

# Cooperative Spelling Groups

Here is a procedure I recommend for using cooperative groups to teach spelling.

First, in order to collect data on individual spelling abilities, teach spelling in a traditional individual setting for three or four weeks. Then form heterogeneous triads including one high-, one average-, and one low-scoring speller. Triads then work together to study spelling for the rest of the year in the following fashion:

*Day 1 – Pretest.* As teams sit together to take the pretest, they reach a consensus on how to spell each word. Teams self-correct their pretests and note any troublesome words.

*-Note:* Students do not write words 10 times each if not spelled correctly.

*Day 2 – Spelling games and activities.* Teams choose from a variety of activities to study the unit words. For example, if teams “jigsaw” the words, they divide word cards for the spelling unit equally among team members. Each student is responsible for studying his or her words and devising a strategy to teach the others how to remember those words.

*-Note:* Any spelling games or activities are appropriate—as long as the students perceive a group goal. Everyone must learn to spell all the words, and everyone must understand that she or he will be held individually accountable on the test. Do not have students unscramble the words or give them word searches.

*Day 3 – Practice test.* Teams spend 5 minutes coaching each other in preparation for the test. Students take the practice test individually. After the test, teams reconvene (without pencils) to compare test papers. Teams tutor teammates who have misspelled words, then celebrate accurate papers.

*-Suggestion:* Give bonus points to team members who received 100% on Day 3 test and give bonus points to peer teach teammates.

*Day 4 – Study or free day.* If all team members within a team have accurate practice tests, that team earns free time. If any team member(s) misspelled a word, the entire team uses this time to tutor the student(s).

*Day 5 – Final test.* Teams spend 5 minutes coaching members who misspelled words on the practice test. These students retake the test individually. After the test, the entire team reconvenes (without pencils) to check test papers and praise each other's work.

Teams in which every member masters his or her required number of words receive a reward. If one team member fails to reach mastery, the team does not earn the reward. This reward system promotes positive interdependence: a feeling of “we’re in this together, sink or swim” (Johnson et al. 1988). The combination of peer pressure and peer support creates an environment where students feel accountable to each other for learning spelling. In this motivated atmosphere, individual spelling scores have always improved. In some cases increasing from 40 percent accuracy to 100 percent accuracy.

Good Luck in 2004-2005!!

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