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## Checklists for Doing Cooperative Global Issues Projects

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### Introduction

Projects are not new in education (for example, see Kilpatrick, 1918), but in the last 20 years, they seem to have become more popular in second language education, as projects fit with emphases on communication, tasks, cooperation among students, learner autonomy, curricular integration, alternative assessment, links between the classroom and the world beyond, and thinking skills (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). In particular, the many ways in which projects allow students to link their second language learning with their efforts to learn about and improve the wider world make projects particularly attractive to students and teachers attempting to infuse global issues into their learning and teaching (Cates & Jacobs, 2006).

Projects, whether or not they deal with global issues, are often done in groups. Indeed, research and theory suggest that multiple cognitive and affective benefits can arise from student-student cooperation (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). However, group efforts in and out of education often run afoul of a host of obstacles, such as group members who do not get along with each other, go off-task, neglect to do their assigned tasks or do not give each other useful feedback. Therefore, introducing student-student interaction as a third mode of learning – along with learning from teachers and instructional materials and working alone – brings with it a host of potential complications that students and teachers may find perplexing and discouraging.

The purpose of this article is to offer solutions to some of these complications when groups work on global issues projects. Many of these solutions come from the literature on cooperative learning (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). The article begins with brief explanations of eight cooperative learning principles. The main part of the article consists of nine checklists the students can use for doing cooperative global issues projects.

### Cooperative Learning Principles

This section of the paper discusses eight cooperative learning principles. It should be noted that different authors on cooperative learning have different lists of principles. The subsequent section of the paper then contains nine checklists for doing group projects on global issues. These checklists are referred to in the present principles section of the paper.

**Heterogeneous Grouping:** This principle suggests that the groups in which students do cooperative learning tasks are usually mixed, with teacher guidance, on one or more of a number of variables including past achievement, sex, ethnicity, social class, religion, personality, age, first language, and diligence (Checklist 2). Heterogeneous grouping is believed to have a number of benefits, such as encouraging peer tutoring, providing a variety of perspectives, helping students come to know and like others different from themselves and fostering appreciation of the value of diversity. Nonetheless, some homogeneity may at times

be appropriate, for example, students with a similar interest may want to work together on the same global issues topic.

When we opt for heterogeneous groups, we may want to spend some time on ice breaking (also known as teambuilding) activities, because as Slavin (1995) notes, the combination of students that results from teacher-guided heterogeneous groups is likely to be one that would never have been created otherwise (Checklist 6).

**Cooperative Skills:** Cooperative skills are those needed to work with others on projects. Students may lack these skills, the language involved in using the skills or the inclination to apply the skills during a project (Checklists 4 and 6). Which cooperative skill to teach will depend on the particular students and the particular task they are undertaking. Additionally, cooperative skills often overlap with thinking skills, e.g., the cooperative skill of asking for and giving reasons pushes students to think more deeply, and the skill of disagreeing politely encourages groups to question their ideas.

**Group Autonomy:** This principle encourages student groups to look to each other for feedback and resources rather than relying solely on the teacher. When student groups are having difficulty, it is very tempting for teachers to intervene either in a particular project group or with the entire class. We may sometimes want to resist this temptation, because as Roger Johnson writes, “Teachers must trust the peer interaction to do many of the things they have felt responsible for themselves” (<http://www.clcrc.com/pages/qanda.html>). Yes, teachers will sometimes intervene, but perhaps intervention should not always be the first option (Checklists 1, 5, 6 and 9).

**Maximum Peer Interactions:** In classrooms in which group activities are not used, the normal interaction pattern is that one person – usually the teacher – speaks at a time. Projects offer an alternative to this, with perhaps one person per project group speaking when groups are discussing their projects; thereby the quantity of peer interactions is maximized. Furthermore, even more peer interactions take place when students meet outside of class time to work on their projects (Checklist 3).

However, when groups present their projects to classmates or others, the normal pattern is for one group at a time to present to the entire class, bringing us back to the number of minimum peer interactions. Checklist 8 presents alternatives. Maximum Peer Interactions also refers to the quality of peer interaction. For instance, Checklists 6 and 9 include items to encourage deeper thinking by students.

