

Highlights

- Greetings from Roger and David
- Group Processing
- Web Site: www.co-operation.org

Inside

- 1 Summer Schedule For Training Session
- 2 Cooperative Learning And Conflict Resolution SIGs
- 3 Address For IBC

The Cooperative Link

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Cooperative Learning

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Greetings From The Johnsons

Greetings! Here we are again! We have had a busy year, both nationally and internationally.

It has been a good year for us (besides ignoring last years' new year resolutions). The two of us and Morton Deutsch were honored to receive the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) Lifetime Achievement Award in Odense, Denmark. It was an excellent conference in the city where Hans Christian Anderson grew up. We were pleased to see a number of friends from several countries while we were there.

We also had an article on our work in *Connect*, the news magazine for the College of Education at the University of Minnesota. It was nice that the article emphasized not only our work on Cooperative Learning, but also our work on conflict resolution in the school.

We are working with an enthusiastic group of teachers in Spain with our first training in late October. Nicolas Muracciole, the director of the training has an excellent model with a second

training in May focusing on teaching social skills. He has organized follow-up for the teachers for the six months in between. A couple of our books are being translated into Spanish to support the training. We have high expectations for this project.

Also in May, we will be in Mexico City presenting cooperative learning and celebrating the translation of another one of our books in Spanish.

We still teach the Cooperative Learning Course at the University of Minnesota in the Spring Semester (on Saturdays so that local teachers can attend) and are looking forward to the Cooperative Learning Institute in July. We will be celebrating our 30th year of the Institute. Last year we had participants from several different countries.

I'd like to remind all of us who are using cooperative learning that emphasizing the group goal (and positive interdependence), strategies to support individual accountability, teaching and encouraging cooperative behaviors, and structuring processing in the groups to celebrate what they are doing well and what could make their groups even better (see major article in the newsletter).

We have a group that 2016 will be a good year. Make sure it is a good year for you.

Roger and David

Need For Group Processing

David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson

Aesop tells of the consequences of not processing the effectiveness with which group members work together. A lion had been watching three bulls feeding in an open field. He had tried to attack them several times, but they had kept together, and helped each other to drive him away. The lion had little hope of eating them, for he was no match for three strong bulls with their sharp horns and hoofs. He could not keep away from that field, however, for he could not resist watching a good meal, even when there was little chance of his getting it. One day, however, the bulls had a quarrel. When the hungry lion came to look at them, he found them in separate corners of the field. They were as far away from one another as they could get. It was then easy for the lion to attack, kill, and eat them one at a time. In failing to process their problems in working together and continually increase the effectiveness of their cooperation, the

bulls forgot that their success came from their unity.

Perhaps the most neglected aspect of structuring cooperative learning is group processing. A **process** is an identifiable sequence of actions (or events) taking place over time aimed at achieving a given goal (Johnson & F. Johnson, 2013). **Group processing** occurs when members reflect on the group's work and members' interaction to clarify and improve members' efforts to achieve the group's goals and maintain effective working relationships (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2013). It involves describing what member actions were helpful and unhelpful and making decisions about what actions to continue or change.

Processes to be Examined and Improved

There are two types of processes that group members need to discuss. The first is **taskwork processes**, which involves the process used to complete the assignment. In solving a series of math problems, for example, the process of doing so may include reading the problem, ensuring all group members understand it, specifying a series of steps required to find the correct answer, ensuring all members understand the steps and underlying principles required to solve the problem, and coming to consensus as to the answer. This process is repeated for each problem. The second is **teamwork processes**, which involves the process used to interact effectively with each other while completing the assignment. This includes etiquette (members should not interrupt each other), the appropriate use of social skills (leadership, trust, decision making, conflict resolution), and the promotion of each other's learning (ensuring all members engage in oral rehearsal, explanations, and so forth).

In order to continuously improve their taskwork and teamwork processes,

group members should discuss each thoroughly at the end of each lesson. The **purposes** of such group processing are to:

1. Improve continuously the quality of the group's taskwork and teamwork.
2. Increase individual accountability by focusing attention on each member's responsible and skillful actions to learn and to help groupmates learn.
3. Streamline the learning process to make it simpler (reducing complexity).
4. Eliminate unskilled and inappropriate actions (error-proofing the process).

Structuring Group Processing

You (the teacher) structure group processing by (a) setting aside time for students to reflect on their experiences in working with each other and (b) providing procedures for students to use in discussing group effectiveness. You may provide several minutes or so at the end of each group session for immediate processing and a longer period of time every five group sessions or so for a more detailed discussion of the process the group is using to maximize members' learning. Students reflect on and analyze the group session to (a) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful in contributing to the joint efforts to achieve the group's goals and (b) make decisions about what actions to continue or change. There are four parts to group processing.

1. **Feedback:** Ensure each student, group, and class receives (and gives) feedback on the processes of taskwork and teamwork.

2. **Reflection:** Ensure students analyze and reflect on the feedback they receive.
3. **Improvement Goals:** Help individuals and groups set goals for improving the quality of their work.
4. **Celebration:** Encourage the celebration of members' hard work and the group's success.

