Jacobs, G. M. (1993). The sweet smell of learning: Adding lots of honey to small group activities. *Guidelines, 15*(1), 29-36.

The Sweet Smell of Learning: Adding Lots of Honey to Small Group Activities

Educators seek ways to give students chances to communicate meaningfully in the target language. Thus, we see group work used more often in second language classes. However, some teachers report less than satisfactory results from the use of groups.

Perhaps, these problems arise from a lack of understanding of how educators can facilitate effective group dynamics among students. This article presents fundamental ideas for structuring student groups so as to encourage students to work together productively.

Key Elements in Successful Groups

Based on hundreds of studies, psychologists working in education identify two characteristics of successful learning groups (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990; Slavin, 1990). The educational jargon for these characteristics are positive interdependence and individual accountability. Positive interdependence (PI) simply means that group members feel that they sink or swim together. In other words, what helps one group member helps them all, and what hurts one group member hurts everyone in the group.

One example of positive interdependence is a sports team (Jacobs, 1988). An injury to one member hurts the overall team performance. On the other hand, if one team member plays well and scores a lot of points, the whole team benefits.

If you have been in a group in which one person talked all the time and would not let others participate (Tickoo, 1991) or in a group in which some people did nothing, then you know why individual accountability is so important for a group to be successful. Individual accountability (IA) simply means that everyone in the group needs to actively participate in helping the group succeed.

To use a simile, PI and IA are a kind of honey for small groups. The stickiness of honey is like PI because it helps groups stick together. Honey also provides lots of energy, just as IA helps to get everyone actively involved.

Teachers can not guarantee that groups in their classrooms will feel positively interdependent or that each group member will feel and be seen by others as individually accountable to participate. However, by keeping in mind certain fundamental ideas about how groups function, teachers can increase the chances that their students will study well together.

Eight Types of Positive Interdependence

These ideas centre on eight ways of structuring groups to attempt to increase positive interdependence (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990). Each of these ways are discussed below with examples of ESL classroom activities.

Goal Interdependence

The first idea is to give each group a common goal. D'Rourke (1991) presents a method in which students work together in groups of three or four to critique compositions written by students from other groups. Here, the groups' goal is to complete the composition feedback sheet distributed by the teacher and to help improve their classmates' writing at the same time that they improve their own knowledge of the art of writing.

IA is encouraged in this activity because each student writes a composition and rewrites it after receiving their classmates' feedback. Another way to invite IA in such an activity is to use Talking Chips in the feedback groups (Kagan, 1992).

This is how Talking Chips works. Each student is given three chips. Every time they speak, they give up a chip. When they have used up all their chips, they cannot speak again until everyone else has used all their chips, at which time everyone starts again with three chips. In this way, all members have to contribute to the discussion; no one dominates, no one remains silent.

Sim (1991) suggests that a common goal can extend beyond a group to include all the groups in a class. For example, a class of 14-year olds I was teaching prepared short skits to perform for a class of 6-year-olds. Each group in the older class combined their efforts toward the joint goal of entertaining and educating the younger students.

Role Interdependence

Hyland (1991) presents an example of an activity which stresses role PI. Groups of three are involved. The first person's role is to draw a picture. The second person's role is to describe the picture to the third group member who is to try to draw a similar picture without looking at the original. The roles rotate so that each person has a chance to perform each role.

This activity can stimulate a lot of discussion between the second and third person, while the person who did the original drawing listens with interest to see if their drawing will be recreated successfully. Role PI is a good way of encouraging IA, because everyone has something to do in order for the group to complete its task.

An example of a reading activity which invites role PI is reciprocal teaching (Cotterall, 1990). Here, a reading passage is divided into sections. The group reads the passage

section-by-section, and students take turns clarifying, locating the main idea, summarizing, and predicting.

Outside Enemy Interdependence

Outside enemy interdependence means that group members are cooperating to defeat a common opponent. Safnil (1991) offers an example from Indonesian secondary school ESL classes. After the teacher gives a presentation, groups study the material in preparation for individual quizzes. Groups compete against one another to see who does best. This activity also facilitates IA because each person takes an individual quiz.

A variation on this is the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) method (Slavin, 1990). Here, each student's quiz score is compared against their own past average score, and they contribute points to their team based on how well they did in comparison with that past average. In this way, lower proficiency students can contribute to their team even if their language proficiency is not yet as high as that of most of their classmates.

