"Cooperative" Learning
—— One Answer to Learning English in the Japanese Classroom ——

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Abstract. Cooperative Learning is a teaching strategy or approach that facilitates cooperation among students to increase the language learning process. Three key components that characterize Cooperative Learning and differentiate it from other types of student group work are **positive interdependence, individual accountability** and the teaching of **cooperative skills.** These three components are critical elements in Cooperative Learning.

This paper will introduce the principles of Cooperative Learning and lay a foundation for practical use in the classroom. The Cooperative Learning classroom is a student centered approach. It is a successful way to facilitate language learming in the Japanese classroom that has traditionally been teacher centered. Cooperative Learning gives the student more chances to interchange with other students and overcome language and cultural barriers.

Simple Cooperative Structures

The three key components that characterize Cooperative Learning are **positive interdependence, individual accountability** and the teaching of **cooperative skills.** These are the three critical components in Cooperative Learning.

POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE

Positive interdependence means that students work together to achieve a goal. Students must not only be concerned about their own performance, but also about the performance of the whole group. Tasks and activities are structured so that group members succeed only when the whole group succeeds. Positive interdependence can be structured by using **common goals** (students must produce a single product-story, a picture), **shared resources** (e. g., each student has different material, a different tool) and group rewards (i. e., teams are rewarded for their achievement, for their ability to work well together, for helping each other ; rewards may be certificates, applause from the rest of the class, or leaving five minutes early, etc.).

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Individual accountability means that each student is held accountable for his work and for his contribution to the group. Tasks and activities are structured so that each student is responsible for learning the assigned material. Each student's understanding is assessed and feedback is given. Individual accountability can be achieved by using **random selection** (i. e., students work together to complete their worksheets, but only one worksheet is collected by the teacher for evaluation), **individual testing** (i. e., paper and pencil test of each student in the group) and **task accountability** (i. e., each student is made responsible for one section of the task and must teach the other members the material).

COOPERATIVE SKILLS

There is much discussion among Cooperative Learning practitioners as to how cooperative skills are taught. Educators such as Spencer Kagan and Frank Lyman believe that time for discussion and instruction on cooperative skills is necessary ; however, the amount of time and the amount of instruction is dependent upon the type of cooperative skill and on the needs of the students. Highly structured activities may require less cooperative skills training. In addition, students may already possess the necessary cooperative skill. Other educators, such as David and Roger Johnson, Dee Dishon, and Pat Wilson O'Leary, believe the only way to ensure that cooperative skills are learned is to have students ' practice those skills separate from the academic content.

Cooperative skills are interpersonal skills that help students work together effectively. Cooperative skills can be divided into three areas :

1. *communication skills* such as active listening, paraphrasing, checking for understanding

2. *group management skills* such as role responsibility, conflict resolution, and consensus building

3. *group cohesion skills* such as trust building, encouragement and appreciation

Determining which cooperative skills are important is often dependent upon the type of task the students are asked to complete. For example, having students produce a team story requires students to actively listen to each other, to paraphrase, to participate equally in the writing of the story, to check that all members agree on the context of the story and to show appreciation for each member's contribution.

In order for the student to display skills such as trustbuilding, active listening, consensus

building, and paraphrasing, language is required. Instructors need to develop activities that help students to practice appropriate language usage - saying the right thing in the right place at the right time.

Creating a Cooperative Climate

Cooperative Learning is a building process which, like any new teaching strategy or approach, takes time to master, not only for the instructor, but also for the students.

To ensure successful results, instructors need to start slowly and to lay a solid foundation. Classbuilding and teambuilding activities help teachers and students adjust to this new type of classroom. These activities help students: 1) get acquainted, 2) decrease anxiety and shyness, 3) build trusting relationships, 4) value individual differences and 5) be accustomed to working together.

One way to lay a solid foundation and ease into a new type of classroom is to introduce Structures into the lesson. By definition, a Structure can be used with any subject matter and at any point in the lesson. Structures organize classroom interactions and can be used as building blocks in a lesson (Kagan). (Examples of structures follow in italics.)

