INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF COOPERATION IN EDUCATION

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Dear Colleagues,

IASCE is pleased to bring you the third and final newsletter for 2006.

When I read an IASCE newsletter, I am often struck by the synergy of the pieces included. This newsletter is no exception. I found the discussion amongst Yael Sharan, Peter Gobel, and T.H. Sim to be truly stimulating as they considered how teachers learn to use cooperative learning and why they tend to make the decisions they do. When Yael and Peter mentioned the need for active reflection, I was excited to be able to refer to the extensive review of Dick Schmuck's recent volume about action research. And Celeste Brody, in her review of four books about pedagogy in higher education, examines issues similar to those raised by Sharan, Gobel, and Sim. When teachers—no matter where they stand in their professional careers and no matter the age of the students with whom they work— begin to implement new ways of teaching and new ways of thinking about learning and professional practice, they need to start simple, they need to implement gradually, and they need to believe that they model professional competence.

In this issue of our newsletter we have reports on three conferences. We are delighted that board member Yael Sharan attended conferences in both Bardolino, Italy and Vilnius, Lithuania. The conference in Lithuania marked the culmination of a three-year project that was both broad and ambitious in its scope. Those interested in systematic planning and implementation of educational change may find the Lithuanian story both fascinating and relevant; we hope interested readers will contact Yael or Egle Pranckuniene for further details. Yael's description of the conference in Italy reminds us that the study and implementation of cooperative learning is ongoing and important. Notice that, once again, we hear about the need for gradual skill development. My heart was warmed by the metaphor of the cooperative learning classroom as a symphony and by the call for the transposition of enthusiasm into meaningful and deep implementation.

The third conference highlighted in our newsletter took place in Nagoya, Japan under the auspices of the JASCE (Japanese Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education). The conference theme "Cooperation as a Process and Its Own Goal," says so much and the description of the events suggests that the planning committee thought quite carefully about content, collaborative processes, and community building.

And now, to our announcements! We are delighted to announce a co-sponsored conference in Torino, Italy. The International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE), the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), and the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) have agreed to co-sponsor a conference in January, 2008. The conference theme is: Cooperative Learning in Multicultural Societies: A Critical Reflection. The dates are January 19-22, 2008. Watch our website and future newsletters for details and a Call for Proposals.

We are also delighted to announce that we anticipate celebrating the 30th birthday of IASCE in Japan with the JASCE. Discussions are underway with JASCE and we expect to announce dates and themes soon. We are excited about both of these projects and especially thrilled that our collaborations with these organizations will allow us to hear many voices and meet many educators who share an understanding of the value of cooperation in education.

Please remember that our conferences, newsletters, and website are supported by your membership dues. Please accept our heartfelt thanks and remember to share your newsletter with colleagues and check the website at www.iasce.net for conference details.

Cooperatively yours,

Lynda

Lynda Baloche
Co-president IASCE

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From the Bookshelf

This issue contains three book reviews. The first two reviews are written by IASCE co-president, Celeste Brody (celeste.brody@gmail.com). Celeste first reviews the second edition of a book on Action Research by IASCE's inaugural president, Richard Schmuck. In her next review, Celeste looks at four books on the use of CL at the tertiary level. The third review considers a book that is relevant to people who use CL with second language students.

1. **Schmuck, R. A. (2006). *Practical Action Research for Change* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.**

   The author of the second edition of *Practical Action Research* has had an important role in the development of the field of cooperative learning. Richard Schmuck was the first president of the IASCE when it was founded in 1979 in Israel. His seminal work, with his wife, Patricia A. Schmuck, *Group Processes in the Classroom,* is now in its 8th edition (2001) and has been translated into five languages. In *Practical Action Research,* Dick Schmuck brings together his experiences in teaching and supervising hundreds of doctoral dissertations in action research, group dynamics and organization development. This second edition is a useful book for classroom teachers and cooperative action research teams at all levels because it invites practitioners to conduct their own action research in the classroom or with colleagues in a school. Through the detailed case studies integrated throughout the book, the reader meets teachers, many of whom are applying new learning about cooperative learning from their graduate coursework. They are experiencing a shift from believing their students to be passive subjects in a classroom to becoming collaborators with the teacher in achieving their learning. The teachers are learning how to get inside the students' experience and recruit students to become partners in their own learning.

