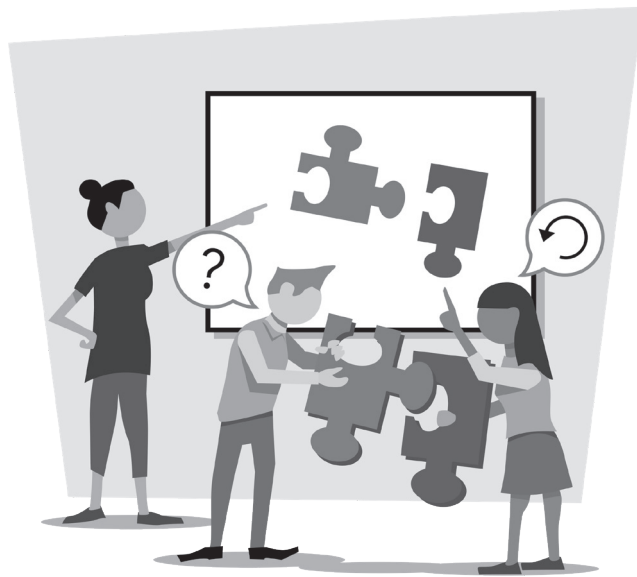


Jakob Werdelin and Drew Howard

The Beginner's Guide to
**Cooperative
Learning**



Make your learners your main teaching resource



Crown House Publishing Limited
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Published by
Crown House Publishing
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK
www.crownhouse.co.uk
and
Crown House Publishing Company LLC
PO Box 2223, Williston, VT 05495, USA
www.crownhousepublishing.com

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First published 2021.

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British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue entry for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978-178583585-8
Mobi ISBN 978-178583589-6
ePub ISBN 978-178583590-2
ePDF ISBN 978-178583591-9

LCCN 2021945969

Printed and bound in the UK by
Charlesworth Press, Wakefield, West Yorkshire

To the people with whom we have worked.

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Introduction: Cooperative Learning and the COVID Comeback

When we began drafting this book in 2017, our intention was simply to share with colleagues the inner workings of Cooperative Learning at Stalham Academy in Norfolk, and its wider multi-academy trust (MAT), over a number of years. Looking back, 2017 seems a lifetime and a world away. In general terms, of course, Cooperative Learning is always relevant because it is a cost-effective way to promote academic performance and social skills. More specifically to the 2020s, Cooperative Learning is relevant because it effortlessly operationalises key theories underpinning the 2019 Ofsted Inspection Framework. These and many other arguments for the adoption of Cooperative Learning are expounded throughout this book. However, COVID-19 has added entirely new levels of importance, and some degree of urgency, which deserves to be touched on separately.

It is reasonable to say that, in spite of a monumental effort by schools, the pandemic has had a devastating effect on all areas of education. In primary schools alone, the attainment gap has widened by up to 52% during school closures, according to *Schools Week*.¹ Unsurprisingly, learners with lower socio-economic status take the brunt of this blow, and within that group those with language barriers, mental health problems or prior learning difficulties will be affected even more. We can also add to this factors such as race and gender. Beyond this learning gap proper, it is expected that inequality in 'socio-emotional skills' will also increase.² Crucially, the pandemic has widened the already stubborn

1 J. Dicken, The Cost of Lockdown: Attainment Gap Widens By Up to 52% for Primary Pupils, *Schools Week* (24 July 2020). Available at: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-cost-of-lockdown-attainment-gap-widens-by-up-to-52-for-primary-pupils>.

