

Cooperative Learning Strategies

Adapted from Kagan's, *Cooperative Learning* and Erwin's *The Classroom of Choice*

Carousel Brainstorming :

Place chart paper in 4 – 6 locations around the room. Each sheet has a task for students to complete, a question to answer, quote to reflect or respond to, etc. Students are placed in groups and given markers (or you can select group recorders and give markers only to them). Each group is asked to begin at a different piece of chart paper. The teacher explains the traffic flow, showing students how they are to move around the room. A timer is set. Students begin their first task and when the timer rings, they move to the next piece of chart paper and begin the next task, adding answers or comments to the ones already recorded. Students continue to work through each station, moving each time the timer rings. Once finished, students can take a “gallery walk” and read all the responses.

This activity can be used in numerous ways: to uncover or build prior knowledge, to motivate or engage, to develop ideas for writing topics or projects, to identify ways to apply content, to solve a problem, or as a review.

Inside-Outside Circle:

Students form two concentric circles with the same number of people in each circle. It's easiest to have students count off by twos and direct the “ones” to stand in a circle. Once they have arranged themselves in a circle, ask them to turn around and face out. Direct the “twos” to face the “ones” creating an outer circle. One circle moves clockwise, the other moves counterclockwise. When the teacher says, “freeze”, both circles stop moving and students pair with the person standing across from them in the other circle. The teacher then directs them to share or discuss with their partner. After the partners have had a chance to finish their discussion, the teacher directs the circles to move again.

This strategy can be used in numerous ways:

- As an icebreaker or team builder, giving questions about personal interests, movies, etc.
- To help student discover prior knowledge about a particular topic before holding a large-group discussion or prior to teaching a lesson.
- As a drill-and-practice activity
- As a review
- As a listening exercise. Have the inner circle speak first for a minute or two about a particular topic. The outer circle can't say anything; they just listen. Then the outer

circle summarizes what their partner says. The inner circle gives feedback and they switch roles.

Pairs Discuss or Pairs Check:

This activity is a great follow-up to teacher-guided practice on a particular skill. Once the teacher gives an assignment, partners take turns answering a question or doing a problem while the other partner coaches and gives feedback. Once they've done that two or three times, both do the work, stopping after each two or three questions or problems and checking their answers with each other. For a variation of this activity, students can simply work in pairs to practice a skill. They work on the problem simultaneously and then check their work together, or one student may "ask" and one "answer" and then reverse roles.

Pick a Card, Any Card:

This activity encourages total student engagement and accountability. You will need two sets of regular planning cards. Divide the class into teams of four and give each student on each team a card of a different suit. After assigning the teams a topic (hold a discussion, brainstorm some ideas, solve a problem, etc.), pull a card at random out of the deck. The student in each group who holds the same suit as the card you pulled reports her team's ideas or answer. Note: You can also use this strategy to assign roles. For example, hearts will be the facilitators; spades will be the recorders; diamonds will report to the class; and clubs will be in charge of materials.

Numbered Heads:

Each person in the group is given a number (1, 2, 3 or 4). The teacher poses a question and the teams are given time to discuss the answer. The teacher then asks student # ____ to stand and answer the question in front of the whole class.

Jigsaw:

As we all know, the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. This strategy requires students to teach other students. 1) Identify content that can be divided into relatively equal meaningful segments. 2) Identify the number of segments to be learned and place that number of students in each learning team. 3) Assign each person in the learning team a different segment of the material and give them time to study it. 4) Students then meet in expert groups (leave their original groups to discuss material with other students who have the same segment) to make sure they have a good grasp of their specific segment of the material and to discuss how they will teach their portion to their learning teams. 5) Students return to their

learning teams and teach the material on which they are experts. 6) Ensure individual accountability by some means, possibly by using Pick a Card, Any Card or giving a quiz.

Note: If the Jigsaw is new to your students, start out with simple content. They will first need to learn the process before combining it with complex content. Also, after their Jigsaw experience, provide students with an opportunity to discuss how they worked as groups, what skills were needed to be successful, what worked well, and what they might do differently next time.

