

Diversity Literacy Co-operative Learning (CL) Sessions – Overview

A. Introduction to Co-operative Learning

All aspects of the course have a particular function, are important and are designed to complement and enhance each other, but there is one aspect which is of particular importance in the fostering of a Critical Diversity Literacy: “co-operative learning”.

Methods of cooperative learning were originally developed by Roger T. and David Johnson who developed pedagogical styles which centered the ways in which students interact with one another as they learn. Like social justice pedagogy, co-operative learning speaks to the need for democratic citizenship training in the post WWII war era. The basic elements of cooperative learning involve *positive interdependence* in which “students perceive that they need each other in order to complete the group's task”; *Face-to-face promotive interaction* in which “students promote each other's learning by helping, sharing and encouraging efforts to learn”; *Individual accountability* in which “each student's performance is frequently assessed”; *Interpersonal and small group skills* such as leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict management skills which are taught “as purposefully and precisely as academic skills”; and *Group processing opportunities* in which groups are given “specific time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships” (Johnson, Johnson & Smith 1991, p. 3).

Embedded in the post-war tradition of social justice education, co-operative learning structures aim to shift existing power relationships by providing students with opportunities to showcase their individual strengths and give a sense of power to those who feel that they do not have a voice within mainstream, competitive, teaching and learning activities (Clarke, Gill, Hounsell & Urquhart, p. 70). In brief, cooperative learning is based on the argument that the ways in which teachers structure student-student interaction patterns directly influences how well students learn, how they feel about institution and the lecturer/professor, how they feel about each other, and how much self-esteem they have (Johnson and Johnson, 1994).

Group work, in the form of Base Groups, is central to this model of teaching. This pedagogical approach is particularly effective in diverse classrooms in that group work requires *cooperation* among students who celebrate each other's successes, encourage each other to do homework, and learn to work together (regardless of ethnic backgrounds or whether they are male or female, bright or struggling, disabled or not) rather than *competition* (Johnson and Johnson, 1994) between them. Further to this is provides the very simple exercise of working on shared assignments together. In doing so, co-operative learning compliments the desired outcome of Diversity Literacy in that it requires students to work towards shared outcomes with diverse Others.

Co-operative learning involves small heterogeneous groups of students who are required to complete tasks together. As Andersen, Nelson, Fox, and Gruber (1988 cited in Clarke, Gill, Hounsell & Urquhart, 2003, p. 72) have discussed, research has found that “students who have experienced this type of learning demonstrate social behaviours such as active listening and effective conflict resolution more often than do students who are studying competitively or individually”.

Within the context of Diversity Literacy, co-operative learning groups which are invariably heterogeneous in terms of gender, race, and nationality, are required to work together on a weekly basis in order to produce group assignments, which are designed to facilitate an inclusive learning environment. The course requires that students work in heterogeneous ‘Base Groups’ to produce weekly papers based on selected films in addition to a presentation and group glossary of key terms

at the end of the semester. Because conscientization is a relational process requiring that learners experience, first hand, their own positionalities within the context of difference, co-operative learning is a fundamental aspect of Critical Diversity Literacy pedagogy.

References

- Johnson, D., Johnson, R. & Smith, K. (1991). Basic Elements of Cooperative Learning. Interaction Book Company: Minnesota. Available online: <https://files.pbworks.com/download/dLhLWwjzKZ/unbc/12318718/Active%20Learning.PDF> [Accessed 9.6.2011]
- Johnson, D., Johnson, R. (1994). Learning together and alone, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning. Needham Heights, MA: Prentice-Hall.
- Clarke, D., Gill, S., Hounsell, M. & Bill Urquhart (2003) Cooperative Learning: For (4) Teachers Working Towards Social Justice. Educational Insights, 8 (3).

(taken from Kelly & McEwen, forthcoming)

B. Co-operative Learning Process in Diversity Literacy

All group work is geared toward facilitating the co-operative learning process. However, this process needs to be 1) set up and 2) assessed. Two sessions are dedicated to these activities:

- In week 3, base group formation which involves the creation of **group names & logos** and the creation of **group contracts**, over one or two sessions.
- In week 9, groups assessments will take place over one session.

1. Base group formation session

This session takes place in the 3rd week once the classes have settled and once the Assistant Lecturer has had some time to get to know them. This enables the Assistant Lecturer to select the groups based on their interaction with them.

Group formation:

Group names & logos: The group logo and name are simply an exercise in fostering a shared identity, as a group. Students usually find this quite “lame” at this stage, but when they do their presentations at the end of the semester this identity is usually quite strong. The shared identity is important to create a sense of shared being across the deliberate differences engineered into the groups.

Group contracts: The group contracts set the terms of the group’s engagement with each other. The importance of the contracts must be stressed, especially the point about what to



do in case of disputes. Importantly, the lecturer and Assistant Lecturer are also bound to these contracts. If for, example the contracts state that if someone does not participate in a group assignment they do not get the mark for that assignment, the Assistant Lecturer is bound to respect that.

See **Div Lit Week 3 - Co-operative Learning Process 1: Setting up of base groups and co-operative learning process**

2. Group assessment session

This session takes place in the 9th week after at least two group assignments and before the group presentation assignment. The point is to get students to reflect on their group functionality and how diversity is playing out in their groups, before they embark on the big group presentation project.

See **Div Lit Week 9 - Co-operative Learning Process 2: Group and Self Assessments**

C. Other useful resources

These are some useful resources co-operative learning theory and practices:

Web sources

Co-operative Learning <http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/cooperativelearning.htm>

Co-operative Learning <http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/cooperative/>

Co-operative Learning <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/cooplrng.asp>

Cooperative Learning Institute And Interaction Book Company <http://www.co-operation.org/>

Books & Articles

Baker, T., & Clark, J. (2010). Cooperative learning- a double edged sword: A cooperative learning model for use with diverse student groups. *Intercultural Education*, 21(3), 257-268.

Clarke, D., Gill, S., Hounsell, M. & Bill Urquhart (2003) *Cooperative Learning: For (4) Teachers Working Towards Social Justice*. *Educational Insights*, 8 (3).

Gilles, R.M., & Adrian, F. (2003). *Cooperative Learning: The social and intellectual Outcomes of Learning in Groups*. London: Farmer Press.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R. & Smith, K. (1991). *Basic Elements of Cooperative Learning*. Interaction Book Company: Minnesota.

Johnson, D., Johnson, R. (1994). *Learning together and alone, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning*. Needham Heights, MA: Prentice-Hall.

Scheurell, S. (2010). Virtual warrenshburg: Using cooperative learning and the internet in the social studies classroom. *Social Studies*, 101(5), 194-199.

Sharan, Y. (2010). Cooperative Learning for Academic and Social Gains: valued pedagogy, problematic practice. *European Journal of Education*, 45,(2), 300-313.