2 G. Di Pietro, F. Biagi, P. Costa, Z. Karpiński and J. Mazza, *The Likely Impact of COVID-19 on Education: Reflections Based on the Existing Literature and Recent International Datasets* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020), p. 29. Available at: <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC121071/jrc121071.pdf>.

language gap, with Ofsted warning that children hit hardest are 'regressing in basic skills and learning', including language, communication and oral fluency.³

The upshot is that, a decade after the world's last COVID-19 patient has been discharged, the education sector will still be catching up on the general learning loss, as well as an unprecedented gap in social, emotional, cognitive and language skills for a vastly enlarged group of vulnerable learners. If you are like most teaching professionals, tackling all these challenges coherently with a patchwork of individual interventions seems more than overwhelming. But, what if you could find one relatively simple, comprehensive approach – a framework of sorts? You would need an approach that simultaneously re-forms institutional cohesion, tackles emotional and social lockdown fallout *and* increases the volume of learning per lesson to close the gaps. And, this intervention of yours must do these three things for *every* learner regardless of level, race or socio-economic background and must work across *any* subject and age group; it must use your current schemes of work; and it must fit with or enhance any other approaches, while adding as little as humanly possible to teacher workload.

It is our hope that Cooperative Learning can meet all of these requirements.

What's in this book?

Whether you approach this book as a teacher or a leader, this *Beginner's Guide to Cooperative Learning* is a step-by-step manual to get simple, powerful Cooperative Learning up and running in your class or school. The objective is to make the learners responsible for their learning, leaving you free to concentrate on the teaching. Based on best practice developed over many years, it provides precise, detailed instructions to make you an expert practitioner. However, for all its precision, Cooperative Learning is far from prescriptive. Rather, it lets you get on, but get on better, in a way that you are comfortable with, using your own trusted materials and systems. Best of all, it lets you experiment and develop your own practice. Step into the driver's seat and let the kids do the pedalling.

This book does not claim to cover all of the many varying interpretations of the term 'cooperative learning'. Instead, the principles and practices you see here have been applied successfully by ourselves on a wide range of learners in the UK (and through Jakob's

3 Ofsted, Children Hardest Hit By COVID-19 Pandemic Are Regressing in Basic Skills and Learning (10 November 2020) [press release]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-children-hardest-hit-by-covid-19-pandemic-are-regressing-in-basic-skills-and-learning>.

international work in other educational cultures). Although the age groups range from children in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) explaining simple shapes, right up to university lecturers elaborating on how to best teach the content of their PhD,⁴ the examples and transcripts in this book will focus on Key Stages 1 to 4.

We want this book to work for you. Within reasonable limits, the chapters are designed as stand-alone units, directly accessible as required by your individual needs and interests. However, the chapters marked with asterisks (*) are must-reads for everyone. Aside from the definitions in Chapter 1 and the detailed instructions for roll-out in Chapter 2 (which should be followed stringently!), you may approach this book in a non-linear fashion. Some readers might prioritise context and theory, so may skip forward to the chapters on the relationship between Cooperative Learning and direct instruction or social construction (Chapters 3 and 4). Others might prefer to try out a couple of activities and then review these chapters in light of their experiences.

Of course, as you begin to deploy Cooperative Learning in your classroom, you can dip in and out as the situation demands. Need to get your teaching assistant (TA) on board? Find TAs in Chapter 5 on roles and responsibilities. Need to see the big picture? Learn how one school successfully developed a MAT approach in Chapter 6. Dennis the Menace giving you trouble? You will find him and his kin dealt with in Chapter 8. With this non-linearity in mind, we hope you will forgive some repetition of key points. Its purpose is to allow random snacking.

The following chapter outline is there to help you make these choices. Remember that the chapters marked with asterisks (*) are must-reads for everyone.

Introduction

This chapter provides a bit of context and gives you the reasons why you may wish to read and apply this book, from the perspective of the bigger scheme of things. We suggest reading the first section as a minimum.

⁴ Find out more in this short video interview with Professor Lee Marsden at the University of East Anglia: J. Werdelin, Tertiary in the 21st Century: A Cooperative Learning Toolkit (2015). Available at: <https://videos.werdelin.co.uk/#collection/13>.

