

Teaching the History of Leisure Using the Cooperative Learning Model

Melanie S. Mitchell
Appalachian State University

Kevin W. Riley
Appalachian State University

The Cooperative Learning model is a set of instructional strategies in which students work collaboratively to reach common goals and objectives (Slavin, 1977). This model is based on the union of four major educational theories:

1. *Motivational Theory*: Students foster unity and mutual support among the members of their team and success is achieved when all the group members contribute.
2. *Cognitive Theory*: Students receive developmentally appropriate instruction.
3. *Social Learning Theory*: Students are engaged in the learning process through peer teaching.
4. *Behavioral Theory*: Students must meet specific performance criteria that are identified by the instructor (Metzler, 2000).

Over the past three decades, the Cooperative Learning model has been thoroughly researched and has been shown to be a viable tool to be used during the teaching/learning process (Slavin, 1995). Many cooperative learning instructional strategies have been developed and used in classrooms ranging from elementary to college level.

In order to successfully implement cooperative learning strategies, the instructor's role shifts from that of teacher to facilitator. The instructor facilitates group learning by building a continuous sense of teamwork and monitoring the students to ensure that all students are learning the desired material.

The students must become active and responsible for their own learning. During the process they become both learner and teacher by explaining, compromising, negotiating, and motivating each other (Metzler, 2000).

Typically, an introductory course in recreation and leisure studies provides an examination of the leisure pursuits of various cultures. This activity addresses where leisure originated and how leisure pursuits of other cultures influence today's leisure participation.

The initial implementation of the cooperative learning strategy involves the instructor planning for the lesson by making several pre-instructional decisions. These

decisions include determining the cultures to be examined, the resources used (articles, textbooks, and online sources), how to group the students for the learning experience, and the criteria for developing presentation materials. These decisions are instrumental in the successful implementation of the cooperative learning experience. The instructor has an integral teaching role during the introductory phase of the lesson. The instructor provides an overview of the lesson.

Students are assigned to “expert groups” to learn about the leisure pursuits of different cultures and historical perspectives (i.e., the Greek culture). As the students become the experts about the assigned culture, the instructor ensures that the students are engaged in their own learning by participating in the group discussion and developing the instructional materials.

For example, one expert group might focus on various aspects of Greek life: celebrations and weddings; the arts (music and drama); costumes; and the physical activities pursued. As the group becomes the expert in Greek culture, they follow a set of guidelines to prepare a presentation to teach the other expert groups (see Figure 1). This phase of the cooperative learning experience incorporates peer teaching that is grounded in the social learning theories in which the students cooperate and learn from one another.

During the majority of the instructional phase, the instructor is the facilitator ensuring that the students are engaged and cooperating with one another. As each group presents its material, the instructor assesses the presentation using a rubric or checklist based on the established criteria. After the group presentations, the instructor assumes control of the instruction, providing closure to the lesson. During the closure phase of the lesson, the instructor summarizes the material presented by each group.

Implementing cooperative learning strategies similar to the one described will provide a learning environment in which the students are active participants in their own learning. Not only are the learners engaged, but they also promote higher-order thinking and decision-making skills. Active learners tend to take ownership of the information and be more responsible for their own learning.

Implementation of the Cooperative Learning model into the learning environment is an effective teaching tool, but may be time consuming as compared to other instructional models (e.g., direct instruction). For example, utilizing the direct instructional model to focus on the cultures may take one or two days; whereas, the cooperative learning model may take two weeks to implement. But the benefits of cooperative learning may outweigh the length of the instructional unit.

<i>Presentation Criteria Example</i>
Create a PowerPoint Slideshow that includes specific information about the culture your group is investigating. (Greeks, Romans, Mayans, or Native Americans)
The information should focus on the following:
weddings/celebrations
music/art/drama
costumes/attire
physical activities

Figure 1. Presentation Criteria

Locate and wear the appropriate material that represents the clothing and attire that would be worn by members of the culture your group is investigating.

Select appropriate music from that culture to use as background music during the presentation to emphasize the important facts about the leisure pursuits of that culture

References

Metzler, M.W. (2000). *Instructional Models for Physical Education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Slavin, R.E. (1977). Classroom reward structure: An Analytic and Practical Review. *Review of Educational Research*. 47, 633-650.

Slavin, R.E. (1995). *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.