

Cooperative Processing: A Structure for Selecting a Book to Study

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Essential Question(s)

- Which book would we like to read and discuss?
- How can we use cooperative processing to decide on a title?

Summary

This activity is part of a series of professional learning activities that can be used to support a group book study. Over the course of this activity, participants collaborate in small groups and use the cooperative processing strategy to select the title they will be reading for the book study. They will acquire an understanding of the cooperative processing strategy and the ways in which it promotes shared leadership and efficient communication.

Learning Goals

- Acquire an understanding of the collaborative processing method.
- Determine the book that will be read for an upcoming book study.
- Use a process that enables effective communication.

Attachments

- Presentation Slides - Cooperative Processing.pptx

Materials

- Pens/pencils
- Computers with Internet access (optional)
- Notebook paper

10 minutes

Introduction

Use the attached **presentation slides;** display **slide 2**. Begin by explaining to book study participants that they will be modeling a process that provides an opportunity for shared leadership. Let them know that this process is a structure known as “cooperative processing.” Explain that in this particular instance, they will be using cooperative processing to decide on the book that the group will be reading and discussing.

Display **slide 3**. Discuss with participants that through cooperative processing, they can communicate efficiently while gathering input and practicing shared leadership. Take a moment to describe each of the four steps of cooperative processing listed on the slide: **in-turn response, clarification, discussion, and decision.**

Display **slide 4**. Explain to participants that for the “in-turn response” activity, they will be divided into small groups of 6-8. Once they are in their small groups, they will have to designate a leader and recorder. To do this, they can decide on two prompts (e.g., “Who has the earliest birthday in the year?” or “Who is the tallest?” etc.), and they will use one prompt to choose the leader and the other prompt to choose the recorder.

Take a moment to explain the responsibilities of both roles. Emphasize that the most difficult task of the leader is to be rigorous and make sure that group members follow the process (e.g., taking turns speaking and ensuring that only one person talks at a time). The recorder writes down the titles brainstormed by each member of their group in a designated Google doc and reports them to the larger book study group once it reconvenes.

45 minutes

Activity

Facilitator's Note: In-turn Response

"In-turn response" is the first phase of cooperative processing, but it is only necessary if the book study group has not already prepared a list of book titles. If your group already has a list to work with, skip ahead to "clarification."

To begin the activity, display **slides 5** and **6** to go over the essential questions and activity objectives.

Display **slide 7** and explain that you will be exploring the first step in the cooperative processing structure: "**in-turn response**." Review each of the attributes of that step that are listed. Let everyone know that the object of this activity is to assemble a list of book titles to be considered for the book study. Assure participants that there are no right or wrong answers.

After making sure that no one has any questions, ask leaders to begin the process. Each person within the group will take turns mentioning a book that they think would be worth reading for the book study, and they will briefly explain why they think it would be a good book to study. As they do so, the recorder will write down each suggested title in the Google Doc. Once everyone has made their initial suggestions, the process will repeat. If a group member finds that they have run out of ideas or someone has listed a title they were already considering, they may pass. Everyone else in the group will then have an opportunity to respond. The entire group will have four minutes to complete this process.

Display **slide 8** and explain that you will be exploring the second step in the cooperative processing structure: "**clarification**." Review each of the attributes of that step that are listed. Let participants know that the goal of this step is to ensure that all the group members understand the subject matter of the books that were suggested during the in-turn response activity.

The in-turn response process will be repeated during clarification, but during this phase, each group member will have a chance to ask another member to explain more about a particular book if they are still wondering why that book would be a good option. If a group member feels that they do not need clarification about any of the books, they may pass. If they do need clarification, they must ask for clarification for only one item at a time from the person who proposed it. They must wait until their next turn before they can ask again. The person in need of clarification will be allowed one more turn. Make sure participants are aware that the goal of this step is to be as efficient as possible, so only one person may speak at a time. The entire group will have four minutes to model this process.

Possible Participant Responses During Clarification

- Group member: "I don't understand why item #3 is on the list. Could you remind me what this book is about?"
- Person who provided the #3 title will answer: "This is a recently published book that introduces educators to new types of technology that can be brought into high school classrooms."
- Now that we have item #3 clarified, no one else can ask for clarification on item #3.

Display **slide 9** and explain that you will be exploring the third step in the cooperative processing structure: "**discussion**." Review each of the attributes of the "Pro" and "Con" discussion methods. Let everyone know that during this process, they will have an opportunity to try to convince others that the book title they have selected is the best option for the book study.

