

OBE INFO

FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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MULTI-LEVEL TEACHING

In the last edition of the OBE INFO, we wrote about multi-level teaching. A few points need to be clarified in this regard.

Firstly, although one must always be aware that there are a number of different levels of ability present in every class and that teaching must be adjusted accordingly, it is vital to remember that every level has equal importance and validity in the classroom situation. No group should ever be seen as a 'slow' group - it is always good to have mixed level groups so that peer assistance can be effected. No group is in fact slow - it merely has different needs, and its needs are as valid as that of any other group.

As teachers we should not only be teaching to the average, ignoring the needs of all others in the class. Teaching must be learner-centred, not teacher-centred or

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Cooperative learning is a teaching and learning strategy in which small groups, each with learners of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a Learning Area. Each member of a group is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping group members learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement.

In this Information Letter, educators are given examples of interactive activities that can be characterised as Cooperative Learning. The activities can be adapted to suit the educator's classroom situation. But first let us consider the following:

Roles of Group Members

When putting together groups, you may want to consider assigning (or having learners select) their roles for the group. Learners may also rotate group roles depending on the activity.

Potential group roles and their functions include:

- **Leader**- The leader is responsible for keeping the group on the assigned task at hand. S/he also makes sure that all members of the group have an opportunity to participate, learn and have the respect of their group members. The leader may also want to check to make sure that all of the group members have mastered the learning points of a group exercise.
- **Recorder (or Scribe)**- The recorder picks and maintains the group files and folders on a daily basis and keeps records of all group activities including the material contributed by each group member. The recorder writes out the solutions to problems for the group to use as notes or to submit to the instructor. The recorder may also prepare presentation materials when the group makes oral presentations to the class.
- **Reporter**- The reporter gives oral responses to the class about the group's activities or conclusions
- **Monitor**- The monitor is responsible for making sure that the group's work area is left the way it was found and acts as a timekeeper for timed activities.
- **Wildcard (in groups of five)**- The wildcard acts as an assistant to the group leader and assumes the role of any member that may be missing.

There are many other possible roles – the educator should use his or her imagination.

Group Expectations

Some of the common fears about working with groups include learner fears that some members will not pull their weight as part of the group. Learners are scared that their grade will be lower as a result of the group learning vs learning they do individually. One way to address this issue is to use a group activity to allow the group to outline acceptable group behaviour. Put together a form and ask groups to first list behaviour they expect from each individual, each pair and a group as a whole. Groups can then use this as a way to monitor individual contributions to the group and as a way to evaluate group participation.

Some cooperative learning techniques

1. Three-step Interview

Three-step interviews can be used as an icebreaker for group members to get to know one another or can be used to get to know concepts in depth, by assigning roles to learners.

- The educator assigns roles or learners can divide themselves. The educator can also give interview questions or information that should be “found”.
- A interviews B for the specified number of minutes, listening attentively and asking probing questions.
- At a signal, learners reverse roles and B interviews A for the same number of minutes.
- At another signal, each pair turns to another pair, forming a group of four. Each member of the group introduces his or her partner, highlighting the most interesting points.

2. Roundtable

Roundtable groups can be used to brainstorm ideas and to generate a large number of responses to a single question or a group of questions.

- The educator poses a question.
- One piece of paper and pen per group.
- First learner writes one response, and says it out loud.
- First learner passes paper to the left, second learner writes response, etc.
- Continues around the group until time elapses.
- Learners may say, “pass” at any time.
- Group stops when time is called.

The key is the question or the problem you’ve asked the learners to consider. It has to be one that has the potential for a number of different “right” answers. Relate the question to the lesson unit, but keep it simple so every learner can have some input.

Once time is called, determine what you want the learners to do with the lists. They may want to discuss the multitude of answers or solutions or they may want to share the lists with the entire class.

3. Focused Listing

Focused listing can be used as a brainstorming technique or as a technique to generate descriptions and definitions for concepts. Focused listing asks the students to generate words to define or describe something. Once learners have completed this activity, the educator can use these lists to facilitate group and class discussion.

