

## Cooperative Learning

### **Effective Group Roles:**

**Materials/Observer:** You are responsible for ensuring that the group has all needed materials to begin and complete assignments and that all materials are returned. You should not have to be asked to get the materials for your group. The materials for the day will be listed in the same place on the board. If you are assigned the material person role, you need to ensure all necessary manipulatives, calculators, copies, books, etc are on the desks at the start of class. You are also responsible for putting these back where you found them at the end of class. You must collect any copies for absent students in the folder as well as keep a record of the homework they need to make up. While your group is working you are responsible for paying attention to how your group members interact. It is your job to discuss any issues and offer suggestions for how you can work more cooperatively.

**Advice Seeker/Checker:** Your role is unique; you are the only member of your group who can ask questions of the teacher. You must be sure that no one in your group already knows the answer to the question you wish to ask. You are responsible for asking the questions that move the group towards meeting the goals and objectives of the lesson. The advice seeker needs to communicate with the entire group and check for understanding. The group must come to a consensus as to what pertinent questions need to be posed to the teacher if any. You must ensure by questioning that each member has sufficiently learned the expected goals of the activity. If you find that one or more of your group members can not explain the material, it is your job to ensure your group comes together to help them learn.

**Manager:** You will assure that all members of the group continue to work until the task is completed. The task is not done until you say so. You are responsible for organizing the final product and overseeing that all members contribute and the work gets done. Each member of the group must contribute to the final product and you should be able to articulate what they added. You are also the support and encourager for the group. You need to pay attention to how group members are feeling—are they feeling left out? Slighted? You need to get them back involved. Offer praise and encouragement when appropriate and needed. Keep members on track by being aware of how actions and words are perceived.

**Relater/Summarizer:** You are responsible for getting the whole group to articulate how the current tasks and topics relate to content previously studied. This is ongoing. Your whole job focuses on how connections can be made between this assignment and anything else that relates—work in other classes, work in this class, movies, TV, home life experiences, shopping, whatever. Make the connections and get your group talking about it in the context of the activity. You are not responsible for making the connections, but you are responsible for getting the group to discuss it. Be careful. If the group is off task and is talking about topics that don't pertain to this lesson, it is you who will not have succeeded in your role. As tasks and activities are completed you will work with the advice seeker to ensure that the each of your group members can summarize their learning.

## Necessary Components for Cooperative Group Work

**Individual Accountability:** Each group member is responsible for his/her own learning. You must make sure you understand and be your own advocate. Group members cannot rely on one or a few students to “do” the bulk of the work. The dynamic should reflect a balance of contributions from all members. Individual contributions to the group effort could be assessed and that assessment needs to be shared to continue to support and encourage each member of the group. Students may be asked to self-assess or use a form of peer-evaluation. At times an individual test, quiz, project or assignment will be given to assess this learning and students need to be able to demonstrate this learning.

**Peer Accountability:** Groups only function if all members are accountable to one another. The group cannot be successful unless all members are successful. If one member fails, the entire group fails. Each group will “sink or swim together.” If one member is off task, the entire group will face the consequences. It is essential that everyone understands the impact they will have on others. The instructor may choose to poll one student random as a representative of the whole group, or grade one student’s paper as a reflection of all the work done as a group. Each member is responsible to the other group members for their grade. Knowledge and understanding should be shared and responsibility for this rests on all members. On a particular assignment, the instructor may assign everyone the lowest grade of the group members’ work, the highest grade or offer a bonus if everyone in the group achieves at a particular level.

**Interpersonal Skills:** Teamwork is of the utmost importance in cooperative learning groups. The success of the cooperative learning experiences hinges on how well students can work together as a team. In order to work closely with someone you have to communicate and play nicely. Unkind words and sarcasm have no place in our groups. A level of trust must be maintained if you are to work together and be responsible to one another. There should be a spirit of cooperation and encouragement. If one member is struggling with the content, the other members should see themselves as cheerleaders—encouraging and helping until success is achieved.

**Group Processing:** From time to time you must look at how well you are working together. As a group, you need to describe and decide on what behaviors are useful or not and what changes need to be made to move the group along and complete tasks. This is ongoing. Students should be evaluating the “working relationship” throughout the lesson. Are you getting your tasks accomplished? Why or why not? What can you do if you are not finishing? Is one person doing all the work? How can you fix this? Is everyone learning the material? Fulfilling their roles? Taking their responsibility seriously? You will be asked to reflect on your cooperative efforts periodically, but you should also be self-monitoring along the way.

### Bibliography:

Cohen, E, 1986, *Designing Group Work*

Johnson, D & Johnson, R, 1991, *Cooperative Learning*

Schmuck, R & Schmuck, P, 1983, *Group Processes in the Classroom*