Another aspect of STAD which merits consideration is that groups do not compete against each other. Instead, any team with enough points receives recognition, regardless of how well other groups did. Thus, groups are not vying with each other for scarce resources but are, instead, competing against a fixed standard.

There are many ways of making the outside "enemy" a thing, rather than a person. For example, the whole class can strive to better the score of last year's class or their own past average. Or, the whole school can compete against a fixed goal. For example, at a school of 500 students, the goal might be for the whole school to read a total of more than 2000 books for outside reading in a two month period, with each person reading books suited to their own current level of proficiency.

Resource Interdependence

One of the most frequently used forms of positive interdependence is resource interdependence. The key here is that group members have different resources which they must share in order to successfully complete their task. These resources can be of two types: information and equipment. Safnil (1991) provides an example of resource PI based on information. Students interview groupmates about leisure activities or ask them to make comparisons, e.g. of family members or of their home with that of a neighbour. These interviews form the basis for written or oral presentations. Wiseman (1990) and Hall (1992) explain similar information gap activities. The key is that students each possess unique information. They must share this information to accomplish a task.

Jigsaw activities (Aronson, 1978; Graney, 1989) are another way to foster resource PI. In jigsaw, each member of a group is given a different piece of the same text. They then leave their home group to meet with others from different groups who have the same piece of the text. The purpose of these expert groups is to learn their piece well and prepare to teach it to their groupmates. Next, learners return to their home groups and

take turns teaching their piece to the others. Finally, the home groups perform a task which requires knowledge of the entire text. One point to keep in mind when constructing jigsaw activities is that each text piece must be understandable on its own. (However, see Kagan [1992] for other versions of Jigsaw which are more flexible.) Jigsaw encourages IA because each person must teach their piece of the text to their home team.

An example of resource PI involving equipment is when students construct word webs, also known a semantic webs (Kagan, 1992). Each student can have a different colour pen or marker. By giving students these different resources, chances increase that IA will exist.

Fantasy Interdependence

Sometimes, learning becomes more enjoyable and captivating when the tasks students take up are not real. Fantasy interdependence embodies this concept. Group members pretend to be in another time (e.g., the year 2020) or place (e.g., Brazil) or to be different people (e.g., Hungarian ballet dancers) or even nonhuman (e.g., talking fish). They then need to use language to accomplish goals in their imaginary situations.

Role plays (Ladousse, 1987) may promote fantasy interdependence. For instance, students can pretend to be visitors from another planet. After they return home, they are to present a report on what they experienced on earth. Another possibility would be for students to pretend that their school was sponsoring them to take a trip anywhere they chose. Their task would be to do research on their destination and prepare a plan for their trip based on the research. How might IA be encouraged in these two activities?

Identity Interdependence

Identity interdependence involves encouraging group members to forge a common identity. Just as sports teams and clubs have special names, handshakes, songs, shouts, banners, etc., so too can learning groups. These can be general or specific to a content area. For example, students of English for Science and Technology can take group names inspired by famous inventors (e.g., "The Edisons" with a drawing of a phonograph on their banner) or famous inventions (e.g., "The Cellular Telephones" with a handshake done holding their hands to look like cellular phones) or important processes (e.g., "The Photosynthesizers" with a song about plants or the sun).

Reward Interdependence

One of the most frequently used means of encouraging positive interdependence is via rewards. These can be intrinsic (internal) rewards, such as the enjoyment of learning or the pleasure of collaborating with others and getting to know them better. Rewards may also be extrinsic (external), such as grades, recognition from the teacher and peers, or certificates and other prizes. Here, IA must be considered. If, for instance, students cooperate to create a single group product, giving the same reward to all group members

may be viewed by students as unfair, unless there is some way to monitor whether everyone has contributed to that project.

Environmental Interdependence

Occasionally, a group of students are supposed to be working together, but they are sitting so far apart from one another that you wonder if group members are afraid of catching colds from each other. The final type of PI, environmental interdependence, comes in here. Environmental interdependence does not involve students working together on recycling projects, although that, too, would be a good idea. Instead, environmental interdependence means that students are close together as they collaborate. This sometimes neglected concept is important because having the whole group "eye-to-eye and knee-to-knee" makes it easier for them to communicate and helps ensure that no one is left out. As one colleague of mine put it, "Group members should be so close they can smell each other."

