

Using Cooperative Learning to Support English Language Learners

In this article in *Essential Teacher*, ESL instructor Judie Haynes has these suggestions for successfully integrating English language learners into cooperative learning groups and getting the most out of this approach:

- *Spread English language learners among heterogeneous cooperative groups.* “All students will benefit from working with classmates from varying ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and linguistic abilities,” says Haynes. She suggests making sure each ELL has a buddy who will give extra help and support.

- *Arrange the physical space so active student participation is encouraged.* Arranging students in groups of four or five maximizes communication and the integration of ELLs into the group.

- *Teach teamwork and social skills.* This means explicit instruction in group process and communication skills.

- *Have students process how their group is working together.* This means assigning roles, monitoring individual participation, and periodically discussing how things are going.

- *Give all students real reasons to communicate within their groups.* This will boost ELLs’ content-area knowledge and language proficiency. Group-mates who are native English speakers should adapt their speech and vocabulary to help ELLs understand and participate.

- *Use “Showdown” to assess and reinforce learning.* In this activity, each group comes up with a list of ten questions on the topic that’s just been taught and passes the questions to another group. A student in each group then reads the first question to his or her teammates, has them write down their answers, and then says, “Showdown”, at which point everyone shares answers. Those with correct answers are congratulated, those with wrong answers are helped. A different team member then reads the next question and calls “Showdown”, and the activity continues until all the questions have been answered and discussed.

- *Use “Round Table.”* In this activity, the teacher asks all groups an open-ended question, for example, “Name as many insects as you can.” A student in each group responds on a piece of paper and passes it to the next student, and the paper makes its way around the group until everyone has contributed (Haynes suggests having ELLs be among the first to write). The team with the most correct answers gets some kind of recognition.

- *Use “Two-Minute Review.”* In this activity, the teacher pauses in the middle of instruction and asks all teams to spend two minutes discussing and reviewing what they’re learning. Haynes says she sometimes allows as much as ten minutes so ELLs can get answers to their questions and understand everything.

“Cooperative Learning in the Content Area Classroom” by Judie Haynes in *Essential Teacher*, December 2008 (Vol. 5, #4, p. 6-7), no e-link available; the author can be reached at judieh@optonline.net.