   Schmuck creates models, steps and exercises so that practitioners can fully integrate the processes of reflective practice in the service of continuous professional improvement. Schmuck recognizes the frustrations of getting started, and he focuses the first two chapters on the importance of practitioners getting in touch with the concerns, hopes and prior experiences which led to their desire to use new practices. Schmuck then builds on the three phases of action research (initiation, detection, judgment -- and the role of research during each phase) by drawing heavily on cases to point out the subtle difference between proactive action research and responsive action research. He also offers several fine examples of research done from the traditional research paradigm and research done from the action research paradigm. While both paradigms are valuable, "In action research, you study your own situation to improve the quality of processes and results within it. By using research methods with your students on your practices, you are doing

what will improve your practice continuously (p. 19)." Again, "traditional research is often carried out by disinterested (objective) scientists...often without immediate payoffs for research subjects," while "in action research, you remove the traditional gap between scientists and research subject because you are both a 'scientist' and a 'subject' of research (p. 21)." Schmuck has no intention of pitting the two traditions against one another. Instead, his goal is to assist educators at all levels to learn processes that will encourage them to become astute observers of their students and their organizations, and have the tools to make changes as needed and desired. This is the same goal that those who have trained others in the use of cooperative learning have emphasized: teachers need to be skilled in observing students, gathering information and assessment data on student performance to improve their teaching and ultimately, student learning.

Schmuck devotes one chapter to "Group Dynamics of Cooperative Action Research," again integrating reflective practices such as critical friendship and probing conversations, and highlighting tips for successful group work. Chapter 8 describes the different types of cooperative action research in schools, districts, and communities. Such research offers the opportunity for colleagues to assume leadership on a larger scale. I appreciated Chapter 9 which discusses the democratic philosophy underlining educational action research. Schmuck selects 15 prominent authors in the history of action research and explains how the history of action research in education has developed into the teacher-research "movement" (p. xiv).

This book is particularly important to those who work with teachers to implement cooperative learning and believe that the best way to support long term change in schools is to empower teachers and administrators to research their own questions about teaching. Trainers in the field of cooperative learning know how important contextual knowledge is for teachers who want to implement this complex and often challenging pedagogy for students' academic and social development. Action research is a process to empower teachers. Schmuck's new edition combines methods that are consistent with cooperative learning, the study of cooperative learning, and the values and ends of democratic organizations. This is a resource that will invite reflection, inquiry and continuous improvement in classrooms and schools.

Schmuck, R. A., & Schmuck, P. A. (2001). *Group Processes in the Classroom* (8th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.

2. Higher Education Faculty and Cooperative Learning: A Review of Books for College Faculty.

Barkley, E. G., Cross, K. P., & Major, C. J. (1998). *Collaborative Learning Techniques. A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Smith, K. A. (1998). *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co.

Millis, B. J., & Cottell, P. G., Jr. (1998). *Cooperative Learning for Higher Education*. Westport, CT: American Council on Education, Oryx Press.

Weimer, M. (2002). *Learner-Centered Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Recently I retired as the instructional dean of a U.S. community college where faculty took pride in learning and growing as teachers. Previously, in my professional career, I had the privilege of working with elementary, middle and secondary teachers who were preparing for a career in teaching and with in-service teachers who were extending their learning through advanced degrees. I specialized in pedagogy that supports student-centered learning environments and particularly cooperative learning. But I learned in my role as a dean that facilitating college and university teachers' classroom teaching was a particularly delicate art. Just as Millis and Cottrell assert in their book, *Cooperative Learning for Higher Education Faculty*, I found it true that college faculty take ideas about new approaches to teaching best from their department or program colleagues. I also found the faculty at my community college quite pragmatic; they wanted to see quickly that a strategy spoke to their question or concern. If what I proposed worked, they would eagerly come back for more. I was also privileged to observe many of the faculty through our peer team processes and the standard formative evaluations. Through these, I learned better how to address their concerns and speak language that would invite their innovation.

If something smacked of the K-12 way of doing things, or came primarily from the lexicon of K-12, college faculty had a difficult time buying into it. Even though the working conditions of most community college faculty are more like a high school, the significance of the subject discipline meant workshops on small group learning needed to be organized from the point of view of their concerns and their teaching contexts with as many examples from different disciplines as were faculty attending the workshops (I usually began a workshop with KWLs—"What do you know; What are you wondering about; and concluded with: What have you learned"). As I developed my workshops and seminars, I kept my eyes on resources that: 1) provided me with good theory and examples of what were effective ways to introduce cooperative and collaborative learning, and 2) were helpful resources on topics that faculty were interested in pursuing.

With an upcoming opportunity to work intensively with university faculty in Thailand, I have been reviewing old standbys and a few newer texts to refresh my thinking. I will point out some of the strengths, weaknesses and uses of the four selected books from my experiences as a faculty developer and share how I have used them or would use them to facilitate college teachers learning to successfully implement cooperative and collaborative approaches to teaching.

