
BUILDING UP COOPERATIVE CULTURE IN THE CLASSROOM

What is described here is an activity that could be used in a teacher training workshop or for school-based teacher training.

The purpose of the exercise is to get teachers thinking about the relationship between classroom culture and cooperative learning.

It is helpful to think of the relationship as being a two-way relationship. In other words, the two aspects of the relationship are mutually reinforcing:

- Introducing cooperative learning activities can help to promote a change in classroom culture.
- Changing the classroom culture can help cooperative learning activities to be more successful.

On the next page is a worksheet, which can be used as the first stage of a teacher training activity. Two steps are described. If wished, the training facilitator could conduct a plenary session after each step, so that Groups share their conclusions. What similarities and differences emerge? Do groups agree or differ?

To assist the facilitator, the following is a short list of changes that might occur in a "cooperative" classroom:

- Help each other to success
- Take the responsibility of the others in the group as well
- Ask for help
- Listen and talk with everyone
- Ask their opinion of the others
- Be active, talk
- You and your group evaluate your own work
- Development is important and so is the process not the outcome

On the third page of these notes is a "staircase" of steps towards creating a cooperative classroom. This provides a useful reference summary of the kinds of changes to classroom culture that a teacher can strive to bring about.

BUILDING UP CO-OPERATIVE CULTURE IN THE CLASS ROOM

WORKSHOP ACTIVITY

Task

Step 1:

In a small group, brainstorm for ten minutes to identify some typical characteristics of traditional classroom culture: the "norms" that exist in the classroom.

If wished, you may use the following questions to guide you. (You do not need to limit yourselves to these. They are starting points only.)

- What kinds of behaviour are allowed in a classroom?
- What is not allowed?
- Who talks most of the time?
- What is called learning / How it is organised?
- How is the control organised? Who by?
- Who makes the evaluation?
- Why is the evaluation made?
- What kind of things are important in a classroom?

Step 2

How about the culture in a co-operative classroom? Brainstorm for a further ten minutes to identify changes to the norms.

Step-by-Step Towards a Cooperative Classroom

26. What else?
25. Go on innovating
24. Ask good and intelligent questions
23. Add details or theories
22. Connect thoughts into real context
21. Find out core things of differences
20. Evaluate or assess things and thoughts, not other people
19. Ask others to tell their plans
18. Ask for explanations (why)
17. Find out ways to remember details
16. Point out details
15. Make conclusions
14. Try to understand how others are feeling
13. Express your feelings when appropriate
12. Make your group enthusiastic
11. Describe or evaluate the work of each member of your group
10. Be ready and willing to volunteer to explain or express ideas
9. Ask help or clarification
8. Encourage others
7. Lead the work in your group
6. Talk to everybody in your group
5. Look straight into the eyes of your cooperators while interacting
4. Encourage others to participate
3. Talk in a normal voice, not to cause noise
2. Stay in a group during the work
1. Move without causing noise

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