

# Cooperative Learning Strategies to foster Students' Achievement

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<b>Pedagogical skill:</b> Language Teaching Methodology	<b>Topic:</b> Current Trends in Language Teaching
<b>Curricular Thread:</b> Cooperative Lan- guage Learning	<b>Sub thread:</b> Activities to develop comprehension, collaborative spea- king and writing skills through group dynamics and cooperative strategies

## Strategy 1: Group formation

### Description

Cooperative Language Learning is an approach that encourages collaboration and reduces the isolated effort for competition usually found in a classroom. It provides students the opportunity to construct knowledge as they interact with their classmates.

Generally cooperative language learning strategies promote positive interdependence with the notion that one student cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds; enhance equal participation since all students should contribute equally, with no one being forgotten or opted out; Foster individual accountability in which each member is accountable for a specific portion of the work; and, promote interpersonal skills such as active listening, communication, decision-making and conflict management.

Students need to be provided with the motivation to use these skills in achieving group success.

Teachers may employ the following strategies to ensure that cooperative classroom situations are, indeed, cooperative.

Assigning roles to the group members is an essential part of the groups' achievement. Group formation based on closeness or student selection may be the fastest way to do it, particularly for big courses, as a result, learners may end up working with the same individuals. Teachers should assemble groups in various ways to further the activity's learning objectives.

### **Implementation of the Teaching Strategy**

#### **A. Sample activity. Pre Basic user Year 2-3**



The title of this activity is “*A fantasy zoo*”. The purpose is to create a zoo for their home town.

Students have to be assembled in groups for the activity. You have to whisper an animal name (four of each animal to every student) making sure that everyone is familiar with the names of the animals. The challenge is to find the other animals of one's kind. Ask students to make the sound of the animal that was whispered in their ears. They have to keep making the sound until they find one another.

Then, students need to put four chairs together. It is important to show or give them instructions by shifting their desks together to assemble their workspace. Each member of the group should cooperate. Guide one group to demonstrate what you mean. Practice at least three times.

Now, ask students to sit and give them instructions regarding group behavior during the cooperative learning activity. You can write and tell the participants the three responsibilities that all members have in the group: **To be polite, to listen, to cooperate.** Have them repeat orally the responsibilities in each group and post them on the board. For group management, draw a **Quiet signal** that signifies that whenever you wish the class to convene or to stop working in their groups; it could be a hand signal, a bell or a card with a symbol on it.

Tell the participants that when the teacher uses the signal, everyone understands that the whole class needs to pay attention. Drawing a **Team stop sign** is a good way to manage noise levels during group activities. If a team becomes too noisy, you can place a *Team Stop Sign* in the middle of the group's table. That team must be silent for 30 seconds.



It is time to assign roles to students according to the required tools to be used. Give each member of the group a number as follows: Number 1 can be in charge of the scissors, number 2 the glue, number 3 the pencil, number 4 the markers. Students need to know that they are allowed to use only the given item. You can choose a group, and demonstrate the way the zoo should be prepared:

The student with the pencil should use the colored papers to draw the animals. The student with the scissors should cut out the drawings. The student with the paper glue should paste the animals into large piece of paper (the zoo). The student with the markers should draw the cages of the zoo and the surroundings.

The following are roles that can be assigned to group members (names of superheroes may be used) such as:



**Iron Man/woman (Group Leader)** makes sure everyone follows the rules established by the teacher and remind the students not to make noise.

**Spider Man/woman (Materials Manager)** receives all the materials. The only person permitted to move away from the work zone to get the materials, returns additional material, and eliminate any garbage.

**Batman (Coach)** is in charge of helping the shoulder partner if he/she gets stuck with the task.

These roles should be presented in labels and placed colored index cards to distinguish between groups. Make two holes in the top corners of

the cards. Run a yarn through the holes to make a necklace that the students should wear while working in the cooperative learning group.



Another option is to make a crown to those who are group leaders. Monitor participants` work and participation in the group. Make sure that everybody is concentrated on his or her own task. You can also encourage students to help others if necessary. Offer positive feedback after the completion of the task (animal).

If students seem to have developed the understanding of the project and the group is on the right track, hand out plastic sign with the picture of “Thumb up” showing good progress. Remind the students about the time limit assigned for the activity. Once learners have finished their task, ask them to paste together on the board or on a wall (you have to show them how). They must remain in their seats.

There are several things you can do to assess participants. Ask two members of each group to count the animals and show every color of the animals. Ask the names of the animals, their sizes, etc. Example: is this a lion? Is this lion pink? Is this giraffe big? Enumerate the posters that belong to each group and provide positive feedback. (i.e This zoo is very beautiful. I love the white llamas). Another form to assess groups is

by using an observation checklist. It is especially helpful when different items need to be observed.