Johnson, Johnson & Smith's workbook, *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*, was first published in 1991, but I didn't discover it until well after I had started working with college faculty. By then, I had concluded that one of the easiest ways to begin with college teachers' interests and concerns was to build a template or an approach that encouraged them to increase student participation during lectures. Most faculty work from the lecture model, and by integrating the use of informal pairs or groups strategically throughout the typical 50 or 90 minute class period, faculty could begin to experience ways to increase student participation, observe students' thinking through verbal exchanges, learn how to cultivate conceptual learning more strategically

and regularly, and practice the art of adjusting their instruction (e.g., need to re-teach, model or explain or question further) based on the feedback of pairs. Faculty also need to learn how to build in clear advance organizers, motivators and opportunities for students to summarize and master content. What a pleasure to find that the Johnsons and Karl Smith had already given structure to this model! I have found this one of the best ways to introduce cooperative learning to college faculty: using informal pairs or small groups at the beginning, middle and conclusion of a lecture. This model has enough elasticity and power to promote considerable basic learning for teachers new to small group work.

The second critical form of groupwork that the Johnsons and Smith articulate is the use of base groups. The idea of creating base groups that provide the function of managing groups, offer emotional and social support, and assist with academic content throughout a term or a year is another useful way for faculty to begin cooperative learning. I found that learning about base groups improves faculty understanding of the importance of classroom climate, positive peer relationships and how to cultivate student responsibility and student development in learning, particularly in cohort programs such as nursing, emergency medical services, and forestry. I was particularly inspired observing Lynda Baloche, co-president of IASCE, while she gave a workshop to tertiary faculty in Singapore. She, too, chose base groups as the way to introduce these university teachers and graduate students to cooperative learning. While faculty can continue teaching their content the way they have been doing, devoting 10-15 minutes per class period or week to base groups provides greater accountability and efficiency for both teachers and students. And, they provide wonderful laboratories for faculty to learn *the basics of groupwork: assigning roles, creating specific timebound tasks, and teaching students individual accountability and positive interdependence*. I have found that some use of extrinsic rewards, at least at the beginning of a term, can assist students in realizing that the effort they put into working as a base group or team can make a difference in their learning, both social and academic.

Although *Active Learning* follows the Johnsons' tradition of introducing the whys of cooperative learning, the five basic elements of a cooperative lesson, and some templates and outlines of social processes to coach for, the book's tone and examples are sometimes problematic for college faculty. For example, while most books on cooperative learning build the case for the importance of using cooperative or collaborative learning with the particular kind of student, *Active Learning* seems to send mixed messages by including parables from Hans Christian Anderson, stories about children in the third grade, and judgments such as, "Not wanting to appear unfit or stupid, faculty members conform to the current consensus about instruction and are afraid to challenge the collective judgment of how best to teach" (p. 1:8). This book might benefit from additional streamlined templates, outlines, and examples from higher education. Teachers who try to learn with the help of this book may find they need the help of a more knowledgeable colleague or faculty developer.

Barbara Millis and Philip Cottell have many years experience providing professional development and consultation to college and university faculties. Their book, *Cooperative*

Learning for Higher Education Faculty, was part of the American Council on Education's series on higher education. Interestingly, Millis & Cottell begin by briefly contrasting the two different but related traditions--cooperative and collaborative learning--but come down in favor of the benefits of following the lessons learned from cooperative learning. They frequently quote Jim Cooper of the California Community College system, one of the early adopters and promoters of cooperative learning in higher education, who stressed that college teachers need to be mindful of the importance of "Structure, structure, structure!" in planning and executing cooperative learning. Millis and Cottell organize their book around the topics: Classroom Management, Structuring the Cooperative Classroom, Assessing the Cooperative Classroom and Supporting Cooperative Efforts. They draw on what has come to be called, "Beginning Structures," such as Think-Pair-Share, Talking Chips, Roundtable, and Three-Step Interview, but proceed to develop structures for problem solving in teams as well as Reciprocal Teaching. They make no apologies for drawing heavily from the K-12 experience and research, but their tone and examples are intended for college faculty. Due to its density, Millis and Cottell's book may be best used as a resource for a facilitator who can selectively provide sections for faculty.

Their chapters on assessing cooperative learning are among the best. They build on the work in T.A. Angelo and K.P. Cross's 1993 edition of *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (Cross is one of the coauthors of *Collaborative Learning Techniques* discussed below). Although I am not reviewing this handbook, it is also a powerful resource for assisting teachers to consider how important it is to know what students know as quickly and frequently as possible. Being a good observer and gatherer of formative information is one of the hallmarks of a teacher who is effective in using cooperative learning. Many of the strategies in this book--referred to as CAT--such as one-minute papers, feedback forms and dialogue journals, work very well in cooperative pairs and assess pair and small groupwork.