Classbuilding

Classbuilding is important because it creates a network among all students and requires students to view themselves as part of the whole class. Classbuilding activities build a positive classroom environment and are a necessary precursor to team formation and teambuilding. Some examples of classbuilding activities can be seen in the following structures. In *Line-up* (Kagan), students create one line according to a specified criteria. For example, students may stand in a line according to their birthdays, height, time they woke up, etc. The teacher gives the criteria and the students must ask one another the question, "When's your birthday ?" and get in the line accordingly. In *Inside-Outside Circles* (Kagan) students stand in two concentric circles, ask their partners information questions, and rotate based on the teacher's command. Personal information such as favorite hobby, favorite sport, favorite class may serve as appropriate content. In *Deuces are Wild* (Kagan) students are given a playing card, pair up by number and color, exchange information, exchange cards with someone else and repeat the process with a new partner. "Hi, my name is…and I'm from…" may serve as appropriate ice breakers.

TEAM FORMATION AND TEAMBUILDING

Team Formation can be accomplished by random selection, student selfselection and teacher selection. The type of team selection is dependent upon the goal of the Cooperative Learning activity. Randomly selected teams (e. g., students pick numbers) are often used in Classbuilding activities. Student self-selected teams (i. e., students choose who they want to team with) are often formed to change the atmosphere in class and to give students the opportunity to work with other students who have similar interests (e. g., students who like the same sport or music). Teachers select based on ability level, and sex. These heterogeneous teams provide for and promote more peer tutoring (students of high ability help students of low ability), and integration. Teams stay together for the length of the activity whether that be one hour or three weeks. Team size is dependent upon the type of activity. The optimum number of students per team is four, and should never exceed six students.

Teambuilding, like Classubuilding, activities help students become acquainted and become comfortable with one another. They are important, especially when teams are first formed, because they serve as ice breakers, build support and trust, and generate enthusiasm. Two structure examples of teambuilding activities are *Roundtable* and *Think-Pair-Share*. In *Roundtable* students on each team work together to answer a question with many answers. One paper and one pencil are passed around the table so that each student can write and answer. Making a list of all the sports or vegetables, or parts of the body, or finding words in a scrambled word puzzle are appropriate content for teambuilding. In *Think-Pair-Share* students listen while the teacher poses a question. Then they are given a chance to think of a response. Students within the team are paired to share their thoughts. Students then share their responses with the whole team (Lyman). Talking about an important event in one's life, describing one's favorite place, or talking about a favorite person may serve as appropriate content for teambuilding.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Good classroom managements skills are essential in a Cooperative Learning classroom. Managing a Cooperative Learning classroom requires the establishment of standards for individual behavior, for group interaction, and for movement between whole group and small group activities. Because students are asked to constantly interact and to share in tasks equally, it is important that the instructor, with student input, establish standards (e. g., be on time, be responsible for your own material, be willing to help others), and

introduce strategies to facilitate a smooth-operating classroom. Some examples of effective classroom management strategies are : 1) a zero noise level signal (such as a raised hand or a ringing bell, which signals students that it's time to stop and listen), 2) time limits (i. e., letting students know in advance how much time they have on a tast), and 3) role assignments (i. e., each student on a team is assigned a role, such as facilitator, reader, checker, recorder, timekeeper).

The Cooperative Learning Lesson

As in the development of any successful lesson plan, cooperative learning lessons require instructors to plan the lesson carefully and to analyze their roles in the execution and evaluation of the lesson. Decisions instructors make regarding the content and structure of the lesson, their involvement during the lesson and their focus after the lesson are significant because they determine whether or not a cooperative learning lesson will succeed or fail.

