

Kagan cooperative learning can give you better management, engagement and stronger students who are confident in speaking, writing, listening and reading in English. I have used it with primary, secondary and adult learners and have found that it consistently supports students academic achievement as well as social emotional learning. In this article, you will find three sections: why use cooperative learning, how to set up your classroom, and classroom management tips.

## Why Use Cooperative Learning?

It's all about engagement. When students are learning cooperatively, they are driving their own learning and must do so actively through the various structures. While most classrooms are teacher-centered and didactic instruction-heavy, research has shown that this is not effective for student learning and retention of materials. In order to create opportunities for students to practice what they are learning, teachers must relinquish outdated teaching methods and develop student-centered activities. Creating activities based on PIES is a simple, research-backed method that ensures student engagement and achievement.

## PIES and the Simultaneous Advantage

- a. Positive Interdependence - Positive Interdependence
  - i. Students should love English class. They should feel valued, supported and successful. To do that, you have to keep a positive classroom culture.
  - ii. Interdependence here means that students should have to rely on each other to have success. The point here is that by helping each other, they are helping themselves, which makes them want to continue helping.
    1. Questions to ask yourself as you are lesson planning: Does doing well help others here? Does task completion depend on everyone doing their part?
- b. Individual Accountability
  - i. In a lot of classrooms, teachers ask the whole group to say something and they do. Typically, only the highest achievers are speaking loudly, and usually they speak loud enough to make the teacher think everyone is speaking. This means that shy students and low achievers can hide. This is the opposite of what we want in cooperative learning - in order for students to learn, they have to participate. The low achievers are usually the last to understand and want to speak, so they opt out of participating whenever given the chance. Cooperative learning structures take away their opportunity to opt out and instead give them a safe space to practice English.

- ii. This doesn't mean students have to be individually accountable to you at all times - they just have to be accountable to someone, whether that be one teammate or three is up to you.
  - 1. Questions to ask: Must everyone perform in front of someone else?
- c. Equal Participation
  - i. This is huge and is something that doesn't happen often in a traditional classroom. Traditionally, a teacher asks a question and one person answers. This keeps all the other students from being engaged - and almost always it is the kid who goes to bushiban who has already practiced the unit who is answering the question. One huge no-no in cooperative learning is having students raise their hands. In a cooperative classroom, no student will ever raise their hand and give the answer to the whole classroom, because of the principle of equal participation: students who are participating are actually learning because they are engaged.
  - ii. Instead of calling on one student, use structures that allow you to give students equal time or equal turns. You can do that by saying A or B go first then take turns with either a shoulder or face partner or by choosing a number 1-4 to go first then having students take turns in a whole group.
    - 1. Questions to ask when lesson planning: Is participation approximately equal? Can be either time or turns.
- d. Simultaneous Interaction
  - i. In a typical class, students are individually allotted only around 20 seconds per class to speak - it's no wonder they are bored!
  - ii. Students are not bored when they are engaged with another student or students - if they are either actively speaking/writing or having to listen/read they are going to be paying more attention and will learn more because they are given authentic time to learn - way more than if you call on students one by one.
  - iii. You might be afraid of management here - how will I know they are on task or if they are doing it right if I am not listening to them individually? The answer is two-fold: first, you have them practice whole group first, then you have them practice as sub-sections of the class (all A or all B or all one number) then you split them up into groups or pairs last so they have heard, read, listened to or written whatever it is multiple times before they practice in a pair or group. Furthermore, you and your coteacher should both be up and moving around, going from team to team making corrections as necessary.
  - iv. All the Kagan structures enable either half or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the class to be participating at all times - which is a huge gain over the traditional classroom!

1. Questions to ask yourself when planning: What percent of students are participating at once?

## The Simultaneous Advantage!

One of the best things about cooperative learning is that it makes your life easier - instead of doing things yourself or one at a time, you can call on a specific student from each table to do whatever needs to be done (getting markers, pick up materials etc).

Teacher's Goal	Sequential Structure	Simultaneous Structure
Distribute Supplies	Teacher or student gives out one at a time	Materials Monitor from each team distributes materials to teammates
Discuss Topic	One student at a time states their opinion	All students discuss their opinions in pairs
Form Teams	Teacher reads names and which team in order	Students find names on cards on team tables or stand up hand up pair up
Share Answers	Teacher calls one at a time	All students respond in Choral Response or on Answer Boards
Receive Help	Students raise hands and wait for teacher's help	Student asks a teammate and receives immediate help

## How To Set Up Your Classroom

- Desks in groups of four, numbered 1A, 2B, 3A, 4B - This is called heterogenous grouping and is the lifeblood of cooperative learning. You

assign students to a seat based on ability level and then you will always know who you should call on depending on what you are trying to find out. For example, if you want to see if all the low achievers can say a word, you could ask all the number threes to say the word (I will explain more about this later) or you could make sure the team leaders at each table can give directions to their team by having the number ones stand up and demonstrate for the class.

