



A Brief Guide for Monitoring the Implementation of Cooperative Learning at Haramaya University

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1. Introduction

Assuring the relevance of higher education and enhancing its quality is a priority issue of Haramaya University. Students, curricula, staff and resources are the key input factors that determine the quality of education at the university. Students' engagements in teaching-learning, research and community services have paramount effects on the quality of higher education provision of the university.

Learning is a social process that occurs through interpersonal interaction within a cooperative context. Employers place greater importance today on the soft behavioral skills than the hard cognitive skills. There is a concern today that many graduates are not well prepared for today's workplace. Thus, students are encouraged to take part in group learning activities that are aimed at encouraging analysis, synthesis, reflection and thoughtful evaluation of content. Therefore, involving students in formal cooperative learning groups or teams will help to increase students' engagement in academic activities, reduce students' attrition rate, enhance student progress and retention, and improve graduate outcomes.

Cooperative Learning (CL) or learning in groups is a student-centered and instructor-facilitated education approach involving a small group of students that are working in teams, are engaged in active learning and study together to maximize their own and each other's learning to accomplish common academic and social goals.

The CL is an important teaching-learning activity for university students. The CL is a student team learning in which students interact with each other in the same group to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter in order to solve a problem, complete a learning task or achieve a goal.

Members of the CL group tend to learn through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of other's ideas. Information that is discussed will be retained in long term memory. For instance, it is known that students who work cooperatively on math computational problems will earn significantly higher scores than those who work alone. In addition, students who demonstrate lower levels of achievement will improve when they are working in diverse groups. CL will help member students to attain higher level thinking and preserve information for longer times than students working individually.

The CL is a proven technique for engaging students, promoting deep learning and developing the soft skills that are demanded by twenty-first century employers. Engaging students in formal CL helps to reduce class absenteeism and increase course coverage, improves students' progress and their retention, and assures and enhances quality of higher education. To be successful, however, teachers must plan carefully, construct tasks effectively and actively monitor the process.

In summary, if the CL is implemented successfully it will improve student engagement in learning and provide students with sustainable, transferable skills that prepare them well for transition into the workplace and life beyond study. For institutions this represents a significant return on investment.

2. Purpose of CL

Engagement in CL helps students to have:

- Basic and advanced knowledge of the subject matter under study
- Intellectual skills
- Practical and professional skills
- Analytical, data interpretation and problem solving skills
- Communication, presentation and information technology skills
- Interpersonal and teamwork skills, and
- Self-management and professional development skills
- Better retention and academic progress in the university

3. Benefits of Cooperative Learning (CL)

1. Increased student responsibility for their learning and more opportunities for feedback
2. More active involvement in learning and increased motivation to learn
3. Maximizing of student learning of highly complex or difficult material
4. Improved problem solving and conflict management skills
5. Enhancement of individual abilities to use knowledge
6. Transfer of learning from one situation to another and development of higher level thinking skills
7. Improved intercultural understanding and acknowledgement of individual differences
8. Improved academic achievement, deeper learning, improved interpersonal skills and long term retentions
9. Preparation for the modern participative workforce

4. Building Blocks of CL

CL is more than just working in groups. In order to construct a lesson in cooperative learning model, the following 5 principles and elements should be included. That means, the following five building blocks are fundamental to successful cooperative learning:

1. **Promotive Interaction:** Promotive (positive) face-to-face interaction means that groups meet regularly to discuss ideas and to establish group relationships. Although some of the group work may be parceled out and done individually, some must be done interactively, with group members providing one another with feedback, challenging reasoning and conclusions, and perhaps most importantly, teaching, helping, supporting, applauding and encouraging one another in order to reach the group's goals. This prevents the development of "pseudo groups" where group members work as individuals and combine their efforts only at the end of the task. There is an established correlation between interaction and learning, so a well-designed CL activity must provide many opportunities for the students to discuss, to question, to support one another and therefore to learn.

2. **Positive Interdependence:** In successful CL the students must feel that they need each other in order to complete the group's tasks, that is, they "sink or swim together." We need to design group tasks so that students can see that their success depends on interaction and mutual support within the group. Each student in the same group has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort. Group members depend and rely on one another to achieve the common academic goal. Each group member's effort is required and indispensable for group success.