Graffiti (Chalk Talks):

This activity allows students to get out of their seats and move around the room. You might use Graffiti to have students offer solutions to problems, list what they think they know about a topic, review what they have already learned, use vocabulary in contextual sentences, or to generate or brainstorm ideas. 1) Write several topics, problems, quotes or sentences on pieces of large chart paper and post them around the room. 2) Divide the student into groups of 4-6 and assign each group to one piece of chart paper. 3) Give them time to write their thoughts, ideas, or answers on the chart paper. 4) After the time limit is up, have the students rotate clockwise to the next piece of chart paper and continue writing. This time they will also be responding to what was written by the previous groups.

Formations:

This strategy also incorporates movement. The object of formations is for each cooperative group to create a physical representation of a word, an object, or a process that they have learned. 1) Divide the class into appropriately sized groups, depending on what you are hoping the groups to create. 2) Give each group a slip of paper explaining what they are to represent with their formation. 3) Designate an amount of time to develop the formation. 4) Have groups present their formations to the rest of the class. 5) If the formations are incomplete or unclear, ask the class to offer suggestions that would improve the formation. Some ideas for Formations are as follows:

- Letters or numbers: Have students form the shape of letters they're learning.
- Spelling: Students use their bodies to spell out a term or vocabulary word.
- Vocabulary: Student form shapes to represent the definition, antonym or synonym of a vocabulary word.
- Geography: Students form a map of a state, country or continent.
- Math: Students represent an equation, a math process, or geometric shape.
- Science: Students represent the solar system or show how the earth rotates around the sun. Or they can physically depict the circulatory system or respiration.
- Technology: Students represent technological inventions.

All Hands on Deck:

This strategy promotes participation by all students, focuses students on a topic to be studied, and helps uncover students' prior knowledge about the topic to be studied. 1) Post chart paper that lists subtopics of the topic to be studied around the room, and give examples of ideas that might be included on each chart. For example, if a high school social studies class was studying the topic of the social conditions of the 1960's, subtopics might include popular music, television shows, recreational activities, famous slogans of the time, celebrities, famous historical or cultural events, etc. 2) Give each team of four students a stack of index cards with the same subtopics written on the posted chart paper. 3) Students divide the index cards equally among the members of the team. 4) Give students a designated amount of time (1-3 minutes) to brainstorm ideas about the subtopics, with the expectation that each student will contribute at least one idea per card. 5) When the time elapses, have the students pass their cards to the team member to their left and repeat Step 4. Continue circulating the cards until all team members have written on each card. 6) A designated reporter on each team reads one contribution for the selected chart on the wall in round-robin fashion while the teacher or a student records the ideas. When one chart is completed, move to the next.

Variation: Provide teams with pieces of paper with the subtopics printed on the top, and give each student a stack of sticky notes. Students write their ideas on the sticky notes and post them on the paper. Large-group sharing can be done by posting the sticky notes on the chart paper and conducting a gallery walk of the charts.

Note: To encourage individual accountability, provide student with different color writing implements or sticky notes.

I Have-Who Has:

This is a great drill-and-practice activity or one you can use for review. Students can stand in a circle or stand or sit at their desks. The teacher gives each student a 3" by 5" card. On one side of the card is a term; on the other side is a definition of a term that appears on another card in the circle or group. Place a green dot on the definition side of one card. The student with the green dot starts by saying, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. The student who has the card with that term that matches the definition says, "I have..." and reads his/her term. That student then continues, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. This continues until all the definitions have been matched to the terms.

Inquiring Minds:

This activity helps students focus on a class reading assignment, learn important questioning skills, and engage in higher level thinking. Have students work in teams of three or four and assign or allow them to choose their roles: The Reader, The Inquiring Mind, The Answerer and The Friend (if you need another role-The Friends helps the Answerer). 1) The Reader reads a selection of the assigned text. 2) The Inquiring Mind writes down the question on an index card, using a question starter and passes it to the Answerer. 3) The Answerer reads the question aloud and answers it. If he/she cannot answer the question, he may “phone a Friend” if there is a fourth member of the group. 4) Once the team agrees that the answer is correct, the Answerer writes it down on the index card. 5) The roles shift to the left and the process repeats until the reading assignment is complete.

Note: To encourage teams to use higher-level questions, require each team to attain a certain number of points and assign values to the different level of questions. Give students question starters that reflect either the 6 levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy or DOK levels to help them think at higher, more critical levels:

- Knowledge -5 points
- Comprehension -10 points
- Application – 15 points
- Analysis – 20 points
- Synthesis – 25 points
- Evaluation – 30 points