- Spinners for 1,2,3,4 and A,B - The kids love these - they all will know their number and letter by heart so when you spin the spinners they get really excited. You use these to randomly choose who goes first in a structure.
- Tables numbered - It is vitally important that you number each table and make sure the kids know their table number for management purposes - You can give praise or rebuke to tables easily if they all know their numbers.
- Cards for vocabulary and phonics - this is time consuming up front unless you have a book publisher who already makes them. On one side of the small card is the picture and the other side has the word. If you have older kids, you can put the sentence patterns on the cards instead.
  - You want to make enough small cards for each team to have one or two sets at their table. You will use these all the time - you can use them in so many ways! For example, you can tell students when they come in to immediately start reviewing them with a partner, or you can use them to fill the time if they finish another structure early, or you can use them in several structures. I love using them for phonics as well. You write the word on one side and the sound on the other side.
- Whiteboards or laminated paper - This will make checking for understanding so easy - make/get one whiteboard per student and get one eraser per team or just use tissues. Students can use their highlighters to write on the whiteboards. You can keep these under the mats on their desks if they have them, or you can just keep them under their chairs to save time having to pass them out and put them up each time.
- Good and bad charts - I use a smiley face and a frowny face sticker on the blackboard for classroom management, but you can use anything that is a symbol for good and bad behavior. The way to use this is to write the number of groups that are behaving well or badly/the number of individual students (but not very often) on the board so everyone can see. This deters students from behaving badly and it makes students want to act well so they get on the board.
- Seating charts based on scores and even boy/girl ratios - This is the one thing you should spend the most time doing. Cooperative learning turns into a chaotic disaster when students are not placed in a way that allows

them to be successful. For heterogenous teams, you need to either use the most reliable test score you have or use an average of test scores to put the students in order from highest to lowest. Then decide how many teams you will have and divide the students into four even groups and label them high, medium high, medium low, low. For each team, place one student from each category. I typically have all the high students in seat 1, medium high in seat 2, low in seat 4 and medium low in seat three. Every table should look like this:

1	2
4	3

- This way the high student and the low student will seldom work together - they are too likely to cause issues sitting by each other because the the high student will usually make the low student feel dumb (they have not be conditioned to help each other; especially the high achievers - they just want to do it themselves and be done so it makes the low student feel even more stupid when they don't understand or it takes them longer).
- It is also very important to try to have an even boy-girl ratio at each table because some students will become very shy when they are outnumbered.

## Classroom Management Tips:

- Team leader at seat 1 - this is a good idea because it adds another layer of management into the classroom. Basically, the person in seat 1 is the strongest student in the team so likely they know the most English. You can rely on this student to give directions to their teammates, to make sure they do what you ask (such as put away your books or raise your hand) and to be a model for what should be happening. (If you have really naughty smart students, do not put them in seat one. You are better off having an obedient, slightly slower student in seat one in that case.)
- Positive praise - one thing that is lacking in a lot of classrooms is positivity. It's easy to get frustrated when students do not do what you ask, and it's even easier to want to correct their mistakes. A good ratio is 3 praises to every 1 rebuke - this is per student but also works per team. You want to be a model for positive praise. You can do this by saying things like, "Wow! You gave your best effort!" or "You tried so hard!" Try to avoid just saying "good job" constantly because it leads to a fixed mindset that makes students less likely to keep trying as hard (this is a totally different topic for a different workshop but I encourage you to google "The Power of Mindset and Belief" to learn more!!).

- SLANT - SLANT is a classroom management technique that doubles as an attention getter.
  - Sit up
  - Listen
  - Ask and Answer Questions
  - Nod
  - Track the speaker
- There are a lot attention-getting techniques you can use if SLANT doesn't work:
  - Countdown from 5
  - Class, Yes (teacher says class, students say yes)
  - Clapping (clap a rhythm and students respond)
  - Recorder (play a sound until students are looking at you)
  - \*\*\*do NOT go on until you have 100% of students' attention - this is vital because if students think it is ok to be off task and ignore you then they will always do so and you will not be successful in cooperative learning. It's vital that all students are engaged.
- Shoulder and face partners - this is the other part of cooperative learning that will change your classroom. Every student has two people with whom they work regularly. You can choose who goes first by using the AB spinner!
- Volume levels - I use 0 = teacher talking, students silent, 1 = whisper to a partner, 2 = soft indoor voice with whole team. This is huge for classroom management because students in Taiwan are not used to being given the freedom to talk during class so they often get really loud. The very best way to get them to talk softly is for you to talk softly yourself and remind them of the volume level right before you say go. It is vital when you start cooperative learning to have students practice the volume levels and be able to say them and do them correctly. I would drill this over and over again in the first several classes. Along with this, I keep the numbers 0, 1, and 2 on the board with a magnet under them and before I start any new structure I remind them of their volume level by visually moving the magnet.
- Finished signal - Some teams will naturally finish faster than others, but you may not know it if they keep talking. A way to avoid them being off-task and out of control is two-fold. First, have them do some kind of visual and audible signal - I use the bubblegum clap but you can do anything really! Secondly, have what is called a "sponge" activity for the team to do until everyone else is done. Usually this looks like having a set of small cards at each table for them to review using Rally Robin when they are finished. I do mean when the whole team finishes, not when one person gets finished, because in a truly cooperative classroom there will never be a time where one kid at a table finished before the others - if they do, you need to check on them because they are not doing the cooperative learning correctly.
- Team chant/name - This is a vital element of teambuilding. After students get new teams, it's really important to give them opportunities to get to know each

other better and to ensure that they like each other and want to cooperate. This is where the team chant comes in - they can say it when they finish as the finished signal or you can have them do it as a positive praise whenever they seem down or tired. Having a team name is usually just fun for the kids because it helps them with vocabulary when they think up the words for the team name, and it unites them all behind the name.

- Island - this is your last ditch resort for kids who are having a bad day and refuse to cooperate. You can move students to an island (aka a desk by itself) to give students space to cool down. Don't say it like they are in trouble but frame it as though they need time to get back into a cooperative mood and let them know that when they are able to cooperate with their teammates, they are welcome to come back to the group. I suggest giving them something to write while they are at the island - typically these are the same kids who are low achievers, so think of something that would really help their English.