BEFORE THE LESSON

Prior to the actual lesson, the instructor needs to determine :

1. the **lesson objective** (e. g., identify common illnesses, demonstrate the ability to give directions, identify five global problems and evaluate the effect of each problem on the world population)

2. the **cooperative skill** (e. g., turn taking, active listening, encouraging)

3. the group size and **formation** (e. g., four students per group, heterogeneous, homegeneous)

4. the **room arrangement** (e. g., chairs grouped in fours)

5. the **materials** needed for the lesson (e. g., textbook, visuals)

6. how **positive interdependence** will be structured (e. g., group product, shared resources)

7. how **individual accountability** will be structured (e. g., individual worksheet)

8. how much **time** to allot for tasks (e. g., 15 minutes per task)

9. how **observation** of group work will be conducted (e. g., teacher observation, student observation sheet)

10. what **processing** questions/activities will be needed (e. g., questions that deal with content, questions that deal with group effectiveness)

11. how **students will be evaluated** (e. g., test, group product)

DURING THE LESSON

During the lesson, the role of the instructor is to **FACILITATE** the learning. The instructor provides direction, guides students through tasks and activities, and helps groups work to achieve their goals. The instructor provides resources by which students can learn new information. By becoming a facilitator the instructor gives students the opportunity to discover information on their own, to share their knowledge with other students, to evaluate their new knowledge and to draw conclusions.

During the lesson the instructor also monitors group work. The instructor observes the group at work, "listens in" during group activities and collects information on group interactions. The instructor may interact with a group to guide them in the activity, to ask questions of the group, to praise them or to provide skill reinforcement to help the group solve a problem. If there is a problem, the instructor must be careful to act as a consultant and must ultimately, leave the group to solve the problem. The instructor's observations and interactions with the group help in diagnosing group strengths and weaknesses and assist the instructor in processing and in planning future lessons.

AFTER THE LESSON

At the end of each lesson it is important that the instructor and the students evaluate how well they learned the material and how well they worked together. Processing takes many forms and shapes and varies in degrees as to the amount of time and energy devoted to it. The instructor may choose to highlight : observations made during the lesson, ask groups to evaluate their own group interaction, ask individuals to evaluate each other or themselves or ask the class as a whole to discuss and provide feed back on the learning and group effectiveness. The instructor may choose to process by asking question of the whole class, of groups or of individuals or by providing a group or individual questionnaire. It is essential that instructors take time to process. Allowing students time to think about what they just did helps them to focus on skills that will not only assist them in improving their learning, but also in improving their own cooperation skills. Processing encourages the development of effective groups.

TASK 1

Questions to Guide Lesson Planning

Directions : Answer the questions below to guide you in the planning of a cooperative learning lesson.

Focus Questions	
1 . What is the lesson objective ?	
2 . What cooperative skill will be highlighted ?	
3 . How will groups be formed ?	
4 . What will the size of the group be ?	
5 . How will the room be changed ?	
6 . What structures will be included ?	
7 . How will positive interdependence be structured ?	
8 . How will individual accountability be structured ?	
9 . How will observations during group work take place ?	
10. How will processing take place ?	

Developing a Cooperative Learning Lesson

Directions : Use the responses from Task 1 and the following lesson plan fomat to develop a cooperative learning lesson.

TOPIC : _____

OBJECTIVE :   Content _____

            Cooperative Skill _____

LESSON STEP	COOPERATIVE STRUCTURE	ACTIVITY	RESOURCES/MATERIALS
Warm-Up/Review			
Introduction			
Presentation			
Guided Practice			
Evaluation			
Application			

SUMMARY

The Cooperative Learning approach, in the language learning classroom, has proven to be not only effective but fun! Students respond to a cooperative climate once they understand the new environment and objectives. Like anything new or different, a time of adjustment is expected. Going from a teacher centered classroom in the Japanese education system, to a student centered one, is a transition for the students as well as the teacher. The rewards and progress of language learning are plain to see. The challenge of the 90's in Japan must surely be how to make the English classroom more communicative. Cooperative Learning offers teachers in Japan an exciting way to increase student involvement in the "communicative" language class.

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