Example: Ask learners to list 5-7 words or phrases that describe or define what a motivated learner does. From there, the educator might ask learners to get together in small groups to discuss the lists, or to select the one that they can all agree on. Combine this technique with a number of other techniques and you can have a powerful cooperative learning structure.

4. Structured Problem-solving

Structured problem-solving can be used in conjunction with several other cooperative learning techniques.

- Have the learners brainstorm or select a problem for them to consider.
- Assign numbers to members of each group (or use playing cards). Have each member of a group be a different number or suit.
- Discuss task as group.
- Each learner should be prepared to respond. Each member of the group needs to understand the response well enough to give the response with no help from other members of the group.
- Ask an individual from each group to respond. Call on the individual by number (or suit).

5. One Minute Papers

Ask learners to comment on the following questions. Give them one minute and time them. This activity focuses them on the content and can also provide feedback to you as an educator.

- What was the most important or useful thing you learned today?
- What two important questions do you still have; what remains unclear?
- What would you like to know more about?

You can use these one-minute papers to begin the next day’s discussion, to facilitate discussion within a group, or to provide you with feedback on where the learner is in his or her understanding of the material.

6. Paired Annotations

Learners pair up to review/learn same article, chapter or content area and exchange double-entry journals for reading and reflection.

- Learners discuss key points and look for divergent and convergent thinking and ideas.
- Together learners prepare a composite annotation that summarizes the article, chapter, or concept.

7. Send-A-Problem

Send-A-Problem can be used as a way to get groups to discuss and review material, or potential solutions to problems related to content information.

- Each member of a group generates a problem and writes it down on a card. Each member of the group then asks the question to other members.
- If the question can be answered and all members of the group agree on the answer, then that answer is written on the back of the card. If there is no consensus on the answer, the question is revised so that an answer can be agreed on.
- The group puts a Q on the side of the card with the question on it, and an A on the side of the card with an answer on it.
- Each group sends its question cards to another group.
- Each group member takes one question from the stack of questions and reads one question at a time to the group. After reading the first question, the group discusses it. If the group agrees on the answer, they turn the card over to see if they agree with the first group's answer. If there again is consensus, they proceed to the next question. If they do not agree with the first group's answer, the second group write their answer on the back of the card as an alternative answer.
- The second group reviews and answers each question in the stack of cards, repeating the procedure outlined above.
- The question cards can be sent to a third, fourth, or fifth group, if desired.
- Stacks of cards are then sent back to the originating group. The sending group can then discuss and clarify any question.

Variation: A variation on the send-a-problem activity is to use the process to get groups to discuss a real problem for which there may be one set answer.

- Groups decide on one problem they will consider. It is best if each group considers a different problem.
- The same process is used, with the first group brainstorming solutions to a single problem. The problem is written on a piece of paper and attached to the outside of a folder. The solutions are listed and enclosed inside the folder.
- The folder is then passed to the next group. Each group brainstorms for 3-5 minutes on the problems they receive without reading the previous group's work and then place their solutions inside the folders.
- This process may continue to one or more groups. The last group reviews all the solutions posed by all the previous groups and develops a prioritised list of possible solutions. This list is then presented to the group.

8. Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning

The goal of this activity is to generate discussion among learner groups about a specific topic or content area.

- The educator conducts a brief (10-15 minutes) lecture on a topic or content area. The educator may assign a reading or written assignment as well.
- Instructor then gives the learners a set of generic question stems (see examples below)
- Learners work individually to write their own questions based on the material being covered.
- Learners do not have to be able to answer the questions they pose. This activity is designed to force the learners to think about ideas relevant to the content area.
- Learners should use as many question stems as possible.

Grouped into learning teams, each learner offers a question for discussion, using the different stems (see page 4)

Sample question stems:

- What is the main idea of...?
- What if...?
- How does...affect...?
- What is a new example of...?
- Explain why...?
- Explain how...?
- How does this relate to what I've learned before?
- What conclusions can I draw about...?
- What is the difference between...and...?
- How are...and...similar?
- How would I use...to...?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?
- What is the best...and why?

Cooperative Learning References

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We will continue to share with you examples of cooperative learning techniques in future newsletters.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT 0832981119 OR 051 4055077 FOR ANY FURTHER CURRICULUM INFORMATION

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