

# COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR THE SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Janet Orr, Director TEAL Services

May 2010

**Sponsored by the US Embassy and Consulates in Japan**

Participants discover the rationale for and principles of effective collaborative learning and ways to improve spoken language in the secondary English classroom. Six effective and flexible collaborative learning structures that can be adapted for many topics and learning goals are demonstrated: Think, Pair, Share / Solve, Pair, Share; Inside-Outside Circles; Word Square; Line-Ups; Sentence Maker and Numbered Heads Together.

## **What is collaborative learning?**

Collaborative learning is a relationship among learners that requires a relationship with individual accountability (each has to contribute and learn), interpersonal skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution), face-to-face interaction, and processing (reflecting on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better). The active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes natural language use and critical thinking. (Adapted from <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgmt/c-learn/index.html> )

Why use collaborative learning?

- To increase academic achievement
- Help students as they negotiate meaning
- Ensure active participation
- Provide natural oral communication events
- Ensure high-level thinking
- Practice procedural language
- Gain group skills for life



## **What is the difference between collaborative learning and cooperative learning?**

Collaborative learning is a method of teaching and learning in which students team together to explore a significant question or create a meaningful project. A group of students discussing a lecture or students from different schools working together over the Internet on a shared assignment are both examples of collaborative learning.

Cooperative learning is a specific kind of collaborative learning. In cooperative learning, students work together in small groups on a structured activity. They are individually accountable for the task, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed. Cooperative groups learn to work as a team. They develop

their interpersonal skills. They learn to deal with conflict. D.W. and R.T. Johnson, R.E. Slavins and S. Kagan have research and effective practices published on cooperative and collaborative learning to the learning of English.

### **Cooperative Learning Lowers Anxiety**

Adapted from a Spencer Kagan article available at [http://www.kaganonline.com/online\\_magazine/spencers\\_thinkpad\\_p2.php](http://www.kaganonline.com/online_magazine/spencers_thinkpad_p2.php) )

Learning and using a foreign language can be stressful. In the traditional English classroom, the teacher quizzes students in front of the entire class. Students may not know the correct answer, may be apprehensive about speaking in public, or may be self-conscious about their accent. In global surveys, public speaking ranks as people's greatest fear, beating fear of death, spiders, flying, and confined spaces. Whole-class settings for language learning are often perceived as threatening situations. We know from both language learning theory and brain research that stress negatively impacts attitudes, learning, and memory.

Most Structures encourage pair work or work in teams of four. Students who would experience anxiety in a whole-class setting feel more comfortable speaking English in a more intimate setting. Cooperative groups are less intimidating than whole-class settings. This is especially true in cooperative classrooms in which the teacher uses teambuilding to establish trust and encourage support among teammates.

### **Cooperative Learning Promotes Natural Language Acquisition**

There's a big difference between learning about a language and actually acquiring the language. Too many language courses teach students about the language. Not enough courses allow students to actually use the language in a functional way. In our example of the traditional classroom, students learn about directional vocabulary. They learn to correctly complete exercises. But are they really building fluency? Results say no.

In the real world, we don't fill out exercises on the proper use of language. But we often do need to give instructions and follow directions. When the situation of language acquisition (exercise work) is too different from the situation of performance (giving directions), a transference gap is created and fluency is not acquired.

Too often, language courses fail to build functional fluency. Students learn how to conjugate verbs, memorize vocabulary, and learn grammar rules, but too often miss out on the opportunity to use language frequently in a functional way. With the Structures, students not only learn about directional terminology, but they actually implement them to accomplish a goal. Natural language acquisition among infants is based on frequent social interaction. Cooperative structures provide the social setting for language use and offer students many more opportunities to receive input, interact in the target language, and practice oral production of the language.

## ***THINK-PAIR-SHARE AND SOLVE/QUICKWRITE-PAIR-SHARE***



Pair Share structures offer learners the opportunity to think, listen and respond to their peers. Learners gain a shared sense of meaning of the text (Snow, Burns, Griffin, 1998). Learners connect their own experience to new information and gain from the experience of their peers. Learners are active while processing what they have read.

**Target learning strategies:** Self-evaluation, practice and elaboration plus the quickwrite focuses on writing a summary.

**Lesson Stages:** Into and Beyond

### **Procedure for Think-Pair-Share**

1. **Into** the lesson: The teacher asks a previewing question to activate prior knowledge.  
**Beyond** the lesson: The teacher asks a comprehension question, i.e. summarize the story, what do you think happens next, what would happen if ....
2. *Think:* Students think about the answer and relate their own experience.
3. *Pair:* A student turns to another student and tells the answer to their partner. They listen to the answer their partner tells them. (If using this answering structure regularly, mix pairs of students, i.e., the student in front/behind you, , the student to the right/left.)
4. *Share:* The pair shares their answer with the whole class or another pair of students.