Chapter 1: What is Cooperative Learning? (And Especially What It Isn't)*

A better title might have been 'What *isn't* Cooperative Learning?' Here, we unpick some critical misconceptions and demonstrate how Cooperative Learning negates the politically charged conflict between progressive vs. traditional, student-led vs. teacher-led and so on. We then refer to some research evidence and introduce and define the Cooperative Learning Interaction Pattern (CLIP), which is undoubtedly the most important concept in this book. We also discover how Cooperative Learning relates to some of the research findings that underpin the 2019 Inspection Framework to enlighten your conversation with inspectors.

The Cooperative Learning Interaction Pattern (CLIP) is undoubtedly the most important concept in this book.

Chapter 2: Catch1Partner – an Exemplary CLIP*

This chapter is the heart of this volume. It is a step-by-step guide to introducing and growing the versatile CLIP dubbed Catch1Partner in your school. Here, you will learn how to facilitate social skills, language acquisition (general and subject specific), revision, metacognition, formative assessment, self-assessment, peer feedback and a whole lot of other things – with relatively little work on your part. Our intention is that by fully mastering the principles of staging and running Catch1Partner in its many forms, you will be ready to apply these skills to any other CLIP (there are more in Appendix A).

Chapter 3: Cooperative Learning and Direct Instruction*

The individual Cooperative Learning activities are in themselves incredibly powerful, but using them at the appropriate time and place in a lesson really takes them to another level. Based on Barak Rosenshine's famous paper 'Principles of Instruction',⁵ this section puts Cooperative Learning into the context of a best practice lesson and drives home Cooperative Learning's dependence on direct instruction.

5 B. Rosenshine, Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know, *American Educator* (spring 2012), 12–19, 39. Available at: <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Rosenshine.pdf>.

Chapter 4: Cooperative Learning and Social Construction

This is a look at the mechanics behind the slick surface of well-executed Cooperative Learning. While not as central to your practical success, it does form a couplet of a sort with the previous chapter on direct instruction.

Chapter 5: The Roles and Responsibilities of Cooperative Learning: What's in It for You and Everyone Else?

What's in it for you? Because Cooperative Learning looks at human beings as the key resource in any situation, everyone has a unique part to play in a Cooperative Learning school, from the head teacher to the TA and right down to the youngest learners.

Chapter 6: The Story of Stalham: A Reflection on Implementation Across a School

Get inspired by finding out how Cooperative Learning played an integral part in moving a disintegrating, headless, freshly converted junior school from special measures to the nation's top 500 league, with happy teachers, children and parents.

Chapter 7: Teaching Materials: The Stuff You Don't Need to Buy

In this chapter you will learn how materials can be used weekly (or even daily) across classes for years on end to achieve different and specific outcomes. Note that revision, which is important enough in its own right, is only one of the more obvious benefits of reusing materials systematically. You will also learn how to adapt materials to tie your school community together in time as well as space. In the long run, time spent planning and resourcing can, and often does, reduce workload over time.

Chapter 8: The Pitfalls of Cooperative Learning – Things That Go 'Bump' in the Classroom*

The problem with turning children into your main classroom resource is that they are human beings, with all that it entails. What if someone just does not want to take part? What if they are teaching each other the wrong thing? This chapter comprises answers to common questions from teachers and school leaders who have trained with us.

Chapter 9: Cooperative Learning and Other Strategies

Many teachers use the same basic structure across many of their lessons. Whether you have your own unique style or follow the guidance from works such as Shaun Allison and Andy Tharby's *Making Every Lesson Count* series⁶ or Tom Sherrington's *Rosenshine's Principles in Action*,⁷ Cooperative Learning can slot straight in with what you are doing and strengthen each stage of your lesson. From SOLO taxonomy to Talk for Writing, Cooperative Learning will support, and in most cases enhance, any system in which you have previously invested.