This activity may entail a time duration longer than the usual classroom time. The purpose is to promote the production of outputs towards the end. This ensures that cooperation is not only developed inside the classroom but is strengthened and maintained over a period of time outside the classroom.

The materials that can be used for this activity are, but not limited to, names of animals, glue, scissors for each group, colored papers, pencils, markers, tape plastic chips, yarn, cards with students roles, large sheets of paper (wrapping paper), thumb up sign.

### **Differentiation & Accommodation**

Always model a strategy before asking students to do it and use simple language for children to understand.

If you have big groups of students, it is important to establish routines for group seating arrangement for students to know what to do when a cooperative learning task is presented. This will help to save time for further activities. An additional suggestion is to set a few ground rules when forming groups.

After the students have found their partner/team, there is no trading partners or joining another group.

It is also important to set up group seating so that students are close enough to share materials and thoughts and make sure there is room for you to access each group. You can change the composition of groups at least each month so as to give students the opportunity to work with different classmates throughout the school year.

An additional suggestion is to keep your tone of voice clear and friendly and set up bell ringing to control time. The following are ways to have

your students` attention before, during and after an activity: blow a whistle, ring a bell, clap your hands, play their favorite music, or stand still.

## **Strategy 2: Deliver Team-Building Practice**

### **Description**

Assigning students to groups does not ensure that team building will happen. It is important to foster a climate of cooperation in the classroom by having learners participate in engaging students in team-building activities in which they enjoy and help each other in an effort to attain both academic and non-academic objectives. All group members must understand that one cannot achieve success unless they all cooperate. Everyone in the team must learn to synchronize their efforts to guarantee that this happens.

### **Implementation of the Teaching Strategy**



The topic of this activity is: “**A mysterious box**”. The purpose is to write a story using past tense and sequence connectors.

You can start this activity by assembling the groups. One way is to make puzzles with pictures or names of famous Ecuadorian legends. Students choose a puzzle piece and find the rest of the pieces of their puzzle to form a group. You can add on the back, a message related to a

behavior required for group work that is revealed after the small group puts all their pieces together.

Have participants put four chairs together and sit with their puzzle mates. Once seated, ask students to think what the message regarding group behavior in the puzzle means. One student from each group has to post the phrase on the board and tell the class what they think it means.

You can use the following phrases: **Get along with each other, Respect others, On task only, Use quiet voices, Participate and share, Stay on task.** At the end, have students notice that they have just formed the word GROUPS. You could summarize what you expect from them when working in groups.

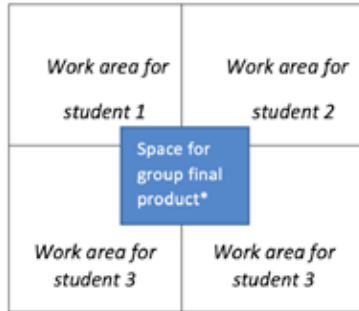
Now, you are ready to assign the following suggested roles to your students: **Recorder.** - writes the final product/work. **Narrator.** - reports the final product of the group. **Editor.** - checks if the final product has no errors. **Timekeeper.** - makes sure the group works within the time limit.



Divide a large piece of paper into four parts and leave a central square or circle. Give the introductory sentence for the story that each group has to use: **“When I was walking to school, I saw a box on the floor...”** Each group member has to write 3 different events for the story in a space around the center of a large piece of paper (place mat). Afterwards, the



group compares what each member has written, and the whole story has to be compiled in the center of the paper. See the sample below:



\*Taken from [http://www.eworkshop.on.ca/edu/pdf/Mod36\\_coop\\_placemat.pdf](http://www.eworkshop.on.ca/edu/pdf/Mod36_coop_placemat.pdf)

To ensure that groups are working together to accomplish the task, it is necessary that you monitor each group and provide feedback on a specific point of the task in order to reinforce their learning. While monitoring, take the time to motivate the groups by praising them for their skills shown during their work.

The students need to be told that they will be acting out the story. Once they are ready, provide a gift box that will help them to act out the story. The students can use other resources they have at hand. The narrator tells the story and the other members act out. Give positive feedback to students' work and again praise their effort when presenting the story. The placemat can be used to assess learners' individual and group work. You can also use a rubric to evaluate the content afterwards.

This type of activity basically needs colored paper, list of Ecuadorian legends, markers, cards with participants roles, pens or pencils, placemat design, gift box.

## **Differentiation & Accommodation**

Establishing routines and clearly defined expectations for performance can help you manage big classes successfully. You can also provide extra time to process oral information and directions in order to make sure everyone understands.

