastery be explained to students?</li><li>• How will you determine whether each student carried out their role/responsibility and contributed to the group goal?</li><li>• What form of individual assessment will you use?</li><li>• How will you differentiate any individual accountability?</li></ul> |               |

## Step 6. Promote One Another's Success

The sixth step in the cooperative learning planning is to address CL Element 4: Students Promoting One Another's Success. This involves students' active listening and exchanging of ideas, giving and receiving of appropriate help, and providing appropriate feedback.

### Tips and Considerations for CL Element 4: Promoting One Another's Success

Teachers can effectively support students in promoting one another's success and ensuring that there is a level of group accountability. For example, a teacher can implement the following strategies:

- Provide scaffolded directions. Students will probably need more direction from you concerning how to work in groups when you first introduce cooperative learning and gradually assume more responsibility.
- Be sure that students understand what promoting one another's success looks like behaviorally and verbally. For example, what would appropriate help look like and sound like. Teachers often use T-charts to list these attributes.
- Monitor the groups and report back to students how well their group promoted one another's success.

| Step 6. Prompts  | Teacher's Notes |
|--|-----------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will you teach students to help, encourage, and praise one another?</li><li>• How will you teach students to provide constructive feedback to each other?</li><li>• How will you review or teach students the identified skills?</li><li>• In what ways will you monitor groups and provide feedback on their group's promotion of each other?</li></ul> |                 |



## Step 7. Group Processing

### Tips and Considerations for CL Element 5: Group Processing

During and after the cooperative learning experience, it is important for groups to process the effectiveness of how they worked together, the accomplishment of group goals, and the use of targeted social and personal competencies. Multiple strategies exist that a teacher can use to support group processing. For example, a teacher can implement the following strategies:

- Provide 5–10 minutes for group processing, debriefing, and closure. (Gillies & Boyle, n.d.)
- Within groups, have students reflect on how their group functioned, how they addressed targeted social and personal competencies, and their accomplishment of group goals. Have students reflect on those strategies that worked well for them and those that did not, ultimately creating an action plan on what strategies they want to continue to use and which ones they should not use. Ask them to prepare for sharing in the larger group during lesson closure.
- Consider using individual self-evaluations, group evaluations, checklists, reflective questions, and/or sentence stems.
- Refer to Module 7: Self-Assessment and Self-Reflection for additional strategies.

| Step 7. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On which group processes will students reflect and provide feedback (e.g., decision-making, conflict resolution)?</li><li>• On which targeted social and personal competencies do you want students to reflect?</li><li>• What materials will you use to assist with group processing (e.g., checklist, individual or group evaluation forms, reflective questions, or sentence stems)?</li><li>• How will students summarize what they have learned following the lesson?</li><li>• How will you enable students to identify behaviors or competencies that should continue or change?</li></ul> |               |

## Step 8. Monitor Students and Groups

The eighth step in the cooperative learning planning is to plan how you will monitor students and groups.

### Tips and Considerations for Monitoring Students and Groups

Once students are working in groups, it is important for teachers to monitor whether the groups are engaged in the task, working effectively together, and using the targeted social personal competencies. Teachers can use multiple strategies to monitor students and groups, including:

- Circulate and see whether students understand the goal, tasks, and roles.
- Give immediate feedback and reinforcement when groups are on task and exhibiting targeted social personal competencies.
- Consider using observational checklists of the targeted social personal competencies during your monitoring.
- Intervene when necessary if students do not understand the task or material.
- Intervene if groups are having difficulties working together in productive ways.

| Step 8. Prompts  | Teacher Notes |
|--|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Which targeted social and personal competencies will you monitor?</li><li>• How will you monitor students and groups in terms of their roles, group process, and completion of the group goal (e.g., creating an observation checklist)?</li><li>• How will you collect data on individual and group progress?</li><li>• What anticipated feedback will you give to students and groups?</li></ul> |               |

## Step 9. Lesson Closure

The ninth step in the cooperative learning planning is to plan how you will bring closure to the lesson.

### Tips and Considerations for Lesson Closure

At the end of the lesson, teachers may use the following strategies:

- Review the goals and desired outcomes of the lesson.
- Ask group reporters or individual students to summarize what they have learned to the entire class. Summarize important points and answer any remaining questions from students.
- Share your observations/assessment of student groups using targeted social personal competencies, and integrate with students' reflections.
- Together with students, identify ways to improve the effectiveness of group work and the use of targeted social personal competencies.
- Consider ways to have groups celebrate their success and work.

| Step 9. Prompts   | Teacher Notes |
|---|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will students present summaries from their groups (e.g., ask for individual reports from each group, one reporter from each group shares, etc.)?</li><li>• How will you share your observations of students working in groups and using social personal competencies with students' reflections?</li><li>• How and when will students receive feedback on their academic performance?</li></ul> |               |

