The Instructor’s Role in Cooperative Learning


1. Before the activity
   a. Decide on academic and collaborative objectives – specify objectives that are both academic and collaborative in nature
   b. Decide on group size, composition, roles
      i. Group size depends on the class/task
      ii. Heterogeneous instructor-assigned groups are strongly recommended. They can be completely random or “stratified” and random – sort the students into categories and randomly pick one student per category for each group.
      iii. To promote positive interdependence and ensure individual accountability, it is a good idea to assign roles like summarizer, facilitator, recorder, etc.
   c. Structure positive interdependence – students must “sink or swim” together
      i. Materials interdependence – only one copy of materials per group
      ii. Rewards interdependence – group grading
      iii. Information interdependence – each student has some of the necessary information
   d. Structure individual accountability – assess individual performance frequently through observation of participation, randomly selecting students to explain answers, etc.
   e. Explain the task to the students
      i. Explain objectives of the lesson
      ii. Give clear and specific instructions
      iii. Explain criteria for success
      iv. Ask questions to ensure understanding

2. During the activity
   a. Monitor students’ behavior – find out what they do/don’t understand
   b. Provide task assistance
      i. Clarify instructions
      ii. Do an interview
         1. What are you doing?
         2. Why are you doing it?
         3. How will it help you?
   c. Intervene to teach collaborative skills - intervene minimally, but check in with groups to make sure cooperation is happening
3. After the activity
   a. Provide closure
      i. Summarize task
      ii. Answer questions
      iii. Ask students review questions
   b. Process group functioning - in groups or in the whole class, discuss how the cooperation went, what could be improved, etc.
   c. Evaluate student learning
      i. Individual score + group score based on:
         1. All members attaining some sort of criteria
         2. Lowest member score
         3. Group average
         4. Improvement scores
      ii. Group score - are group scores fair? Research shows:
         1. At the conclusion of the project, most students think that group grades are fairest
         2. Students with experience in group leaning prefer group grades
         3. Achievement is higher with group grades