Before giving instructions for an activity, have students form desired groups and arrange the classroom furniture as needed. Try to group students in clusters of 4 to 5 if class size is larger than 30 participants. Having small groups makes the task organization and the skills management much easier. Always stay close to the groups in order to observe students' behaviors. You might discover that for one student, one role can work but not for another.

Do not burden your students with excessive feedback on their writing. Try to provide them with concrete possibilities for revision. You also need to make sure the learning environment is safe for participants. They should be able to move around the classroom without difficulties. Materials should be accessible so that students do not have to seek assistance from the teacher.

### ***Strategy 3: Manage and monitor group work appropriately***

#### **Description**

Assigning specific roles to learners can be an efficient way of structuring group work and can also **foster positive interaction in class**. Assigning roles encourages a sense of responsibility guarantees accountability for the participation of all members. Cooperative learning activities are generally unlikely to be very quiet; that is why establishing flexible group norms can help improve the quality of interactions. Teachers could also

use a regular classroom monitoring scheme to ensure that students are, in fact, working cooperatively.

## Implementation of the Teaching Strategy

The title of the activity is: Vacation Plan. You can have one student read the purpose from a slide previously prepared: “Your group is going to plan a vacation to the destination of your choice. You have a total budget of \$1500. The plan has to include 3: list of must-see-sites, logistics tips such directions, transportation information, etc. “must see sites”, traveling directions, transportation, lodging, activities/entertainment, restaurants, best time for travelling including weather and finally the estimated price for four people. Each group is expected to start their trip in their home town.”



The first step is to form the groups. One way to do this is by using words that have been explained and studied in a previous lesson and use them to assemble groups of four. Give each student a piece of paper with the word written down and ask him/her to stand up and look for three synonyms of the word he/she has.

It is necessary at this point to reinforce expected behavior during teamwork. You can hand out four most common problems students usually have when working in groups and have each group change these issues into positive behaviors. For example: We are not listening to each other. Instead of fostering other’s ideas and thoughts, we simply push our own opinions. Some of us don’t help. We are noisy and disrespectful. Have students write these positive behaviors in pieces of cardboard and post them in front of the class.

Once students are aware of the expected behaviors, you can assign their roles:

**Traveling leader** finds the sites, directions and transportation to their destination, best time to travel and other issues such as the weather, travel documents, etc. He/she keeps track of the time.

**Hotel leader** finds and calculates the price the lodging that suits the group.



**Activity/Entertainment Leader** finds and calculates the price of at least three activities to do at the destination.

**Restaurant leader** finds different restaurants/places to eat at while at the destination and calculates the estimated price for four people to eat at each place.

Each leader must cooperate with the other leaders in the group to create a fun and successful trip. While working on their project, they have to find a way to present their vacation plan to the rest of the class. This can be done using a poster, flyer or brochure.

As students to do their work, you need to be available for the students to ask for advice regarding any language question they may have. This is also an opportunity to assess students' comprehension of their tasks. Also, observe different situations that can emerge from the discussions, so that you can refer to them by addressing the whole class. You can also sit with the groups in order to invite quiet participants to ask questions or to give opinions regarding the group task and their roles. Provide each

group some feedback on how you believe they are progressing before moving to the next step.

While students are presenting their final product to the rest of the class, acknowledge and value their work in order to help build confidence.

There may be several cases in which students like to check if their work in groups is helpful to them and successfully contributes to the task assigned. You can have them complete a group self-assessment or you can use a rubric to assess the students' product.

This activity entails a multimedia presentation (optional), small papers with synonyms, colored cards with roles for participants, wrapping paper, colored cardboard, colored markers.

### **Differentiation & accommodation**

If there is no access to a computer or projector, you can provide each group with a copy of the purpose of the activity and the roles.

For effective group work, the number of group members should not be more than four/five. Adjust the roles to make them suitable for the tasks and needs of the class.

Big classes can become very noisy, so it is necessary to summarize what has been said and/or have students repeat the instructions for the class.

In case the expected behavior is not shown by certain students, you can remind them by placing cards with the statement of the positive behavior in the center of their work space. Independent users should maintain control over their work. Instead of acting as an editor, you can help them learn to assess their own writing by only giving them some useful clues.

## Assessment in the cooperative learning process

Assessment helps teacher evaluate students' progress, set standards, motivates performance, and improve the quality of teaching. All of the teacher's assessment decisions will direct and change students' learning outcomes. Assessment activities can be categorized as formative or summative: **Formative assessment** is used to provide feedback, and to measure learners' progress so as to encourage them to reach greater levels. **Summative assessment** is used to evaluate the outcomes for competency development or improvement. While teachers monitor groups during the activity, some informal assessment may also be applied.

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