**Equal Opportunity to Participate:** A frequent problem in groups is that one or two group members dominate the group and, for whatever reason, impede the participation of others (Checklists 4 and 5). Cooperative learning offers many ways of promoting equal opportunities to participate in group projects. Two of these are the use of rotating roles in a group, such as facilitator, checker (who checks to see that everyone understands what the group is doing/has done), questioner, praiser, encourager and paraphraser, and the use of multiple ability tasks (Cohen, 1994), i.e., tasks that require a range of abilities, such as drawing, singing, acting and categorizing, rather than only language abilities (Checklist 8). These roles need to rotate (Checklist 6).

**Individual Accountability:** Individual accountability is, in some ways, the flip side of Equal

**Opportunity to Participate.** When we encourage Equal Opportunity to Participate in group projects, we want everyone to feel they have chances to take part in the group. When we encourage Individual Accountability in groups, we hope that no one will attempt to avoid using those opportunities. Ways to foster Individual Accountability include keeping group size small (Checklist 2), assigning responsibilities to each group member (Checklist 5), and using peer and self feedback (Checklist 9).

**Positive Interdependence:** This principle lies at the heart of cooperative learning. Positive Interdependence is the “All for one, one for all” feeling that leads group members to want to help each other learn, to see that they share a common goal. Johnson & Johnson (1999) describe nine ways to promote Positive Interdependence. Seven of these are discussed below.

**Goal Positive Interdependence:** The group has a common goal that they work together to achieve (Checklist 6).

**Environmental Positive Interdependence:** Group members sit close together so that they can easily see each other’s work and hear each other without using loud voices. This may seem trivial, but it can be important (Checklist 4).

**Role Positive Interdependence:** In addition to the roles mentioned above, there are also housekeeping types of roles, such as timekeeper who reminds the group of time limits and ‘sound hound’ who tells the group if they are being too loud in their deliberations (Checklists 4, 5 and 6).

**Resource Positive Interdependence:** Each group member has unique resources needed for completing the group’s project. These resources can be information that members have researched or equipment, such as a printer or a particular colour marker (Checklist 5).

**External Challenge Positive Interdependence:** Students collaborate within their cooperative learning groups and with other project groups to do better than an external gage of quality, such as their own past achievement or to alleviate the effects of a social ill (Checklists 7 and 9).

**Reward/Celebration Positive Interdependence:** If groups meet a pre-set goal, they all receive some kind of reward or take the opportunity to celebrate (Checklist 6).

**Identity Positive Interdependence:** Groups form a common identity, similar to what is done in sports teams, with mottoes, mascots, colours, etc. (Checklist 6).

**Cooperation as a Value:** This principle means that rather than cooperation being only a way to learn, i.e., the how of learning, cooperation also becomes part of the content to be learned, i.e., the what of learning. The principle of Cooperation as a Value flows naturally from the most crucial cooperative learning principle, Positive Interdependence. Cooperation as a value attempts to expand the feeling of “All for one, one for all” beyond the small classroom group to encompass the whole class, the whole school, on and on, bringing in increasingly greater numbers of people and other beings into students’ circle of ones with whom to cooperate. Global issues projects offer an excellent way to do this (Checklists 1 and 7).

The previous section on cooperative learning principles was intended to provide a framework for understanding the nine checklists found in the present section of the paper. The checklists are worded from students' perspective. Of course, not every item on every checklist will be relevant to every group in every class; checklists will often need adapting to fit particular classes and projects.

### Checklist #1 – Choosing Topics

Does our entire class do projects related to the same topic or might each group have an unrelated topic?

How are our topics chosen?

Selected by teacher

Selected by us, approved by teacher

Voting

Consensus

Are projects meant to be part of Service Learning?

Are there links between our projects and other topics and skills we are learning?

Are we students aware of those links?

### Checklist #2 - Group Members – How Many and Who

How many members should there be in our group? (Smaller groups may encourage everyone to be active.)

Is our group composed of a variety of members? (Variety helps us learn from each other, learn to work with and admire people different from ourselves, and provides our group different points of view.) Ways our group members might vary include:

Language proficiency

Sex

Religion

Socio-economic group

Main field of study

Skills, such as computer graphics and musical skills

Experience doing projects

Personality, such as shy, talkative, detailed

### Checklist #3 – Group Members – Meeting Outside Class

To facilitate group members meeting outside class time:

Do our group members live near each other?

Are group members' class schedules similar?

Does everyone have his/her group members' contact information?

Where can we meet outside class? Is everyone comfortable with those places?

