STRATEGIES FOR
COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Five Levels of Cooperative Learning Activities for Adult Learners

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Cooperative learning is a natural for the adult education classroom (Thistlethwaite, 1994). After all, group problem-solving is how adults handle most real-world problems. Cooperative learning also mirrors how adult education teachers themselves learn. Being able to work cooperatively contributes to an individual's success as a member of the workforce as well.

Definitions of Cooperative Learning

- Generally, any venture where people are sharing the learning experience in some manner is a cooperative venture. More specifically this includes face-to-face interaction, positive goal interdependence, individual accountability, and demonstration of interpersonal and small group skills (Johnson and Johnson 1981).
- Collaborative learning is different from cooperative learning. Generally, collaboration is less-structured than cooperative learning, often with learners entering into collaborations of their own free will. Cooperative learning is more often structured by someone other than the learners and usually requires that individuals "give up" something for the good of the group. In collaborative learning each learner gains without compromising. BOTH TYPES OF LEARNING ARE HELPFUL TO ADULT LEARNERS.

Adult Education – Special Considerations

- In adult education classrooms, learners frequently are NOT working on the same general task; therefore, there is no necessity for everyone being in a cooperative learning group at the same time. Only a part of the class may be working in a small group format.
- Individual accountability is tied to progress towards personal goals, not group grades.
- The social skill aspect of cooperative learning is very important in the adult education setting. A teacher cannot assume that just because the learners are adults that they will know how to work together. Also, both teachers and students must be aware that opinions about and reaction to group learning may be culture-specific.
- It's a good idea to start small. Don't force adults to participate in cooperative learning groups. Instead, set one up and have it open to others who may want to join as they observe the activity and find it appealing. Begin with pairs; work up to groups of three or four, perhaps simply by combining pairs.

Cooperative and Collaborative Activities

Level A

Adult learners can participate in Level A cooperative learning activities even if they are not in the same place at the same time and regardless of their skill level.

1. A group poem: Select a topic for the poem, such as influential people. Each student selects a person to be added to the first line and then writes a stanza to be added anywhere in the poem. This can be added to by learners in different classes, for no consultation between writers is needed.

2. Learner-generated lessons: One learner reads a story and writes questions about the plot, theme, characters, etc. Learner two reads the story and answers the questions. Learner one checks learner two's answers. Alternately, learner one could choose places for learner two to stop and predict what will happen next in the story, giving the same kind of feedback as above. Learners one and two can repeat the exercise changing roles.

3. News Sheet: The class or a combination of classes or learners from various classes may create a quarterly or monthly newsletter. Adult learners can establish and commit to contributing certain columns; adult learners can select the focus; adult learners can try on the roles of writer, editor, proofreader.

4. Anthology: Adult education students from various classes in the program could contribute to an anthology of writings. The writings can cover all subject areas. Again students can try on roles of writer, editor, and proofreader as well as designer and publicist. Teachers can host an authors' signing party when the anthology is published.

Level B

Adult learners of varying abilities can still work together cooperatively in Level B. However, Level B groups must meet face-to-face, if only for a session or two. The work may involve sharing individual work already done or meeting to learn a new skill/strategy. Because of the face-to-face interaction, Level B groups do allow members to experience firsthand that people access and apply the same skills in very different ways.

5. Knowledge Guide: Groups can meet to learn to use the Knowledge Guide Strategy for reading. Adult learners will be taught the strategy as a small group; they will then practice the strategy on their own; finally they will return to the small group to share their experiences using the Knowledge Guide Strategy and to work out any questions that came up as they practiced it. The second group meeting may actually provide answers to questions learners generated for column 4 of the Knowledge Guide.

   Knowledge Guide Strategy: Learners divide their papers into four columns. In the first they list what they already know about the topic that they are going to read about. In the second they list 3 – 5 questions that they think might be answered by this reading. In the third they record their answers to the questions from column 2. In the fourth column readers record questions that they still wonder about.