Improving Social Skills Through Processing

High quality work is based on the continuous improvement of teamwork (and taskwork) skills. You engineer a process through which students assess the current levels of their social skills and plan how to increase them:

1. Decide which social skill is going to be emphasized in the lesson.
2. Operationally define the social skill with a T-Chart and teach the social skill to students.
3. Prepare an observation form, appoint observers, explain the observation form.
4. Conduct the lesson, observing each of the learning groups, and coaching the student observers. **Observation** is aimed at recording and describing members' behavior as it occurs in the group, that is, to provide objective data about the interaction among group members. The behavior of group members is observed so that students may be given feedback about their participation in the group and so that inferences can be made about the ways in which the group is functioning.
5. Complete the lesson and structure the procedure for processing how members use the social skills. The data gathered by you and the observers are analyzed as are the self-assessments by the members

of how often and how well they individually performed the targeted social skills. The data are recorded and displayed on charts so that individual students and the groups can track their improvement in using the social skills and make informed decisions as to how students' teamwork can be improved. After small group processing, conduct whole class processing. Class charts are used to record and display the progress in mastering the social skill. Students set goals for improving their social skills during the next group meeting. Finally, the group members celebrate their hard work in mastering social skills.

Types of Group Processing

There are two types of small group processing, quick and thorough. When there is little time, teachers can have the cooperative groups engage in a quick conversation such as the following:

1. Give each member of your group some honest, positive, and specific feedback about how they helped you and your groupmates learn.
2. Identify three things group members did well in working together...
3. Actions that helped the group were...
4. One thing the group can improve is...

Alternatively, the processing may be more thorough. The procedure for thorough small group processing includes the following:

1. Prepare an observation form and procedure for student observers to use.
2. Explain the role of observer to the class.

3. Supervise student observers, helping any who do not fully understand what to do.
4. Intervene in any group that needs help in their taskwork and teamwork.
5. End the small group work.
6. Have the group teach the academic material to the observer.
7. Instruct observers in how to report their results to their group. This includes summarizing the rows and columns, holding the observation form so all group members can see it, ask the group members to summarize the results for themselves and for the group as a whole, and ask the group members to set an improvement goal of what they could do better tomorrow. The observer does very little talking while the group analyses the data. The observer does make sure all group members receive some positive feedback about their participation.
8. Each group sets for goals for improvement.
9. Groups celebrate their hard work and success.

Thorough processing is almost always preferable over quick processing, if time allows.

Levels of Group Processing

There are also two levels of group processing, small group and whole class. In small group processing each cooperative learning group engages in their own processing quasi-independent from all the other groups. The teacher may move from group to group adding his or her observations to the group discussion.

In whole class processing, two procedures may be followed. First, the teacher may report his or her observations to the class as a whole,

often graphing the results of the observations so that the students may see if their cooperative groups are improving or not. Second, the teacher may:

1. Observe each group for a few minutes, add the data together, and share the results with the whole class. Charting the data to get a continuous record of class improvement is always a good idea. You make a large chart on which you record the frequency with which students' performed each targeted skill. Students can see how much they improved over time. Teachers may wish to give the class a reward when the class total exceeds a preset criterion of excellence. Not only does such a chart visually remind students of the skills they should practice while working in their groups, but continuous improvement becomes a challenge that promotes class cooperation.
2. Add together the observation results of the student observers for an overall class total. You may wish to chart this data.
3. Ask students to (a) describe things they did to help each other learn, (b) discuss members' answers in the group for a minute or two and arrive at a consensus on an answer, and (c) share their group's answer with the class as a whole. Since this procedure takes some time, three questions may be as many as the teacher may wish to ask.

By and large feedback during processing should be positive. Positive feedback builds trust among group members. It reduces member apprehension about being evaluated and they tend to look forward to being observed and receiving more feedback in the future. It reinforces their effective behavior and encourages them to repeat it in the future. It tapes into past successes and increases self-esteem.

Final Note

Students do not learn from experiences that they do not reflect on. If the learning groups are to function better tomorrow than they did today, members must receive feedback, reflect on how the effectiveness of their actions may be improved, and plan how to be even more skillful during the next group session.

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References

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F. P. (2013). *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills* (11th Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R., & Holubec, E. (2013). *Cooperation in the classroom* (8th ed.). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.

Summer Workshops

Location: **Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Dates: July 25 to July 28

Workshops:

-Foundations of Cooperative Learning

-Foundations Leadership Training

-Advanced Cooperative Learning

-Creative Conflict (Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers, Constructive Controversy)

-Conflict Leadership Training

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The workshops will take place at the Commons Hotel (formerly the Radisson University Hotel), 615 Washington Ave., S.E., 1-800-822-6757, (612) 379-8888.

Join The AERA SIGs

Members of the American Educational Research Association should make sure they are members of the **Cooperative Learning** and the **Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention** Special Interest Groups.

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