Appendices

Once you have fully mastered Catch1Partner, by following the step-by-step instructions in Chapter 2, you and your learners should have the foundational know-how and experience to start deploying other CLIPs in your class and school, which you will find in Appendix A. We have included some ready-to-photocopy sample teaching materials, tools and guidelines in Appendix B.⁸ Appendix C is a checklist of things to watch out for, and Appendix D provides some simple tools for peer and self-reflection (both of these resources are also photocopyable, for your convenience). The quick reference guide in Appendix E unpicks the acronyms used in this book (CLIP? PIES?) and provides a reminder of the four basic rules for staging an activity. Finally, we have included a full activity transcript which may inspire your use of the CLIP Word-Round in Appendix F.

Why read this book?

There are few certainties in life. However, education does seem to have three constants that affect every school from small rural primaries through to huge London colleges: policies change with each new government, money is short and classrooms are full of learners of all shapes and sizes. Based on these constants alone, it makes sense to make your learners your main teaching resource. They are unlikely to disappear anytime soon, they cost

6 See, for example, S. Allison and A. Tharby, *Making Every Lesson Count: Six Principles to Support Great Teaching and Learning* (Carmarthen: Crown House Publishing, 2015). To date, there are nine titles in this series.

7 T. Sherrington, *Rosenshine's Principles in Action* (Woodbridge: John Catt Educational, 2019).

8 These are also available to print directly from the internet in a public folder at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1aqqQGiV7VLEMF2NoivlwtUdk1Xe-0uu2> (<https://bit.ly/TheBeginnersGuideDownloads>).

you nothing, most of them are delivered to your door every morning and their brains are endlessly flexible.

This book is about doing just that: turning each and every learner, regardless of their religious, ethnic or socio-economic background, into a resource – to themselves, to you, to their peers, to their school, to their families, to their local community and to the world at large.

Cooperative Learning sets a stage that can help each learner become a competent and empathic individual, capable of making sound choices and with the natural potential to develop throughout life. And, of crucial importance for your institution, this successful life will be launched with good SATs and GCSE grades. This book is a practical guide on how to achieve this in your classroom and your school, based on our own experiences in various settings.

Why pick some when you can just have it all?

For all intents and purposes, the vision of the current school system is restricted to test scores, with a functional human being as a wholly accidental – and rare – by-product. In the largest (pre-COVID) health survey ever conducted on UK university students, one third reported having a ‘serious personal, emotional, behavioural or mental health problem for which they felt they needed professional help’. More than 80% of these students reported that their symptoms began in secondary school.⁹ In direct opposition to this, for most colleagues we have met, the vision is for happy and well-rounded human beings, with tests as a necessary evil which often just get in the way.

From the perspective of the traditional caricature, the political right wants authoritarian schools to produce quality assured machine parts which will serve to strengthen the national economy, whereas those on the political left are accused of wanting hippie heads to nurture happy and incompetent drifters whose sole ambition is ‘exploring themselves’ while cashing in on Universal Credit. (Although in these blurred times, no one quite knows their left from their right.)

9 Rethink, Largest Survey of Its Kind Reveals Extent of University Students’ Struggles with Thoughts of Self-Harm, Loneliness and Anxiety (5 March 2019). Available at: <https://www.rethink.org/news-and-stories/news/2019/mar/largest-survey-of-its-kind-reveals-extent-of-university-students-struggles-with-thoughts-of-self-harm-loneliness-and-anxiety>.

Cooperative Learning negates the entire progressive vs. traditional dichotomy. In a Cooperative Learning classroom, the teacher is an authority who is responsible for teaching, setting the next learning path, structuring schemata and matching the learning to the needs of the learners. The learners, on the other hand, are responsible for learning – yielding confident, competent human beings with good test results in all phases. In the true spirit of collaboration, why not let everyone win, left and right?