6. Vocabulary Columns: Groups can meet to learn to use Vocabulary Columns strategy. They can then practice it independently or as a group or in pairs and return to the larger group to use the strategy as a study guide. All levels of learners can work together to learn the Vocabulary Columns Strategy, but learners working on similar levels work better together to complete the strategy and study from it.

   Vocabulary Columns Strategy: The learner divides his paper into 4 columns. In

column 1, the learner writes the word to be learned. In column 2 is written a special association (a hint) related to the meaning of the word. In column 3 an antonym is listed and in column 4, a synonym or definition is written.

Level C
At this level learners participate in share activities on a regular basis, which means these are ongoing groups that learners may enter and leave as they see fit; the organization of the group is very loose and doesn't require stable attendance. Level C groups can still accommodate a variety of skills levels.

7. Status of the Class: Using the class as a large group, an opening routine could be to get a brief verbal commitment by each class member regarding what he or she is going to be working on that day. This might lead to more focused work, to people wanting to work together on an activity, and to the teacher better keeping up with who is doing what.
8. Daily News Update: Small groups can meet at the opening or closing of class to discuss interesting topics in the news. Having current newspapers handy is helpful and if students list this activity as a goal for the day other students can read the article during class and join in on the discussion at the end of class.
9. Math Concepts Checkup: Adult learners working on the same math skills can meet once or twice a week to discuss which skills they have mastered and which ones are giving them trouble. Learners can then share expertise, explain particular problems to each other, etc.
10. Writing Workshop: Adult learners working on writing projects can meet weekly or more to get feedback. Group members may read each other's writing and respond orally or in writing to content issues, structure issues or grammatical issues. Each adult learner would be responsible for bringing his or her own writing to the group.

Level D
In this level group members need to be at approximately the same skill level and working on the same material. The teacher plans and implements the lessons. These groups meet more than once and attendance is necessary; however, long-term attendance is not required.

11. Story Impressions: The teacher gives the group a set of key phrases from a story or article and has the group write its own story or article using the given phrases in the given order. Then they read the authored version and discuss how their version is the same and different. The same general format can also be used as an after-reading summarization activity.
12. DR-TA: The three questions that form the basis of the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity are: 1) What do you think is going to happen next?, 2) Why do you think so?, and 3) Were you right? The teacher selects several stopping points during the story and at each point asks the readers to predict what will happen next and provide support from the text or their general knowledge about the situation as proof of their prediction being a logical one. Then learners read to find out if they predicted what actually happened.
13. ReQuest: In ReQuest, the readers determine how far in an article they can read before they need to stop and discuss. The discussion begins with the learners asking questions of the teacher. When the learners can think of no more questions to ask, the teacher asks questions of them. The teacher decides when the important ideas have been discussed and then directs the learners to read again.
14. Structured Writing: Bio-Poem allows students who have read the same text to work collaboratively on writing something about that text. The Bio-Poem is a poem about an

historical figure or a fictional character. Line 1 is the person's first name, line 2 contains four adjectives describing the person, the second to last line notes a location and the last line contains the person's last name. Lines in the middle begin with such stems as "Who likes...," "Who wants...," "Who works for...," "Who dreams about...," etc.

Level E
This is the highest level of cooperative learning and requires a time commitment from those involved. Regular attendance is necessary as is timely completion of the work the group requires because members' individual work contributes to the work of the group as a whole and is not duplicated by another group member.