3. **Individual Accountability:** Group members must always feel that they are individually accountable for helping to complete a task and for mastering material. They must understand that a "free-riding" situation (depending on others to do most of the work) will not lead to group success. Tasks need to incorporate both group and individual accountability. All students in a group must be accountable for contributing their own share of the work and mastering all of the material to be learned to the group's success.

4. **Interpersonal and Collaborative Skills:** Before beginning group work it is important that the students have practiced skills for working together effectively as well as for ensuring that group maintenance is carried out efficiently. The students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, intercultural and conflict-management skills. They need to learn and practice ways of giving constructive feedback and to use probing questions as students do not automatically know how to do this.

5. **Group Processing:** Groups need specific times and processes to reflect on how well they are achieving their goals and whether they are maintaining effective working relationships among their members. This needs to be carried out throughout the life of the group, not just at the end, and needs to be practiced by the students to ensure that they develop the skill to do it effectively. Group members set group goals, describe what member actions are helpful or not, periodically assess what they are doing well as a team, and identify changes they will make to function more effectively in the future. The instructors (mentors) need to monitor the groups and give regular feedback on progress.

5. CL Theory

| Theoretical perspective | Assumptions |
|---|--|
| 1. Motivational (behavioral) perspectives | If students are rewarded for cooperation or if their achievement is in part contingent upon the achievement of fellow group members, they will help each other in order to maximize their own outcome. |
| 2. Social cohesion perspectives | If students value peers and are dependent on each other they will be likely to help one another to reach their goals. |
| 3. Developmental perspectives | Interaction with peers is likely to result in cognitive disequilibrium. Inadequate reasoning will be exposed, and higher-quality understandings will emerge. |
| 4. Cognitive elaboration perspectives | Retention of knowledge in memory needs cognitive restructuring. Explaining material to someone else is an effective means of elaborating. |

6. CL Group Size

The CL groups with fewer than three members can lead to less diversity, less variety of ideas and skills, and the possibility of one dominant member.

The CL groups with over five members can also lead to likelihood of “free-riders”, the possibility that some members will be passive and will be left out of interactions and difficulty for students in managing logistics.

Normally, three to five members is generally considered ideal as this number allows for a range of perspectives and skills and means that it is easier to ensure participation and contribution by all members. There is less chance of group fragmentation with this number and the group can still function smoothly even if members are occasionally absent. Management of meeting times and venues is easier than in larger groups. Odd numbers are preferable as this makes decision making easier.

7. The Role of Teacher (Mentor) in CL

1. Creating a safe cooperative environment where all students are respected and where opinions can be expressed and explored honestly
2. Structuring effective groups
3. Preparing students to work cooperatively – social skills, trust and team building exercises, group processing
4. Helping students understand and define the task
5. Ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills and resources to carry out the task
6. Observing student interaction, checking progress and intervening to help groups or students having difficulty
7. Intervening to support the use of collaborative skills and ensure participation from all group members
8. Guiding group processing to ensure effectiveness
9. Providing immediate feedback during the life of the group
10. Tying ideas together and integrating the learning outcomes from the task into future learning
11. Evaluating and giving feedback on how well students completed the task

8. Major Activities and Performance Indicators

The followings are required major activities to be carried out by concerned academic units (academic program coordinator, Heads of Departments of Schools, CL Coordinators, Deans, Directors and Chief Executive Director) in relation to implementations of CL.

| Major Activities | Performance Indicators or Reference Points |
|--|---|
| 1. Forming CL groups and making functional | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Midsized CL groups- Diversity of CL groups- Flexible CL group norms |
| 2. Training teachers on CL techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Trained teachers on CL techniques |
| 3. Training students on CL techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Trained students on CL techniques |
| 4. Establishing group goals and assignment of learning tasks | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Set common academic vocational and goals (benefits)- Set intended learning objectives for each course |
| 5. Managing the CL groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reduced anxiety- Built trust- Open communication- Group interactions |
| 6. Monitoring and supporting the CL activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Number of CL groups monitored in due time- Number of CL group contacts in due time- Extent of instructors' mentorship of CL groups per week |
| 7. Assessing CL | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Level of participation- Level of commitment- Communication skills- Performance- Academic achievements |

9. Monitoring and Evaluation of CL

The implementations of CL groups in each college and institute must be monitored and evaluated by each course instructor, academic program coordinators, heads of departments or schools, associate deans, CL and Quality Assurance coordinators, deans, scientific director and chief executive directors.

