

What is Cooperative Learning?

The five base elements

Cooperative Learning (in the following called “CL”) is a structured form of learning, which conduces both to the development of specific field related contents of teaching as well as to the training of cooperative social behaviour.

Cooperative Learning arranges the base elements of social behaviour, which are the essential preconditions for a successful cooperation of different people in equal groups.

The task of a CL-teacher is to train social skills by creating working-and learning conditions, which allow the pupils, among direct interaction through personal assumption of responsibility, to develop a positive mutual dependency concerning the handling of a task and to attain a goal by their joint efforts.

Base elements of Cooperative Learning:

1. Direct interaction

The group members sit at close quarters, so that they can see each other and hear each other effortlessly.

2. Individual responsibility

means on the one hand that every single group member is responsible both for his own process of learning as well as for the one of other group members and on the other hand that he or she makes an active contribution to the consummation of the task the group is confronted with.

3. Positive mutual dependency

appears when all group members feel linked to each other in the try to attain a common goal. So for that a whole group can be successful, every single member needs to be successful.

4. Social skills

Different forms of Interaction, which contribute to a positive run of the group processes for the members. (for example: group members speak one after another, encourage each other, listen to each other, solve problems, interrogate understanding, help each other). Those qualities advance communication, confidence, leading skills, the will to make a decision and conflict management.

5. Reflection and evaluation

The group members reject and valuate their common efforts to improve their cooperative skills and their working strategies steadily.

(according to: “Lernende Schule” 2006, 7)

Cooperative learning and class in heterogeneous pupil groups

The training of social behavioural norms is of particular importance if one wants to integrate group members who are of a different social, cultural and ethnical origin. In doing so, the basic tenor of the teacher is the all-dominant precondition. Only if the teacher is able

- to accept every single pupil in his or her uniqueness,
- to create a trusting learning atmosphere in the class,
- to entrust the pupils with the responsibility for their learning process,

he or she can expect social behaviour combined with mutual respect among the pupils.

“We celebrate difference” is the positive formulation of the basic principle. Having respect for the personality of the others including their strengths and failings is the only way that leads to a successful cooperation- with different types of learners, different learning tempi, different disabilities, different personal requirements of learning and different motives of action. In such an atmosphere, pupils might have the heart to make mistakes, to accept help of other people and to help other people on their part. This atmosphere is the precondition for a succeeding Cooperative Learning. In Cooperative Learning, pupils diversity is used aware.

The principle

Thinking-Interchanging-Presenting

demands from every pupil to deal with the problem first of all alone, and then to place his or her own thoughts into the group. As a conclusion, the result of group work is coined by the diversity of perspectives and arguments of the group members. So in Cooperative Learning, the heterogeneity isn't perceived as a problem, but moreover as an enrichment.

1. Thinking

First of all, every group member receives the order to think about a question, a problem or a work assignment alone and to write down all his thoughts or knowledge (Thinking). In this manner, the pupils preknowledge is activated.

(Image 4: individual work)

2. Interchanging

That followed, the pupils have to talk to a partner about his or her ideas, before the group starts to work on the work assignment in common. (Interchanging) In this part, different knowledge and different skills start to effect and the heterogeneity of different group members can be very enriching.

(Image 5: partner work)

3. Presenting

(Image 6: group work)

Afterwards, the group presents their results to the whole class (Presenting). After passing the process of working, the group evaluates the result and the process based on the feedback both of the pupils as well as of the teacher, which could be also connected with the evaluation of the social process (Evaluating). The group might for example wonder about successful parts, problems and about possible corrections for the next process of working.