

BASIC ELEMENTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Positive Interdependence

Students must feel that they need each other in order to complete the group's task, that they "sink or swim" together. Some ways to create this feeling are through establishing mutual goals (student must learn the material and make certain group members learn the material), joint rewards (if all group members achieve above a certain percentage on the test, each will receive bonus points), shared materials and information (one paper for each group or each member receives only part of the information needed to do the assignment), and assigned roles (summarizer, encourager of participation, elaborator).

Individual Accountability

Cooperative learning groups are not successful until every member has learned the material or has helped with and understood the assignment. Thus, it is important to frequently stress and assess individual learning so that group members can appropriately support and help each other. Some ways of structuring individual accountability are by giving each group member an individual accountability exam or by randomly selecting one member to give an answer for the entire group.

Face-To-Face Interaction

No magic exists in positive interdependence in and of self. Beneficial educational outcomes are due to the interaction patterns and verbal exchanges that take place among students in carefully structured cooperatives learning groups. Oral summarizing, giving and receiving explanations, and elaborating (relating what is being learned to previous learning) are important types of verbal interchanges.

Interpersonal And Small Group Skills

Students do not come to school with the social skills they need to collaborate effectively with others. So teachers need to teach the appropriate communication, leadership, trust, decision making, and conflict management skills to students and provide the motivation to use these skills in order for groups to function effectively.

Group Processing

Processing means giving students the time and procedures to analyze how well their groups are functioning and how well they are using the necessary social skills. This processing helps all group members achieve while maintaining effective working relationships among members. Feedback from the teacher and/or student observers on how well they observed the groups working may help processing effectiveness.