15. National Issues Group: Group members consider an important social problem and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of several solutions. This includes the group members doing research and working to come to a consensus about the most viable solution.
16. Literature circles: This group commits to meet over several sessions as the study group for the reading of a novel. Adult learners read and discuss the novel, using questions that invite dialogue rather than those that require specific right/wrong answers. Many novels come with book group discussion guides. Roles such as discussion leader, fact checker, expert on historical context, and word expert may be assigned, adopted, or rotated.
17. Theme studies: Teacher and students decide on a topic of study and a group goal for learning (to understand all sides of an issue; to understand the history of an issue; to understand the arguments against an issue; to develop a position in response to the issue, etc.). The various group members read different relevant materials, including informational texts, newspapers, stories and novels, maps, charts, etc. Group members share their research with the whole group as it works to meet the group goal for learning. Thematic studies underscore the interrelatedness of learning and group members listen, speak, read, write, and think independently and as a group.

Cooperative Learning:
Structures for Developing Cooperative Learning Exercises

Resources: Brenda Andrews and Rownia Watson from Akron, OH
William Draves, *How to Teach Adults*
Sharon Rose McMarr of Harbor Community Adult School in Los Angeles, CA

Brainstorming

Cooperative Brainstorming makes use of 3 leadership roles: stimulator, monitor, and recorder. The stimulator can lead in asking questions to develop an idea or to lead the group on to new ideas. The monitor may lead in questioning the appropriateness of an idea, keeping the group on task, and possibly helping to reword suggestions so that they fit the task at hand better, or, the monitor may be assigned to make sure each student contributes something to the brainstorming session. The recorder makes sure all ideas are recorded as intended by the students who shared and discussed them. At the end of a cooperative brainstorming effort, each student should have offered at least one idea and every student should receive a long list of ideas related to the topic about to be assigned for further work. Some brainstorming lists should be published in the classroom for all to use as inspiration.

Exercises that include Cooperative Brainstorming
1. Solving of a classroom problem
2. Beginning a writing project
3. Beginning a research project
4. Responding to a current event reading
5. Planning entry into the workforce
6. Planning a class social function

Corners

In Corners students are grouped by nature of their opinion on a given topic. Students of differing opinions are paired up in designated corners to discuss their opinions. Each student must sufficiently understand his/her partner's view and then paraphrase the partner's opinion to other members of a group of four. Members may ask questions for clarity, but no debate is allowed.

Exercises using Corners as a Cooperative approach
1. Preparing a paper where the writer must argue a point
2. Researching controversial points in history: different students could read different viewpoints about women's rights and then role-play their author, teaching the rest of their group
3. Forming an opinion on an issue to be decided by vote, such as a presidential election, city election, etc.
4. Reading a controversial author

Roundrobin

This is an information sharing structure in which team members take turns contributing in oral fashion to their team effort. No consensus must be reached or compromise made, but each team member gets to add information to the answer of a question or the working out of a problem, hopefully making the answer more complete and correct.

Exercises that incorporate Roundrobin as a learning tool

1. To understand a current event, each group member reads a different article on the event and reports to the group. This is a good research activity.
2. Students read only one article, preferably a controversial one. They get to hear 4 or 5 perspectives on this article in Roundrobin discussion. This can be a paper writing preparation exercise.
3. Students discuss big topics about which consensus is rarely reached, such as abortion, capital punishment, gun control, gay marriage, etc. in an effort to discover all the points of view held.
4. The working out of certain math problems may allow students to approach the right answer in different ways. A Roundrobin discussion of that problem would expose the variety of ways a right answer may be found and the particular procedures which are not flexible, which everyone must do the same way to get the right answer.
5. Exploring language. For example, work with adjectives can be shared in a Roundrobin discussion, either where each writer is asked to describe the same thing independently and therefore different adjectives and structures are shared or where each writer is asked to add to a description begun by the first Roundrobin participant.

Jigsaw

This is an intense model of cooperative learning based on task specialization that creates interdependence among students by making team members reliant upon each other for success. Students you doubt will do their work and fulfill their responsibility to the group should not be assigned a jigsaw exercise.

