

? Hong Kong Cooperative Learning Center
? Newsletter
? Issue 1
? May 2000
? Website:
<http://www.ln.edu.hk/hkclc>
? Email:
hkclc@ln.edu.hk

Hong Kong Cooperative Learning Center

AN OVERVIEW

Our mission is to empower university faculty members throughout Hong Kong to develop effective cooperative learning terms.

A generous Teaching Development Grant from the University Grants Committee has funded the Hong Kong Center for Cooperative Learning. Our mission is to empower university faculty members throughout Hong Kong to develop effective cooperative learning teams. We also want to support educators in Hong Kong public schools and academics in the Chinese Mainland.

Hong Kong political, social and business leaders have argued that graduates do not have the theoretical and interpersonal skills necessary to perform well in today's demanding team organizations.

Reforms are being instituted to move education away from traditional didactic methods so that students are able to develop successful careers in the dynamic, global economy of Hong Kong.

Many Hong Kong faculty members emphasize team problem-centered education that develops the whole person and increases communication skills. However, they are frustrated with helping students work together synergistically.

A three-day workshop this January by David W. Johnson kicked off the Center's activities and now small groups and individuals are experimenting with cooperative learning. Also in January, Dean Tjosvold gave a workshop on cooperative learning to MBA instructors from throughout the Mainland in Hangzhou, PRC. Research projects are under way and a web site is being constructed. Six academics from different universities in Hong Kong oversee the project with Dean Tjosvold the principal investigator.

Principle Investigator:

Dean Tjosvold
Lingnan University

Co-investigators:

Chung-ming Lau
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Chun Hui
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Gilbert Wong
The University of Hong Kong

Margaret Poon
City University of Hong Kong

Jane Moy
Hong Kong Baptist University

Kenny S. Law
HKUST

Field Experiment for Group Processing

Our center is now conducting a field experiment to test the effects of group processing. The overall rationale and plan are as follows:

Rationale:

Groups should continually reflect on their workings and internal dynamics to identify issues and improve. If the group is not becoming more effective in how members work together, it is becoming less effective because inevitably problems and conflicts will develop that if unmanaged create suspicion and withdrawal.

However, by periodically processing on how their members are interacting and their relationships, they can manage their conflicts, develop solutions to problems, and reinforce that they want to work together cooperatively. Processing facilitates continuous improvement and gradual learning.

Plan:

1. All instructors interested in cooperative learning who would use cooperative groups this semester were invited to participate.
2. Each participating instructor developed presentation groups.
3. We randomly assigned groups to the processing or no processing conditions. As the group is the unit of analysis, we wanted to make sure that we randomly assigned the groups to conditions.
4. The field experiment extended the full semester. Each group in the processing condition processed and reflected on their group once each class meeting.

"THE JIGSAW PROCEDURE WORKS!"

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Jane has taught Business Communication, a subject regarding interaction and presentation skills, for some years. At first, she expected her students would participate and discuss, but that turned out to be a wishful dream. They were simply reluctant to pay attention and get involved. Nobody wanted to answer the questions she asked, and the atmosphere was dead silence.

After several attempts, she realized that it was hopeless to stir them up. She sought advice from her senior colleagues. Their replies were, " This is normal! You should have known it -- Don't ask any questions." Jane was disappointed and believed that she might have to forget about motivating her students.

"When I attended the workshop, I was stimulated to think about my teaching strategies again because of the considerable evidence that this approach led to so many advantages for teaching and learning. I was reinforced to redesign my teaching methods."

"After I had adopted the cooperative learning approach for a short while, I noticed that my students had more responses."

Jane said that the jigsaw procedure of the cooperative learning approach was particularly useful. Students have given it lot of positive feedback. They said that they could have better understanding of the subject and, in turn, they were more interested in the subject. They enjoyed discussing and sharing with other classmates. Consequently, interpersonal relationships among the classmates improved.

The jigsaw procedure is particularly useful when teachers wish their students to read material or present it to the class. Instead of individual reading, teachers divide the material into unique parts, like a jigsaw puzzle, and assign them to different students. They are required to study their own material and then teach it to the other group members. As such, each student has to participate actively in order for his or her group to be successful.

Jane thinks that the setting of the classrooms is a crucial factor affecting whether this cooperative learning approach could successfully be implemented. She has tried to use the approach in a long and narrow classroom. Since the students at the back rows were quite distant from her, they were distracted and tended to chat instead of discuss the material. Then, she requested a wider classroom with fewer rows where she could be closer to the students and the problem was solved.

