

Method: Cooperative Learning in Mass Lecture Halls

The five critical elements necessary for cooperative learning to be successful, as written by Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994), are “(1) positive interdependence... (2) individual and group accountability... (3) promotive interaction... (4) teaching students some necessary interpersonal and small group skills... (and 5) group processing” (p. 9-11). The in-class collaborative projects that I design are a break from lecture; however, the students work individually and then together in order to understand relevant content—and then *I lead the lecture* as a discussion regarding the students’ collaborative content analysis. Indeed, my design of cooperative learning meets the former standards; however, it is a short and intense cooperative learning exercise. Cooperative learning engaged among students under the former conditions results in increased effort, better relationships, and greater psychological health (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1994).

The point of the workshops is to: (1) have the student silently analyze the one page summary; then (2), collaborate with 1-4 other students in order to create a best summary; then (3), appoint a spokesperson to inform the class of the “best sentence”; and finally (4), for the teacher to *lecture* via students’ explanations of professional literature and to expound the scholarly content in conjunction with the textbook content. As a result, students critically analyze one professional article, collaborate to create a best answer; and then collectively the students learn about 9-10 different scholarly articles, each demonstrating different data about the same topic (e.g., public opinion, presidency).

The basic design of the cooperative learning projects is (e.g., public opinion workshop):

Part I: Distribute handouts. Students read the one page summary and then write down answers to the questions: (1) in two-three sentences, what is the author’s main point—

contribution to public opinion research? (2) What is the best quote from your reading? Why? (10 Minutes).

Part II: Find your group members—others in class who also read and wrote on same summary. Do a 1 minute interview: name, major, place on campus to go eat... Group talk about your answers (5 Minutes). Group discussion about “Why this research is meaningful” and create an integrated “Best Answer” for questions 1 and 2 (5 Minutes).

Part III: Group Names announced and each group spokesperson addresses the center of the room and explains: (1) the main point of the summary and (2) the best quote. After the student speaks, the teacher connects the student’s comments with the textbook, with wider theories and explanations of public opinion. The teacher *wisely leads the lecture / debate* from one group to the next in order to *lecture effectively* (20-25 Minutes).¹

For example, the “public opinion” workshop that I created covers 9 different scholarly works—as 9 different one page handouts. With 54 students in class, the first 9 students received different one page summaries to analyze; and on and on. Thus, I had 9 groups of six people, so I split the groups and so that there were 18 groups of 3 people. A teacher of 250 students would simply organize the numbered groups by sectioning off rows (i.e. first four rows—find your group members with the same scholarly title).

I provide downloadable example on the Judiciary, Presidency, Public Opinion, and Political Parties at: <http://politicalpipeline.wordpress.com/teaching>

¹ See: <http://politicalpipeline.wordpress.com/teaching>