Exercises built on the jigsaw concept of cooperative learning:

1. To explore what is required to apply for a job, make a jigsaw group out of the entire class. Have one small group read about resume writing, another about using classified ads, another about cover letters, and another about interviewing. The small groups then report to the class on their area of specialty. In response, each student in the class must individually complete a project using the information they received from the small groups. In this example, students could choose classified ads for jobs they are interested in, and then write cover letters and resumes for their chosen job and role-play an interview for it in front of the class.
2. Research projects work well using the jigsaw concept. A research project on the Revolutionary War could have individual students researching different areas including weapons and ammunition, daily activities of soldiers, home life during those years, the British response, opposition to, etc. The finished project could be a power point presentation where each student is responsible for completing a particular part of the presentation and a test, where each student must demonstrate knowledge of each part of the researched information. The collaboration could also come in the form of a group paper, the writing and presentation of a skit, the staging of a debate, or an illustrated timeline.
3. Math related projects done jigsaw style can include the planning of a large party which would involve preparing a budget, converting recipes, organizing the space used and managing the helpers; the planning and building of a garden/tool shed/bookshelf, etc. that must fit into a certain place, be completed within a certain timeframe and budget, and serve a certain purpose; or the organizing and collecting of goods for a service project, which would include researching needs, figuring costs, and planning solicitation, collection and distribution.

Numbered Heads Together and Pairs Check

These structures are used to develop or assure mastery of a specific skill. Numbered Heads Together assigns students to teams which compete to answer questions. It is important that the teams be even in skill level so that every member will feel comfortable contributing. Numbered Heads Together teams discuss and then agree on an answer before they give it, so students can share expertise, correct each other's mistakes and assure each other of right answers. Pairs Check has students work in pairs sharing and checking answers to particular assignments. Pairs may meet with other pairs for more sharing and checking.

Suggestions for using Numbered Heads Together:
1. Test preparation/study time for students at the same skill level
2. Working of Math Word Problems
3. Review of text read (novel, newspaper article, etc.); may be done with or without access to the text
4. Spelling or grammar skill review
5. Preparation for a whole class interview with a coming speaker

Suggestions for using Pairs Check:
1. Checking written class work
2. Checking interpretations of texts read
3. Checking explanations of how math problems are worked
4. Checking memorization for a presentation
5. Using flashcards

Role Playing

Role playing involves two or more class members acting out a real or hypothetical situation, usually taking roles not normally associated with that person. The objective is to see from another's point of view.

Suggested scenarios for role-playing:
1. Historical event
2. Right and wrong ways to deal with conflict
3. Interviews
4. Talking to a child's teacher
5. Talking to a doctor
6. Characters in a story or novel recently read
7. Conversation with a historical figure or a famous figure, which allows students to show off knowledge gained through research

Case Incidents and Panel Exercise

These are useful in responding to current events that have caught students' interest. Case incidents allow students to expand their point of view by asking several students to analyze a real life situation or case incident. In the Panel structure, class members are chosen to engage in a discussion in front of the rest of the class, usually with one person serving as moderator and fielding questions from the rest of the class.

Suggested topics for Case Incidents and Panels
1. Presidential elections
2. Current controversies, such as the presence of U.S. military in Iraq, tax changes, etc.
3. Current movies, especially ones controversial for some reason, like *The Passion*
4. Current awards given, such as Emmys, Grammys, and Oscars.
5. Verdicts in famous lawsuits
6. School policies/classroom policies

Listening Team

The Listening Team structure divides the class into small groups of three, with each small group member assuming a particular role of speaker, listener or observer. One person relates his or her experiences or ideas on a topic to another person, with the listening person questioning, repeating, and restating key phrases for clarification. The third person observes the entire process, and after a time limit, reports to the other two on what he observed. The people then shift roles and repeat the exercise so that each person has a chance to be speaker, listener and observer. This is another way for students to try out ways of approaching a subject in a safe setting.

Suggestions for using Listening Team:
1. Reacting to and processing text
2. Interpreting word problems, with a new problem discussed by each new speaker
3. Discussing controversial topics
4. Sharing student writing
5. Brainstorming ways to deal with situations, such as talking to a child's teacher, or dealing with a landlord, etc.