### **Procedure for Solve/Quickwrite, Pair, Share**

1. *Beyond the lesson:* The teacher asks a comprehension question, an opinion question or poses a problem to be solved.
2. *Think:* Students think about a response.
2. *Solve:* Students think or write about their response for 5 minutes without stopping. If writing, assure them that spelling and grammar are not important because this is a quick write, it's important to get the idea down on paper.
3. *Pair:* read or tell what they thought to a partner and listen to their partner's solution then discuss.
4. *Share:* Pairs of students get together with another pair of students (groups of four), Students take turns talking and telling each other their response. Ask who had a partner with really good ideas. A few individuals can then share their partner's ideas with the full class.

Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998) *Preventing Reading Difficultures in Young Children*. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press

Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. (2000). Task-based second language learning: The uses of first language use. *Language Teaching Research*, 4, 253-276.

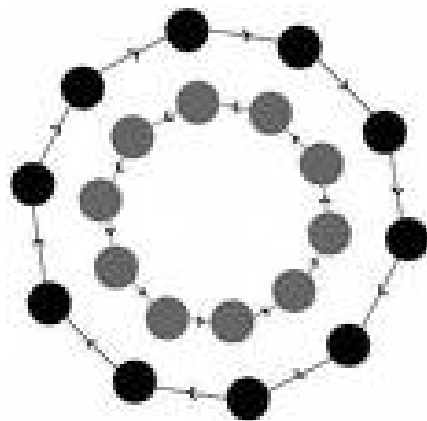
From: McCloskey, ML; Stack, L., Orr, J. and Kleckova, G. (in press). *American Themes Teacher's Guide*. (Working Title) Washington DC: U.S. Department of State.

## ***INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLE***

**Purpose:** To give English Learners real opportunities to give and get information from a number of other students. To practice conversation and asking and answering questions.

**Procedure:**

1. Ask students to stand in two circles, one inside the other. The students in the inside circle facing out and the students in the outside circle facing in.
2. Students in the inside circle ask the students in the outside circle a question. Then the students in the outside circle answer the question.
3. After asking and answering a question the students on the outside circle move to the right. They face a new partner and ask and answer questions again. Students rotate after each question.
4. The questions for Inside-Outside Circle can be presented in three ways.
  - the teacher asks a question and the students respond to their partners
  - the students are given a topic or function to interact about, example: greetings (How are you?), weather, holidays, etc.
  - the students hold flash cards with the question to be asked. The students show their partners their flash cards and get a response before rotating.



---

## ***WORD SQUARE***

The Word Square graphic organizer (McCloskey & Stack, 1996) is a tool for multidimensional vocabulary development. Learners use a variety of ways to study a new term, including writing the word in English and their home language, writing a personal definition, writing a dictionary (or glossary) definition, using the word in an original sentence that shows its meaning, and drawing a picture of the word or action.

**Target learning strategies:** Resourcing and transferring from L1 to L2 and using inference


**Lesson Stages:** Into, Beyond

**Language Levels:** Beginning and intermediate

### **Procedure**

1. Draw a four square on the board. Label each of the squares: Word, Symbol or picture, Meaning and Sentence.
2. Demonstrate by doing a Word Square with the whole class. Select a new word from a reading selection. Complete the square with the help of the class.
3. If using this graphic organizer during the **Into** part of the lesson, the teacher should select important words for the reading and write them on the board. Learners should work in groups or pairs on each assigned Word Square.
4. If you use this graphic organizer following the lesson, in the Beyond section, words can be self-selected or assigned and students can create their word squares independently or in pairs. Circulate the squares and let other class members offer feedback and suggestions.
5. Remind learners that they can use this tool on their own with words that challenge them.

From: McCloskey, ML; Stack, L., Orr, J. and Kleckova, G. (in press). *American Themes Teacher's Guide*. (Working Title) Washington DC: U.S. Department of State.

WORD SQUARE	
<u>Word</u>	<u>Symbol or Picture*</u>
<p><b>Obstacle</b></p> <p><b>Translation:</b>  <b>(Arabic)</b> عائق 3aeq      <b>(Japanese)</b> 障害</p>	
<p><b>Meaning</b></p> <p>My Meaning: Something in the way.</p> <p>Dictionary: n. Something that gets in the way and stops action or progress, hurdle (Newbury House Dictionary, Heinle) <a href="http://www.nhd.heinle.com">www.nhd.heinle.com</a></p> <p>Arabic/Japanese Dictionary:</p>	<p><b>Sentence</b></p> <p>My Sentence: The tree that fell across the road was a big obstacle.</p> <p>From a reading selection: “So I carry a (Rubik’s) cube in my backpack as a reminder that I can attain my goals, no matter what obstacles I face.”</p>

\*sample artwork

## LINE-UPS



Purpose: To use class time that is often wasted as student’s line up as they enter or leave the classroom.

