DESIGNING GROUPWORK: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom,

Designing Groupwork combines theory with examples and practical teaching strategies for the classroom. The advantages and dilemmas of groupwork, especially from the standpoint of the multiability and bilingual classroom, are discussed. Step-by-step approaches to successful planning, implementation and evaluation are presented.

In this second edition, Cohen places more emphasis on skill-building for advanced students, on the development of roles, and how to use multiple ability and status treatments to avoid common cooperative learning pitfalls.

Teachers involved in cooperative learning are now asking different questions than when cooperative groupwork was first presented in classrooms. They are not questioning the validity of groupwork, but seeking answers to genuine questions of implementation: What should I do when groups are floundering or fighting? How do I prevent students from getting "burned out" on small groups? How can I help limited English proficient students participate within groups? How do I better process and wrapup the lessons so it is not a repetition of reports? This book addresses these implementation issues.

First, research is cited that addresses the benefits of groupwork for improving the following intellectual goals--conceptual learning, creative problem-solving, higher order thinking skills, oral language proficiency, information retention and improvement of
basic skills--and the following social goals--positive intergroup relations, socializing students for adult roles, increasing time on task, and providing constructive ways of managing academic heterogeneity in the classroom.

Some of the dilemmas of working in groups is status ordering, where a hierarchy develops within the task group. It is rare in any group of four that each person contributes equally or one-fourth of total; it is true in adult groups as well as well prepared student cooperative learning groups. Students may have status within a group based on academic ability, peer status or societal status based on social class, race, ethnic group or gender. Students placed within high status categories are expected to be more competent, while low status students are likely to hold back and not contribute as much. We need to be alert to situations where a good reader is assumed to be better at everything and thus dominates all aspects of groupwork. When ability in one area is used as an index of general intelligence and classroom competence, we have a status problem. Over a series of group assignments, one would hope that different students would play influential roles depending on their ability, interest and expertise and depending on the nature of the task.

Students need to be prepared for groupwork by learning and practising social skills, such as those listed below:

[insert Table 4.1, pg. 46] When students use new behaviours and skills they need to be labeled and reinforced. In addition, students need to learn to work toward consensus, rather than voting, as a way to make decisions. Conflict and disagreement is expected when working together; yet, students need to learn to say "I feel" statements, rather than blaming. Teachers need to intervene in groups to help students reframe their language and to have them replay situations and determine options to problems.

The success of cooperative learning also depends upon creating lessons and tasks that use a wide range of intellectual abilities. A multiple ability task has

• more than one answer or more than one way to solve the problem
• is intrinsically interesting and rewarding
• allows different students to make different contributions
• use manipulatives and multimedia
• involves sight, sound and touch'
• requires a variety of skills and behaviours
• is challenging.

By preparing students for groupwork through the learning of social skills, roles, and group norms and by developing engaging, relevant tasks, the teacher has solved some of the problems related to their questions above. Students need to understand that many different intellectual and social abilities are necessary to do groupwork tasks and they need to understand that each student has some combination of the abilities required.

No one of us is as good as all of us. Another way of handling status differences within groups is to publically recognize the contribution and competence of a low status student. These "assignments of competence" have three features: (1) They must be public, so other students can recognize the contribution of the low status student; (2) They must be specific, referring to a particular skill or ability the student used; and (3) The ability or skill must be relevant to the group task. Don't gush over a student's contribution; be honest and straight forward.

In bilingual or multilingual classrooms, it is possible to place children who share no common language in the same group; however, the tasks must be rich in context, pictographs, or manipulative. Although it is quite a struggle for the newcomer, if the group is trained to see that everyone gets the help needed, the students will do a remarkable job of communication. Yet, if at all possible, mixed language groups are preferable. If a monolingual Spanish speaker is placed with English speakers and a bilingual Spanish-English speaker, then the child has the benefit of hearing proficient English. Also the bilingual child would gain status because of the valuable bridge they are providing. The monolingual English speaking students also need to see the contributions of the non-English speaker. It may be adviseable for the teacher to have the non-or limited-English speaker hear the introduction to the group lesson first, then when the lesson is introduced again to the entire class, they hear the ideas again. Also, at the end of the lesson, they can process or de-brief the lesson with their cooperative group and then again as a group of limited English speakers. The repetition will help them to be successful and will model how important it is for them to be contributing. Cooperative learning is excellent for bilingual classrooms because it puts language into a context by working out academic problems and learning something worthwhile.
Teachers are encouraged to evaluate their implementation of cooperative learning in order to refine their practice. A learning buddy or outside observer can take notes on your orientation or introduction to the task, on how the students are working in their groups, or on your role in observing, intervening or processing group and individual learning. Teachers could also use a student questionnaire or feedback form to assess their work in the group and their individual contributions and learnings. Seek to refine your skills, because only when teachers feel confident about the inclusion of groupwork in their repertoire will students experience the joys and benefits of talking and working together.

With cooperative learning, differences become assets rather than liabilities.