## Additional Information on Cooperative Learning Methods

There are a variety of cooperative learning methods available for teachers to explore further (refer to the resource list at the end of this handout). The methods may be placed on a continuum from concrete to conceptual and will vary depending on their grouping procedures, group structure and positive interdependence, and teacher's role. Among the more commonly used methods are the following:

| Method   | Author                         | Description  | Grouping Procedures                                   |
|--|--------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Structural Approach</b>                       | Spencer Kagan (1985)           | Students use a variety of generic and content-free ways of managing classroom interactions called group structures (e.g., numbered heads together, pairs check, co-op, three-step interview).  | Varied (random, common interest, homogeneous)         |
| <b>Original Jigsaw</b>                           | Elliott Aronson et. al. (1978) | Students work in heterogeneous groups to learn academic material which is divided into sections. Each member reads his section and meets with members of other teams in expert groups who have studied the same section. Students return to their original team and take turning teaching students about their sections.                                   | Heterogeneous   |
| <b>Jigsaw II</b>                                 | Slavin (1994)                  | Students work in groups and all students read the same academic material. Each student receives a topic in which to become an expert. The experts from all groups meet and discuss their topic. The experts return to the groups and teach what they have learned. Students are assessed individually.   | Heterogeneous   |
| <b>Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD)</b> | Slavin (1995)                  | Students work in heterogeneous groups/teams to master materials after listening to a teacher's presentation. All students take individual quizzes on the material. Students' quiz scores are compared to their past averages and points awarded. The teacher totals the points of each team to form team scores. Teams earn certificates or other rewards. | Heterogeneous   |
| <b>Group Investigation</b>                       | Sharan & Sharan (1992)         | Research groups of students select subtopics of a complex topic, plan, and complete their investigations of the subtopics. Each student must gather, organize, and analyze information. Groups plan and present their findings to the whole class with a report.   | Varied (common interest, teacher selected, or random) |
| <b>Learning Together</b>                         | Johnson & Johnson (1999)       | Heterogeneous groups of students work together according to the five elements: positive interdependence, social and personal competencies, promotion of one another's success, individual accountability, and group processing.  | Heterogeneous   |

| Method                          | Author                           | Description   | Grouping Procedures |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| <b>Constructive Controversy</b> | Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2000) | Groups of four students are assigned to research and write a report on a complex controversial issue. One pair within the group must develop and advocate for the pro position and the other pair do the same for the con position. The pairs research the issue and construct an argument for each position. After they have completed this step, the pairs reverse perspectives. Then they come to an agreement that synthesizes both positions and represents students' best judgment. | Heterogeneous       |

Adapted from Ghaith (2018); Johnson, Johnson, & Smith (2000), Slavin, (2003)

## Selected Cooperative Learning Planning Resources

Aronson, E., Blaney, N., Sikes, J., Stephan, C. & Snapp, M. (1978). *The Jigsaw Classroom*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. Refer to:

<https://www.jigsaw.org/overview/>

Clark, J., & Baker T. (2015). *Cooperative Learning Made Easy: A Practical Guide to Working with Tertiary Students*. Prepared for Ako Aotearoa—The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence. Retrieved from <https://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/download/ng/file/group-4/co-operative-learning-made-easy-a-practical-guide-to-working-with-tertiary-student-groups.pdf>

Cooperative Learning Institute. University of Minnesota, <http://www.co-operation.org/>

Ghaith, G. (2018). Teacher Perceptions of the Challenges of Implementing Concrete and Conceptual Cooperative Learning. *Issues of Educational Research*, 28(2), 385-404.

Gillies, R.M. (2014). Cooperative Learning: Developments in Research. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 3(2), 125-140. ERIC Document Reproduction Center (EJ1111727). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1111727.pdf>

Gillies, R.M. (2016). Cooperative Learning: Review of Research and Practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(3), 39-54. Retrieved from <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2902&context=ajte>

Gillies, R.M., & Boyle, M. (n.d.). *Cooperative Learning: A Smart Pedagogy for Successful Learning*. Queensland: The University of Queensland, School of Education, Cooperative Learning Project. Retrieved from [https://sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/professional\\_learning/resources/papers/slc-2013/cooperative-learning.pdf](https://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/professional_learning/resources/papers/slc-2013/cooperative-learning.pdf)

Hockett, J.A. (2018); A.C.C.E.S.S. *All Children Challenged and Equipped for Success in Schools. Differentiation Strategies and Examples*. Created for the Tennessee Department of Education. Nashville, TN: Tennessee Department of Education.

Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (1999). Making Cooperative Learning Work. *Theory into Practice*, 38(2), 67-73. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00405849909543834>

Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., & Smith, K.A. (2000). Constructive Controversy: The Educative Power of Intellectual Conflict. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 32:1, 28-37. Retrieved from [http://personal.cege.umn.edu/~smith/docs/Johnson-Johnson-Smith-Constructive-Controversy-The\\_educative\\_power\\_of\\_intellectual\\_conflict-Change-32-1-2000.pdf](http://personal.cege.umn.edu/~smith/docs/Johnson-Johnson-Smith-Constructive-Controversy-The_educative_power_of_intellectual_conflict-Change-32-1-2000.pdf)

Kagan, S. (2003). *A Brief History of Kagan Structures*. Retrieved from [https://www.kaganonline.com/free\\_articles/dr\\_spencer\\_kagan/256/A-Brief-History-of-Kagan-Struc](https://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/dr_spencer_kagan/256/A-Brief-History-of-Kagan-Struc)

Knowledge Network by and for Educators. *Examples of Cooperative Learning Strategies*. Retrieved from [https://tccl.arcc.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/Examples\\_of\\_Cooperative\\_Learning\\_Strategies](https://tccl.arcc.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/Examples_of_Cooperative_Learning_Strategies)

NDT Resource Center, [https://www.nde-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/cooperative\\_learning.php](https://www.nde-ed.org/TeachingResources/ClassroomTips/cooperative_learning.php)

Pennsylvania State University. *Cooperative Learning*. iStudy for Success! Retrieved from <http://tutorials.istudy.psu.edu/cooperativelearning/>

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