Cooperative Learning as a Tool for Assessment

Cooperative learning requires that all students in a small group work together to reach a common goal or solve a specific problem; it is a great formative or summative assessment tool.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand cooperative learning is to describe what it is NOT. Cooperative learning is NOT having two students sit side by side and share answers as they complete individual assignments or worksheets. It is NOT assigning a small group report in which one student does all the work.

Cooperative learning requires that each student have a unique assignment that is necessary for completing the final task. Each of these individual pieces of the project are then fitted together into a final product, (think “jigsaw puzzle”).

For example, many of us already use “touch the wall” in our classes as a warm-up activity, but this activity can also be modified to become a cooperative learning activity that can be used for a summative assessment. Here’s how it might work if you were working on grammar; in this example we’ve chosen past tense verbs:

- Split the class into groups of 4
- Ask each member of the group to walk to a different wall.
- On each wall attach a piece of paper with a list of past tense verbs that you’ve been working on and a different subject for discussion (what they did last weekend, what they did on vacation, etc.)
- Tell the students that they will be talking about the subject on the paper using the verbs on the wall.
- Tell each group they must take turns using the verbs in sentences. The group must then decide on the three sentences that describe what they all did last weekend, on vacation, etc.
- Bring the primary groups back together.

Each person in the group must now tell their group the three things they heard in their “wall” group. The person sitting next to them must then retell what they heard.

- This continues until everyone in each group has spoken and retold what they heard.

As the groups are working, circulate among them, listening to make sure the verbs are being used correctly and that all students are participating in the activity.

Many of the other activities described in this website: http://www.teachingwithsimplicity.com/2014/03/10-cooperative-learning-strategies.html are ones that you may be doing already!

Have you used cooperative learning? If so, what worked for you? If not, which of the activities on the website could you use? Answer these questions and submit a lesson plan using one of these activities to receive 3 staff development hours.

Tech Corner

If you love NEWSINLEVELS.COM, take a look at DREAMREADER.NET: http://dreamreader.net

This website offers current news at 5 different levels, (beginner to advanced). Subjects are sorted by categories such as “cities”, “food”, “culture”, and “shopping”. Site extras include reading quizzes, vocabulary worksheets, and the option to listen to the article.

(Thanks to Bob Paysnick, our techie guy extraordinaire, for his usual, great input in this area!)
Research shows: That high quality formative assessments help struggling students succeed. Why? Because they allow teachers to identify struggling students early and it provides students with the opportunity to build confidence as they receive feedback during each step of the learning process.

The National Council of Teachers of English has written as excellent summary of the benefits of formative assessments. Especially useful is the chapter titled “Myths”.

You can find a link to the article here: http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/CC/0201-sep2010/CC0201PolicyBrief.pdf

College & Career Readiness
We’ve all been a part of the “I bit off more than I can chew” club! Many of our students drop out of our ESL or Hiset classes because they are unable to juggle the demands of their lives and school. For many of our students the idea of learning English is a goal they work diligently toward. But many fail because they do not consider other factors that can influence their success.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, students should ask themselves these questions before beginning a new class:

- **Why do I want to go back to school?** Students should have a very specific reason or career path in mind.
- **Have I discussed this situation with everyone who will be affected**, (my spouse, parent, children, etc.)?
- **Do I have time to do the work required?**
- **When will I do my homework?**
- **Do I have a quiet place to work?**
- **Do I have emergency childcare if I need it?**
- **Do I have reliable transportation?** What will I do if my car breaks down?

If you teacher a higher-level class, consider extending these questions to discuss the possibility of college with your students.

**A WEBINAR WORTH WATCHING**
How Body Language Affects the Way You Feel:

Body language plays a significant role in the way we are perceived by others. The way you stand, gesture, and even sit, can convey a subtle message to others.5

In her “Ted Talk” Amy Cuddy, an Associate Professor and Hellman Faculty Fellow in the Negotiation, Organizations & Markets Unit at Harvard Business School, discusses strategies for maintaining your “power” or at least “faking it until you make it”. There is a powerful lesson here for all of us and for our students.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks-Mh1QhMc&feature=youtu.be

If you watch Ms. Cuddy’s talk and submit a reflection On the following : How could you use this information In your classroom or in your life? You will receive 2 Staff development hours.