

Managing the Cooperative Learning Exercise

1. Design an Effective Cooperative Learning Environment/Exercise

A. Specify the Outcome and Purpose of the Exercise

- Product/ Performance (i.e., group creates something).
- Discovery exercise/ Lab (i.e., group does collaborative research using an inductive or deductive process).
- Processing of content (i.e., group reads and discusses some text).
- Jigsaw method (each member learns one part of a multi-faceted whole and then they take turns sharing their piece with the other members of the group).

B. Choose an Effective Task Structure

- Size and membership of the group (be purposeful in your group selection).
- Time of the task
- Arrangement of desks/workspaces
- Roles (if so, which?)
 - Manager
 - Reporter
 - Reader
 - Consensus builder
 - Recorder
 - Researcher
 - or any you think that fit the task

C. Teach the Process Skills that you want to see performed.

Take the time before and during the activity to teach students....

- how to use the process that you have given them (i.e., how to perform each of the roles, or how to do inquiry, etc.).
- how to give their opinions (i.e., I think, I feel, my idea, this is only my opinion, etc.).
- how to listen (i.e., wait for others, active listening).
- how to clarify what they heard by asking questions.
- how to resolve conflict when there is a disagreement.

D. Select an Assessment/Incentive Approach best fitting the Goals of the Exercise

- Group self-assessment form (good for low pressure, complex reasoning situations)
- Group process evaluation rubric (reinforces that success comes from effort toward "how we get there" and "how well we work together").
- Group product evaluation (reinforces putting it all together, but may miss emphasis on the process elements).
- Individual group-member evaluation rubric (reinforces individual accountability, but does not promote interdependence).
- Informal group vs. group competition (this can be motivating, especially for tasks that are more for fun, but make sure the purpose is clear. Never grade or give any kind of meaningful reward based on group or individual competition).
- No Assessment (promotes intrinsic motivation, but may not provide enough motivation for tasks that are less inherently interesting, or students who need a little external incentive).

2. Manage your Cooperative Exercise Effectively

A. Provide Good Directions

- Be clear, get 100% attention, check for comprehension and have students wait until all is understood before any group begins.
- Expect 100% comprehension before starting (if they do not understand the directions, what are they going to be doing?)

B. Monitor and Provide Feedback

- Move from one group to the next providing help and clarification
- Have a well-established cue to stop students to be able to interject ideas, clarify the task, or micro-teach (the shorter the interruptions the better).
- Use your words/conspicuous feedback to help clarify successful performance. Be as concrete and specific as possible.
- Use your attention and focus purposefully (per social learning model).

C. Choose appropriate consequences to unwanted behaviors

- Think in terms of the "social learning model" – what are the other groups learning by your action/intervention with the group you are working with?
- Use the principle – activity is a positive reinforcement, inactivity is a negative reinforcement. Reward with more work. Students should never be penalized with more or different work!
- If a group is having trouble working together, keep the locus of choice on students, and provide interventions that provide choices and consequences. All the while keep your intervention anger free and your attention on the groups that are on task.
 - Intervention 1 – What is the problem? (clarify any misunderstanding)
 - Intervention 2 – How are you going to solve your problem? (when I come back what will I be seeing from this group)
 - Intervention 3 – Given a clear understanding of the task and a second opportunity to get it together, the behavior is a result of choice, so at this point it might be appropriate to withdraw the students opportunity to take part in the activity.
 - Intervention 4 – (optional) members write how they are going to solve their problem the for the next time, and/or another chance after a few minutes.

3. Debrief the Process after the Activity

- This time will create or reinforce your concept of "a good group member" and be motivational to students at all ability levels. *It is well worth the time investment.*
- Ask your students for examples of other students in their group they observed doing a good job of those things in your "good group member" concept (e.g., things that you consider important to making a successful group such as positive attitude, consistently making an effort, being cooperative, doing their role, working through conflict, working through a problem, or whatever you think makes a group learn, succeed at the task, and function well). Ask for one specific area at a time, and encourage students to give specific examples of what they saw that was so valuable.
- This exercise provides students opportunity to compliment one another which makes both complimenter and complimented feel good, and builds community in the class.
- It provides for groups to hear how other groups functioned (i.e., better, worse, different approach), so that they can hear very specific behaviors that will help them in their efforts in the future

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