Support Group

This is a long term group that involves 4 or 5 students. Students should exchange phone numbers, email addresses and check in with each other each day in class, phone when one member is absent, keep up with homework assignments for those absent, read each other's portfolios, and help with personal problems when appropriate. Unless problems develop, these groups should remain stable for as long as the class meets. These groups promote stability and accountability in students.

Information Gap

Students who have incomplete sets of information interact with others who have the missing pieces, asking and answering questions, clarifying, and confirming to get the information they need and fill in the missing parts or "gaps" in their information set. Partners or other groups do the same because their information sets have "gaps", too.

Suggested Information Gap Activities:
1. Coupon Shopping - Student pairs or small groups A and B each receive or compose their own different shopping lists and different sets of actual coupons. They ask each other if there is a coupon matching items on their lists, the coupon value, expiration date, etc. More advanced classes might find prices of items, deduct "double" coupon savings, etc. to estimate total cost. Comparisons of stores can be made.
2. Internet Version of Coupon Shopping: Students can find and go to good coupon sites, review offerings, and determine if a coupon matches what a partner needs. If so, the coupon can be printed and then roles reversed.

Scavenger Hunt

Students are given a task and asked to generate and prioritize criteria for that task and then complete it. Students must share information to get the best plan and solution for their group, for their group members must establish the criteria together.

Suggested Scavenger Hunt Activities:
1. Apartment Hunting: Group members define their preferred type of housing by listing their room/size needs, their ideal rental cost, location, amenities, etc. Then they review the Classifieds section of their area newspaper and try to find a location that can best satisfy all of their needs and wants. Results are reported to the rest of the class, including the compromises made.

2.   Web Quality of Living Hunting: Group members define the amenities they want in the city in which they live. They then review city government websites, quality of living evaluations, weather reports, job availability and cost of housing to determine which city would best meet the needs and wants of all the group members. Results are reported to the rest of the class, including the compromises made.

Survey

Students are either given a survey topic or pose one of their own and determine ways to get information (Question/answer, scale of agree to disagree, counting the number of occurrences of something, measurement, etc.). Students gather the data, visualize it (pie charts, bar graphs, line graphs, etc.), analyze and interpret results, and present findings to the class.

Suggested Survey Activities:

1.   National Weight Recommendations: The survey topic is "To what degree do members of this class conform to national recommendations for weight in relation to height?" Students weigh themselves and measure their height. They report this anonymously to a record keeper. Different groups sort data and visualize it in comparison to a national table. Students create pie charts, bar graphs, and line graphs and report on results and recommendations for weight management, as needed. This kind of survey requires research which can be accomplished in class using the Internet. Students can find the national height/weight by gender table on the Internet. Student graphs and charts can be created on the computer and tips for weight management can be found, printed, and shared with the class.

2.   Family Tree Survey: Individual students survey their family members for information such as years living in the state, types of education, types of jobs, number of children, length of marriages, etc. Actual survey questions should be determined by the survey group. The data is then collected and reported through graphs or charts and a short presentation to those taking part in the survey.

Treasure Hunt

Students read and follow "go to and find" or "go to and do" directives and receive points or prizes or recognition for completion of tasks with correct answers or finished tasks. Treasure Hunts are task-based, usually with only one correct answer, but the whole group is charged with finding the answer.

Suggested Treasure Hunt Activity:

1.   Tax Forms: Students receive and review packets of State and Federal tax forms and instructions and use these to locate answers for a list of questions or complete tasks for directives. (What is an exemption? On what line do you sign your name? etc.) Some of this research can be done on the Internet.

2.   Voter Registration: Students are charged with the task of getting all of their class members (or school members) registered to vote. They must find out the procedure for registering, administer that procedure at school, and report their results to the class.