Students use English to arrange themselves in line based on a criterion. Required language should be previously taught, e.g., numbers – count by 2,3, 4,etc., number words, colors of the rainbow, age in years, months of the year, month born, date of birth, location of birth – north/south or east/west, ABC order – first name/surname or give out word cards.

- Teach language needed for following instructions: What month were you born? What is your name? What number do you have? You go first. I go first...
- Procedure: Provide props/cards if needed.
- Students are asked to line up or get into the queue based on a given set of criteria, i.e. birth date. They must ask many others, “When is your birthday?”
- Demonstrate with a small group, the first time. Have students practice the task in small groups then larger groups

## SENTENCE MAKER

This cooperative learning strategy is an entertaining way for learners to review and analyze a text while they learn to construct good sentences to ask and answer questions (Stack & McCloskey, 2008). Learners answer questions about a text that they read or listened to with sentences – but each learner speaks only one word of the answer at a time. As a result, learners have to think “on their feet” about the answers, but also about many aspects of language – including grammar, collocation (what words “go together”), and word choice.

**Target learning strategies:** summarizing; synthesizing; reviewing; retelling; using physical action to remember language; word order

**Lesson Stage:** Beyond

**Language Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced

## Procedure:

1. Ask students to work in groups of four. Have each group write three questions about the text they have heard or read. Questions may be general or may be directed to a particular character in a story. (Note: some characters can be imaginary -- even inanimate objects.)
2. Each group then sends one representative to stand in the front of the room.
3. Have the students in the front of the class stand in a line facing the class.
4. Have them practice the process of answering questions with sentences, each person speaking one word at a time (when an unfinished sentence gets to the end of a line, it “wraps” around back to the first). Use general questions to help students get started. For example, ask, “What is your name?” Students answer the question in a complete sentence, one word at a time, e.g., student #1 says “My”, student #2 says “name”, student #3 says “is”, student #4 says “(her first name), student #5 says “(his last name) .”
5. Invite a student from one of the groups to ask one of that group’s questions. If the question is addressed to a character, remind the student to name the character.
6. Students in the front of the class answer the question in complete sentences, one word at a time. (Especially at first, the group will need considerable modeling and prompting from the teacher and other group members. Note issues of grammar, word choice, word endings that students need help with and that will be valuable “mini-lessons” for the future.)
7. Continue until all questions are asked and answered.

From: McCloskey, ML; Stack, L., Orr, J. and Kleckova, G. (in press). *American Themes Teacher’s Guide*. (Working Title) Washington DC: U.S. Department of State.

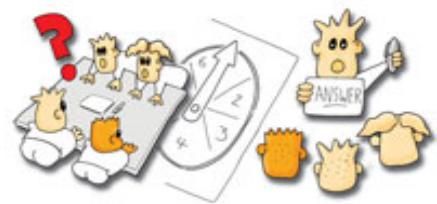
---

## NUMBERED HEADS TOGETHER

This powerful and engaging cooperative learning strategy (Kagan, 1004) can be used at many stages of a lesson: for brainstorming, problem solving, preview, or review. It effectively involves every learner and provides a structure for learners to support one another’s achievement. In the example below, the questions are used in the “beyond” stage of the lesson to help learners intensively re-read a passage to find answers to questions.

**Target learning strategies:** Cooperation with classmates and inference

**Language Levels:** All



**Numbered heads together**

## Procedure:

1. Have learners work in groups of about four.
2. Learners in each group number off 1 to 4. (If groups have 5, two can take turns as one number; if groups have 3, one learner has two numbers).
3. The teacher asks one question at a time about the text, listening or topic and gives a time limit.
4. Learners in each group take a few minutes to “put their heads together” to find and agree on their answers. (This may include looking up page citations in a text, solving a problem, summarizing a passage, drawing a diagram, invent a product...)
5. Teacher calls a number to designate which learner will answer for the team.
6. Learners with that number give their groups’ answers (orally, on paper, or on the board)
7. Teacher gives feedback as appropriate; teams might receive points for correct answers, creative answers, correct spelling, etc.

From: McCloskey, ML; Stack, L., Orr, J. and Kleckova, G. (in press). *American Themes Teacher’s Guide*. (Working Title) Washington DC: U.S. Department of State.