The followings are minimum requirements and standards for implementation of CL

- Each CL group members must meet every day and study at least for an hour
- Every course instructors should meet each CL group once a week for an hour and provide the necessary mentorship (providing learning tasks, setting intended learning objectives, and assessing the performance of the CL groups and providing feedback)
- Academic Program Coordinators and Heads of Departments or Schools should meet and discuss with CL group leaders once every week.
- Associate Deans, CL and Quality Assurance Coordinators, Deans, Scientific Director and Chief Executive Directors should meet and discuss with the CL group leaders once every two weeks.
- Academic Assessment and Quality Assurance Directorate and Vice President for Academic Affairs should meet and discuss with the CL group leaders once every month.

10. Reporting Performance of CL

- The CL and Quality Assurance Coordinators compile information related the progress of CL
- The CL and Quality Assurance Coordinators along with the QA experts should assess the performance of each CL group in the college or institute
- The CL and Quality Assurance Coordinators assess the effects of CL

11. Appendices

1. CL Group Contact Form

Haramaya University
Cooperative Learning
Group Contact Form

1. **CL Group Number:** _____
2. **College /Institute :** _____
3. **Department /Program:** _____
4. **Semester:** _____; **Academic Year:** _____
5. **CL Group Leader Name:** _____
6. **CL Group Leader Mobile Number:** _____
7. **Cooperative Group Members:**

| Name | Mobile Number |
|------------|---------------|
| i. _____ | _____ |
| ii. _____ | _____ |
| iii. _____ | _____ |
| iv. _____ | _____ |
| v. _____ | _____ |
| vi. _____ | _____ |
| vii. _____ | _____ |

8. **Non-cooperative Group Members**

| Name | Mobile Number |
|------------|---------------|
| i. _____ | _____ |
| ii. _____ | _____ |
| iii. _____ | _____ |
| iv. _____ | _____ |

9. **Number of CL Group Meetings conducted per day and per week**

- a. **Per Day:** _____
- b. **Per Week:** _____

2. CL Group Processing Form

Haramaya University
Cooperative Learning
Group Processing Form

1. **Date:** _____
2. **CL Group Number:** _____
3. **CL Group Leader Name:** _____
4. **CL Group Leader Mobile Number:** _____
5. **College /Institute :** _____ **Department /Program:** _____
6. **Semester:** _____ **Academic Year:** _____
7. **CL Group Goals:**
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
 - iv. _____
 - v. _____
8. **Group Discussions:**
 - a. **Strengths and positive experiences:**

 - b. **Weakness and negative experiences:**

 - c. **Members' attitudes towards working in groups**

3. CL Performance Assessment Form

Haramaya University
Cooperative Learning
CL Performance Assessment Form

1. CL Group Number: _____
2. Student being assessed (name): _____
3. Assessed by mentor teacher (name): _____

9. Rating:

| <u>Scores</u> | <u>Meaning</u> |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 5 | Outstanding / Excellent |
| 4 | Very Good |
| 3 | Good |
| 2 | Unsatisfactory |
| 1 | Very Poor |

| Areas of Performance | Rating | Justification for rating |
|--|--------|--------------------------|
| Participation: Attends meetings on time and contributes positively to the discussions. Takes part in group activities | | |
| Commitment: Willingly gives time and effort to make the work a success. Performs team roles effectively. | | |
| Communication: Communicates ideas effectively. Listens to others and responds appropriately. Makes constructive comments. Maintains regular communication with group members. | | |
| Performance: Completes all agreed tasks on time to the required standard. Helps others when appropriate | | |
| Overall | | |