Does everyone know how to use software for group communication, such as the Track Changes feature in Microsoft Word?

#### Checklist #4 – Group Meetings

Have we set up a schedule for regular group meetings, either face-to-face or electronic?

Have we chosen a meeting place without too many distractions, a place where people can sit near enough to be able to speak in quiet voices and see the papers, laptops, etc. of the other members?

Are members on time for these meetings?

Do we have an agenda for these meetings?

Do we encourage everyone to participate and discourage anyone from dominating at meetings?

Does each of us have a role to play during the meeting?

Do we use appropriate cooperative skills, such as praising members when appropriate and keeping the group on task?

Do we ever do something so that our meetings aren't too serious, such as bringing food, just chatting for a while at the beginning or end, or doing something together before or after a meeting?

#### Checklist #5 – Sharing the Work

Does everyone in our group have assigned tasks?

Are there deadlines for assigned tasks?

How will members report to the group what we have done?

How can we share this work roster with our teacher?

Do those of us with special skills teach others, rather than doing for the group? For example, our best writer should not do any writing. Instead, this member should supervise, and all the writing should be done by others, so that everyone improves.

#### Checklist #6 – Group Process

Do we have a clear set of goals, both group and individual, for what we want to achieve by doing this project?

Who else other than the group members might benefit from our project?

Have we given our group a name, chosen a mascot or picked a motto for our group?

Do groups engage in occasional teambuilding activities?

Do we have roles for each group member? For example, at a group meeting, one of us could

be chair, another member could be timekeeper, another recorder, and the fourth member could encourage us to use English as much as possible during the meeting.

Do we rotate these roles, so that everyone can develop the skills needed for the various roles?

How good are we at working together?

What skills do we need to improve in order to work together better?

Do we encourage each other to think more deeply, for instance, by asking for explanations and proposing alternatives?

Have we ever done something together just for fun, such as play a game?

When we finish our project what will we do to celebrate?

How can the teacher know how well our group is functioning?

What is the teacher's role if our group is not functioning well?

#### Checklist #7 – Connecting to the World Beyond the Classroom

Does our project involve others not in our class as

Providers of information and insights?

Recipients of help?

Colleagues sharing goals?

Evaluators of our success?

## Checklist #8 - Presentations

Do we all have a speaking part in the presentation?

Do we explain terms and concepts in clear, simple language, so that non-experts can understand?

Do we give examples to make terms and concepts clear?

Have we included a range of presentation modes?

Songs, raps, poems, chants, background music

Visuals, such as mind maps and drawings

Gesture, mime

Skits, role plays

Videos, photos

Powerpoint files

In what ways do we try to involve the audience in our presentation?

Asking the audience to share an experience or opinion with a partner

Quizzing them about what we have presented

Inviting their questions, comments, and disagreements

Asking the audience to sing, rap, recite or chant along with us

Encouraging the audience to do some gestures or other actions related to key points in our presentation

Asking the audience to rate our presentation for the way we presented or the content of our presentation

Inviting the audience to reflect on the relevance of the presentation for their own lives.

Have we thought about where the presentation will be held and the atmosphere there?

Moving the presentation some place other than the classroom, such as outdoors

Decorating the classroom with plants

Can one group give their presentation to another group, rather than each group presenting to the entire class?

Will our presentation be attended by only the teacher and the class, or will others also attend?

Can our presentation be given to other audiences, for example, to a class of younger students?

In addition to or instead of a public presentation, are our results presented in other forms, such as a written report or a website?

### Checklist #9 – Feedback

Other than the teacher, where can we go for help and feedback with our project?

When is feedback given?

How is it given?

Electronically

In writing

Orally

Is our project graded or assessed in other ways?

What aspects of the project are assessed?

Who sets the assessment criteria?

Do we each reflect on our learning – both learning of content and learning of how to work together – and do we share these reflections with others?

Who participates in the assessment:

Teacher?

Peers?

Self?

Others?

What kind of feedback do we receive and give to others during the project process?

Does our feedback include specific praise for what others have done well?

Does our feedback encourage others to explain their thinking and consider alternatives?

### Conclusion

In conclusion, cooperation, in thought and in deed, plays an important role in global issues education. Lack of cooperation lies at the root of many global problems, and cooperation is necessary to overcoming these problems. This article has provided concepts and practical suggestions for helping students cooperate effectively with peers and others as they do projects on global issues topics.

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