Why it's not business as usual

The classic perception of businesses wanting docile factory fodder is no longer quite fair. Most of today's corporations hold the belief that schools should teach the most relevant and universally applicable skills, which reflect the demands of our complex, competitive, knowledge-based, technology-driven economy and society. This is why organisations such as Partnership for 21st Century Skills include brand names such as the Ford Motor Company, Microsoft and Lego.¹⁰

These sought-after skills include civic literacy, social justice awareness, ethical literacy, global and multicultural literacy and humanitarianism (to name but a few), and their promotion is mainly motivated by a belief that they will have significant consequences for our economy, democracy and society.¹¹ Try tick-box testing that.

Employers have also called for the need to ensure that students develop effective communication skills, and the ability to talk for persuasive purposes has been linked to effective participation in civic and social life.

Bronwen Maxwell, Cathy Burnett, John Reidy, Ben Willis and Sean Demack,
*Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit*¹²

10 C. Fadel, *21st Century Skills: How Can You Prepare Students for the New Global Economy?* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2008). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/site/educeri21st/40756908.pdf>. See also <https://www.battelleforkids.org/networks/p21>.

11 Glossary of Education Reform, 21st Century Skills (25 August 2016). Available at: <https://www.edglossary.org/21st-century-skills>.

12 B. Maxwell, C. Burnett, J. Reidy, B. Willis and S. Demack, *Oracy Curriculum, Culture and Assessment Toolkit: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary* (London: Education Endowment Foundation, 2015), p. 7. Available at: http://shura.shu.ac.uk/10828/1/EEF%20Oracy%20School_21.pdf.

We assume that no one in business or government wants the national economy to fail or for youngsters to be jobless and disenfranchised. However, due to its age and size, the education system carries an incredible momentum and therefore the hope is always that (since it is impractical to tear it down and rebuild it from scratch) it can be somehow gradually upgraded. After all, what sane career politician would want to demolish an old factory and replace it with a garden if its fruits would be harvested outside of his tenure and may not even be quantifiable in any sense of the word?

Cooperative Learning presents a bottom-up solution to all the systemic issues that governments have neither the motive nor the means to address. It allows an educational paradigm shift to take place, one school at a time, without rocking the institutional super-tanker. Is the purpose of education to get learners to pass a test? Is it to serve business and fuel the economy? Is it for young people to lead rich and fulfilling lives? With Cooperative Learning there is no need to choose.

A step-by-step guide to getting simple, powerful Cooperative Learning up and running – both in your classroom and as part of a wider approach to empowering the entire school community.

The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit describes collaborative learning as an approach which 'involves pupils working together on activities or learning tasks' and in such a way that enables 'everyone to participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned'. In the context of this book, Cooperative Learning relates to a number of such activities – from simple memorising to more complex analysis and debating – which are designed to boost learners' interdependence, participation and interaction.

Drawing upon both research-informed theory and real-world examples, this guide sets out how Cooperative Learning relates to a range of other aspects of teaching – including assessment, metacognition and Rosenshine's Principles – and how it can help create an inclusive environment in which every pupil is able to fulfil their learning potential.

Suitable for teachers and leaders in both primary and secondary school settings.

An excellent guide to Cooperative Learning that provides teachers with a coherent philosophy and a detailed structure for bringing it to life in the classroom.

*Tom Sherrington, author of *The Learning Rainforest* and *Teaching WalkThrus**

The Beginner's Guide to Cooperative Learning will change education for the better. It sets out a compelling case for how it can benefit not just all students, but all teaching staff too. A must-buy.

Haili Hughes, Head of Education, IRIS Connect, Senior Lecturer, University of Sunderland, author and speaker

Essential reading for those wishing to gain a real insight into one of the reasons why so many of the Northern European countries have such impressive education systems.

Stephen Chapman, Managing Director, Dragonfly Training Ltd

If you want great results and resilient capable young people who can hold their own in a conversation, take responsibility and engage intelligently with other people, this is the book for you.

Catherine Brentnall, researcher and curriculum development consultant

A useful addition to any novice or experienced teacher's CPD bookshelf.

Hywel Roberts, teacher, speaker, writer and humorist

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ISBN-13: 978-178583585-8



9 781785 835858

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