The More the Merrier

No doubt, the observant reader has noticed that these eight types of PI are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, many of the cooperative group activities described in this article involve several types of PI. An example is the drawing activity described by Hyland in which group member A does a drawing, and group member B describes it to member C who tries to create an accurate copy. In addition to role interdependence, there are also unique *resources*, because A and B can see the drawing but C cannot, while C has the paper and pen. Also, they share the *goal* of communicating successfully to draw accurate copies.

Not only do many activities already encourage more than one type of PI, but teachers can use their knowledge of PI to look for other ways to facilitate effective student-student interaction. For instance, having students choose group names before beginning an activity may be a way of heightening the feeling of group *identity*. Such groups can stay together for several days or weeks to help this common identity build.

Role PI may be increased by assigning students roles which maintain smooth functioning group. Such roles include: a time keeper, responsible for having their group stick to time limits; a noise monitor, responsible for seeing that their group is not too noisy; an encourager, responsible for prompting all group members to participate; a reporter, responsible for reporting the group's result; a secretary, responsible for recording the group's ideas; and a checker, responsible for checking with all group members to be sure they have understood.

There are also many ways teachers can help provide students with an *environment* conducive to cooperation. For instance students can be encouraged to sit as closely together as possible. Further, preparation for group work can include the teaching of the

social skills appropriate to making sure no group member is ostracized.

A Nonclassroom Example

By way of a review of these eight types of PI, let us explore a situation which combines all eight in a nonclassroom context. Two roommates have decided to prepare a delicious meal for friends who are coming to visit. Their *goal* is to please their friends. They share a common *identity* as the two occupants of their flat. Their *reward* will be a feeling of satisfaction, praise from the friends, and, hopefully, a dinner invitation from them. The two roommates share the same *environment* as they sit together on the bus on the way to the market and as they cook together in their small kitchen.

For an *outside enemy*, they try to prepare dishes which are more delicious and attractive than those at an expensive restaurant they once visited. When these two cooks initially became roommates, they brought different cooking *resources* with them. One had a good collection of pots and pans, while the other had a sharp set of knives. Also, one knows an excellent recipe for the main dish, while the other knows how to make a delicious dessert. This difference in information leads them to take on different *roles* in the kitchen. During the preparation of the main dish, one is the helper and the other is chef. These *roles* are reversed when the dessert is prepared. Both enjoy the role of taster. Finally, to add a touch of *fantasy*, the roommates pretend that this is not their flat, but their restaurant, and their guests are not their friends, but reviewers from an important newspaper.

Conclusion

Successful small group work almost always involves much more than just putting students in groups and asking them to work together. A great deal of thought, planning, and structuring are necessary (Sim, 1991; Tickoo, 1991). Knowing about various ways to encourage positive interdependence and individual accountability serves educators in their efforts to help students gain the many benefits of interaction with their peers.

Hyland (1991) points out that small group work can involve any and all of the four macro skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Further, traditional teacher-fronted activities can be adapted to be used with groups. The ideas presented in this article provide guidelines for creating small group activities and for enhancing ones which already exist. When small groups are at work in our classrooms, let's be sure there's lots of honey.

References

Aronson, E. (1978). The jigsaw classroom. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
Cotterall, S. (1990). Reciprocal teaching: A problem-solving approach to reading.

Guidelines, 12, 30-39.
D'Rourke, V. (1991). Group correction of students' written assignments. Guidelines, 13, 36-44.
Graney, J. M. (1989). Providing learning opportunities using group reading activities. Guidelines, 11, 25-32.
Hall, S. J. (1992). Using split information tasks to learn mathematics vocabulary. Guidelines, 14, 72-77.
Hyland, K. (1991). Managing group work. Guidelines, 13, 28-35.
Jacobs, G. M. (1988). Cooperative goal structure: A way to improve group activities. ELT Journal, 42, 97-101.
Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. J. (1990). Circles of learning. (3rd edition). Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company.
Kagan, S. (1992). Cooperative learning. San Juan Capistrano, CA: Resources for Teachers.
Ladousse, G. P. (1987). Role play. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Sanfil. (1991). Techniques of dealing with large English classes. Guidelines, 13, 82-86.
Sim, G. N. (1991). Small group work in the classroom. Guidelines, 13, 19-27.
Slavin, R E. (1990). Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
Tickoo, M. L. (1991). Groupwork in language classrooms: A pedagogic universal or a partial remedy? Guidelines, 13, 45-63.
Wiseman, A. (1990). Sending Mr. Brown to Utopia: Ideas for learner generated materials. Guidelines, 12, 48-54.