



**Indicator:** All teachers use cooperative learning methods and encourage questioning, seeking help from others, and offering help to others. (5108)

**Explanation:** Cooperative learning refers to teaching methods in which students work together in small groups to help each other learn academic content (Slavin, 2015). Cooperative learning has positive effects on student achievement and helps students learn to work together and encourage each other. Teachers can best advance cooperative learning by supporting student questions and positive interdependence between students.

**Questions:** What is cooperative learning? How should teachers approach cooperative learning?

*What is cooperative learning?*

Cooperative learning refers to teaching methods in which students work together in small groups to help each other learn academic content (Slavin, 2015). In order to participate in cooperative learning, students must be able to demonstrate some mastery in one of CASEL's five competence domains—relationship skills. Relationship skills, according to CASEL, involves “communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when needed” (Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullotta, 2015, p. 17). In cooperative learning, the learning goals are shared: Each student can only achieve her individual learning goal if the other group members achieve theirs as well (Deutsch, 1949, Johnson & Johnson, 1999). These team rewards motivate students to help one another (Slavin, 1999). There is reasonable consensus among researchers that cooperative learning has positive effects on student achievement (Rohrbeck, Ginsburg-Block, Fantuzzo, & Miller, 2003; Roseth, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008; Sharan, 2002; Slavin, 2010, 2013; Webb, 2008). When compared with collaborative learning, cooperative learning is typically viewed as more structured, more prescriptive, and more directive about how students work together (Puzio & Colby, 2013).

Cooperative learning requires a small group of learners to raise questions about a topic, work together to seek answers to these questions, and then synthesize their findings into meaningful summaries. First the group must plan what they will study and how they will study, thus deciding their project's content. As their work progresses, students divvy up the pieces of the task, into individual, pair and group jobs. When the individual and pair jobs are complete, they are integrated into the group task, enabling the group to present their findings to the rest of the class. (Thelen 1981; Sharan & Sharan 1992; Sharan, 2015).

*How should teachers approach cooperative learning?*

According to Sharan (2015), the critical first step to using cooperative learning in the classroom is for teachers to enlist a variety of ideas by enabling learners to ask questions of one another and of the teacher. By listening to students' questions “teachers learn what students already know and what they want to know, which helps teachers connect learning to the students' world and capabilities so as to make learning meaningful for them” (p. 91). The

idea is for teachers to ask students questions that generate more than one answer, allowing the teachers to learn what the students know or think. These opportunities to contribute gives students confidence in the value of their opinions. According to Goldenberg (1991) and Watson (2001) teachers can help students use the information they know by encouraging them to express their own ideas.

The teacher's role in implementing cooperative learning includes the following steps, adapted from Sharan (2015):

1. Generate a clearly-stated group goal requiring two or more students to work together. This goal is often formulated as a question that generates more than one answer and/or has more than one resource for the answer.
2. Give directions that activate "positive interdependence." Divide the task so that each student has a distinct part and can actively contribute to the completion of the task.
3. Give directions that are appropriate for the level of interpersonal skills of the group members.
4. Provide clear information about the evaluation criteria for the project.
5. During the completion of the cooperative learning activities, the teacher should monitor the student taskwork and teamwork, providing feedback as necessary.

For the purposes of grouping students for cooperative learning, researchers recommend against grouping students by ability because it tends to widen the achievement gap (e.g., Hiebert, 1983; Oakes, 1985) and stigmatizes lower level groups (Borko & Eisenhart, 1989; Peterson, 1989). In addition, grouping students with mixed abilities provides lower-achieving students with higher-achieving mentors and give higher-achieving students the opportunity to teach and coach their lower-achieving peers.

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