

## Cooperative Learning

More than fifty studies suggest that learning proceeds more effectively than usual when exchanges among teachers and learners are frequent and specifically directed toward students' problems and interests. When students work in small groups, each group member can participate more extensively, individual problems are more likely to become clear and to be remedied, and learning can accelerate. The American workplace increasingly requires group management and cooperative skills (SCANS).

Drs. David and Roger Johnson consider five basic elements essential to all cooperative learning groups:

- Positive Interdependence – the feeling of each person doing his or her own part, knowing that the group sinks or swims together
- Face-to-Face Interaction – working together to understand the task, check comprehension and reflect on learning
- Interpersonal and Small Group Social Skills – the development of trust and respect within the group as conflict is managed and the members interact with one another
- Individual Accountability – each member of the group takes personal responsibility for learning the material, making contributions to the group and participating in assessing both personal and group achievement
- Group Processing – members of the group analyze the effectiveness of the group and work together to find ways to improve group processes.

Jeanne Gibbs defines collaborative skills that students learn and practice through cooperative groups.

- Participating fully
- Expressing appreciation
- Valuing diversity of culture/ideas
- Thinking constructively
- Resolving conflict
- Assessing improvement
- Listening attentively
- Reflecting on experience
- Making responsible decisions
- Solving problems creatively
- Working on tasks together
- Celebrating achievement

Cooperative learning involves much more than assigning students to groups and giving them a task to complete. The assignment to groups must be done thoughtfully to ensure that students gain from the experience of working together. A critical component of cooperative learning groups is the various roles group members take. These roles should be rotated and can either be assigned by the teacher or selected by group members. Some of the roles used in cooperative learning groups include:

- Facilitator – gets group started, clarifies directions, encourages participation and asks for teacher assistance if group is stuck
- Recorder – writes group discoveries and results
- Reporter – tells community the discoveries and results
- Timekeeper – helps keep group on task and within time limits
- Encourager – cheers people on and invites participation
- Summarizer – paraphrases agreements and disagreements and restates major conclusions.