"I attended a 3-day workshop held by Professor David Johnson in Lingnan University two years ago...I was very impressed by the benefits of using the cooperative learning approach. A number of research studies indicated that a cooperative learning approach can help students learn actively and cooperatively and learn a great deal."

Jane Moy, Assistant Professor of the Department of Management, Hong Kong Baptist University, has been using the cooperative learning approach in her classes for more than one year.



TEAMWORK VERSUS OPERATIVE LEARNING

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"The subject I'm teaching is Leadership and Teamwork, in which the students should learn how to get along well with each other. I found that team building and cooperative learning are similar in many aspects. The skills from both camps are complementary. Then, I started to design my program by incorporating the cooperative learning approach."

Moureen Tang is now teaching Leadership and Teamwork in the Department of Management, Lingnan University. The students are required to learn the concepts of team building as well as experience the behavior of teamwork. Throughout the processes, students learn what roles leaders should play and how leaders should build teams.

There are some principles to make cooperative learning work, such as criteria for success, positive interdependence, and individual accountability. Moureen has taken these into account when she was designing the course.

"In the cooperative learning workshop held in Baptist University this year, Professor David Johnson inspired me that we must explain the criteria for success to the students."

Cooperative learning requires criterion-based evaluation. Criteria for success are a fixed set of standards and judging the achievement of each student against these standards. In her subject, the students have explicitly been conveyed these criteria, such as participation, group cohesiveness, initiative, etc.

Positive interdependence is the heart of cooperative learning. Students must believe that they are in a "sink or swim together" learning situation. From the team building activities, her students have a lot of opportunities to learn and experience the meaning and importance of positive interdependence, for example, the trust-fall exercise.

In cooperative groups, everyone has to do his or her fair share of the work, and this is regarded as individual accountability. It results in individuals knowing that they cannot loaf or get a free ride. To assure and control the applying of individual accountability, she requires her students to submit their progress reports after every lesson, in which each student must evaluate the contributions of their group members one another.

Student feedback has been generally good. Compared with lectures, the students found the cooperative learning approach more interesting and attractive. They were more willing to share their views with each other, and they learned the subject with more fun. "There has been ten groups in my class; nine of which are obviously improving in terms of their interpersonal relationship and learning effectiveness," Moureen said.



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able to attain reasonably high scores, say, 75 marks, then all of them earn an additional 10 marks. This enhances their interdependence.

is much more active and vigorous.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

“ With the assistance of some of my friends in the Chinese University, I liaised with other three secondary schools to apply for an educational fund for cooperative learning.”

Simon Ho has been teaching in economics in a secondary school for years. He came across the concepts of cooperative learning in a local workshop some years ago. Later he came across a book for teachers or students in education from China that vitalized his interest in this approach. Last year, he organized four secondary schools and successfully applied for the educational fund. Then, he attended a workshop held by Professor David Johnson in the University of Minnesota during the summer where he consolidated much on his knowledge of cooperative learning.

“I think the most important function of cooperative learning is to organize students effectively and make the group operate better,”
Simon said.

He considers the performance evaluation system essential for maintaining the basic elements of cooperative learning. For example, he has adopted contingent rewards to reinforce positive interdependence and individual accountability.

If all the group members are

COOPERATIVE LEARNING WORKSHOP IN BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

A three-day workshop led by Professor David Johnson was held in Baptist University on 4-7, January 2000.

There were 21 participants from different universities, namely, Paulina Wan, Alfred Wong, Moureen Tang, Dean Tjosvold, Victor Lau, Sandy Chau, Winnie Wong, James Pounder, Helen Kwok, Peng-Zhu Zhang, Wing-Lok Yeung, Kokin Lam, Joe Hong, Kan-Liang Wang, Teresa Siu, Carlo To, Laurence Tin, Jane Moy, Vivienne Luk, Ann Marie Francesco, Marie Cheung, Wing-Kam Lung, and Cordelia Ho.



He may also select one of the group members to represent the group to take the quiz. This assures their individual accountability and prevents them from trying to get a free ride.

Simon is very satisfied with the outcomes of using cooperative learning. He said that about one-third of his students earn contingent rewards. On the whole, the learning atmosphere in classes