Explain that there are two steps to the discussion process. First, they will speak in favor of one title on the brainstormed list (Pro), and later on, they will speak in favor of the elimination of a title on the list (Con). The in-turn response process is used once again with only one person speaking at a time. Each person has an opportunity to speak on behalf of any one item on the brainstormed list, or they may pass. The "Pro" discussion continues until every member of the group has passed. Then the "Con" discussion takes place and follows the same format. Allot 10 minutes to complete the entire process.

Possible Participant Response During "Pro" Discussion

Group member: "I want to explain why I think item #2 should be chosen for our book study. This book seems like it will do the best job of showing us how different types of new technology may be used in the classroom."

Once both discussions have finished, display **slide 10** and explain that you will be exploring the fourth and final step in the cooperative processing structure: "**decision**." Review each of the listed attributes of this final step in the process.

Display **slide 11** and explain to participants how "weighted voting" is carried out. Weighted voting will be done so that the group can whittle down the existing titles and decide on a title (or 2-3 titles) that they would like to read. Explain that they will be assigning a value to each item, and they can give as many 3s, 2s, and 1s as they want to. Remember that they will be assigning a value to each item independently of the other items on the list. Let participants know that the values are as follows:

- 3 = You really like the item.
- 2 = It is an okay item.
- 1 = You are not really sold on this item.

As you begin the weighted voting process, make sure that participants are aware that everyone must vote. As leaders in each group call out the titles one at a time, instruct participants to hold up the number of fingers that represent the value they are assigning to the title. Have leaders count the votes/values contributed by each group member. The recorder records the values next to each title in the Google Doc. Everyone must vote, including the leader and recorder. After voting on all items on the brainstormed list has concluded, the recorder highlights the top choice. If there is a tied weighted value for any three books, group members will break the tie through a "clear-out" vote, which requires that everyone vote yes or no on each book title.

Each group should have one title at the end of the process that they recommend. This list then becomes the list that the entire group votes on. Group members can repeat the process as they do so. Allot 10 minutes to complete the entire process.

Facilitator's Note: The Decision Process

The structuring of the groups in the book study session determines how the voting process is carried out. If your group is small enough that the entire group can vote on a title during the initial round of weighted voting, your group's top choice selected for the book study. However, if you have several groups (e.g., three groups of eight), each group will do an initial round of weighted voting before bringing their top two or three favorite titles to make a new list. Once these titles have been submitted, the larger group will vote to determine the book that the group will study.

5 minutes

Wrap-up

Display **slide 12** and go over the list of positive attributes of cooperative processing with the entire group. Take a few minutes to ask participants what they thought of each of the steps. Ask them also to consider if there are similarities in the lists that they created. Spend about five minutes wrapping up this activity.

Possible Participant Responses for the Wrap-up Activity

- Why do you think we make everyone vote when making the decision?
  - People cannot complain that they did not make the decision. They may not like the outcome, but the process forces everyone to participate. They cannot say, "but no one asked me about ----."
- Let's summarize Cooperative Process for decision-making and promoting Shared Leadership.
  - This process forces everybody to participate and equalizes the opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process. Even if you feel you have nothing to contribute, you are given the opportunity. You take advantage of it, or you pass.
  - The process provides a focus when working in a group.
  - The process is efficient.
  - The process discourages people from dominating the conversation.

Research Rationale

Research advocates for professional learning initiatives aligning with adult learning principles, such as those proposed by Lawler and King (2000), including creating respectful climates, encouraging active participation, building on experiences, employing collaborative inquiry, focusing on actionable learning, and empowering participants.

Book studies emerge as potent vehicles for professional learning. Stover and Elston (2020) emphasize that extended-duration book studies enable educators to assimilate content, to connect it to their teaching environment, and to foster collaborative learning communities. Insights from Blanton, et al. (2021) and Stover and Elston (2020) coalesce, underscoring how book studies promote a culture of shared experiences, reflection, and collective sense-making. Successful book study experiences are characterized by voluntary participation, diverse material choices, active learning of new strategies, equitable participation within trust-filled groups and extended timeframes.

Resources

- Blanton, B. S., Broemmel, A. D., & Rigell, A. (2020). Speaking volumes: Professional development through book studies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *57*(3), 1014-1044. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831219867327
- Stover, S., & Elston, A. E. An online book study approach to P-12 teachers' professional learning experience. *Adaptive and Responsive Educational Renewal*, 93. https://nnerpartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/nner-journal-2021.pdf
- Lawler, Patricia A. and King, Kathleen P. (2000). "Refocusing faculty development: The view from an adult learning perspective. New Prairie Press. Adult Education Research Conference. https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2187&context=aerc#:~:text=Patricia%20A.%20Lawler%20Widener