The next book among the four reviewed here, *Collaborative Learning Techniques,* by Elizabeth F. Barkley, K. Patricia Cross and Claire H. Major, is inviting, clear and useful. Published in 2002, this book makes the case for the collaborative learning tradition as popularized in higher education by James Bruffee (1993). The authors draw from the cooperative learning literature, notably the Johnsons' tradition, to support the characteristics of effective learning groups. They emphasize, however, the collaborative learning approach because it "assumes that knowledge is socially produced by consensus among knowledgeable peers" (p. 6), a goal more in keeping with college and university levels.

The focus on collaborative learning, the structuring of the task and the teacher's role as a facilitator, appeals to faculty in higher education because it encourages them to maintain focus on content while considering their present and future relationships with college and university students as colleagues. My own experience, however, is that many college teachers aren't ready to assume this constructivist relationship to knowledge and knowing and that they must learn to trust methods that cultivate student independence and interdependence and to see learners as people who are growing in their ability to take responsibility for their learning and that of others. Nevertheless, this book is oriented,

like Millis and Cottell's, toward collaborative learning techniques, which they coin as CoLTS: techniques for discussion, reciprocal teaching, and problem solving, using graphic information organizers and focusing on writing. In looking down the list of techniques for conducting effective class discussions, the strategies will look familiar to many CL practitioners as they are called by the familiar names ascribed to simple "structures" in cooperative learning: Think-Pair-Share, Round Robin, Buzz Groups, Talking Chips and Three-Step Interview.

Another book, Ellen Weimer's 2002 *Learner-Centered Teaching*, published by Jossey-Bass, caught my eye during a literature review. Because the buzz word in college-level innovation these days is working toward achieving "student-centered learning" environments, I was intrigued by Weimer's conscious differentiation of the concept "learner-centered" teaching from "student-centered learning." At my own college, faculty have noticed a trend not so unique to them: more students are coming to college, or returning to college, as consumers. They "demand" certain kinds of teaching, and more students feel they are entitled to certain grades and privileges. Within a culture and environment that has prided itself on an exceptional degree of respect for students and sensitivity to their needs, interests and circumstances, this shift in student attitude has been disconcerting. Of course, the positive side is that students are, indeed, becoming less than passive recipients of whatever kind of teaching that is thrown at them. The negative aspect of this is that more and more teacher time has been spent with demanding students who have poor social skills and a facility to disrupt any learning environment for their own needs or ends. Many teachers feel caught between the values of mutual respect and regard and the need to exercise traditional power, authority and more sanctions and rules. Weimer takes on these issues within the larger paradigm of learning: "What the student is learning, how the student is learning, the conditions under which the student is learning, whether the student is retaining and applying the learning, and how the current learning positions the student for future learning" (p. xvi). Learner-centered learning emphasizes the "ultimate responsibility students have for learning," and the book features, in a no-nonsense, conversational and practical way, the issues of power, disciplinary content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility for learning, and the purposes and processes of evaluation. Weimer speaks directly to the developmental needs of college students and draws heavily on her own experience as a college psychology teacher and recently an associate professor of teaching and learning at Berks-Leigh Valley College of the Pennsylvania State University.

I recommend the Weimer book because it provides a larger rationale and context for cooperative and collaborative learning, as well as many practical stories and examples of such practice at work. It keeps in mind the greater purposes of college and university education which are to prepare students to be problem solvers, independent learners, team members and critical thinkers who can achieve more potential than they now typically do within many college settings.

Taken together, these four books are useful for those in higher education who are working in teaching development centers or programs. College and university faculty should also

review a related article on this topic by Caroline Clements and Daniel Johnson of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, "Encouraging Collaborative Learning in the Classroom: What Universities Can Do." In the March 2006 IASCE newsletter, Clements and Johnson outline a practical process for implementing collaborative learning training in higher education. In keeping with the authors of the books discussed above, they highlight the importance of teachers starting small, learning and implementing together in small cohorts with the ability to receive one-on-one consultation, and the value of nesting trainings and workshops on data that speak to different academic traditions and fields. These practical and time honored ways of supporting faculty, particularly those who are attempting to transform their classrooms and learning environments as active and engaging places, are gaining more attention and momentum in higher education.

Bruffee, K. A. (1993). *Collaborative Learning. Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

3. Deller, S., & Rinvolucri, M. (2002). *Using the Mother Tongue: Making the Most of Learner's Language*. Addlestone, Surrey: Delta Publishing.

Among second language (L2) educators, such as those who teach English in Paraguay or Chinese in Poland, one of the key concerns about group activities is that when away from the teacher's immediate supervision, students will speak to their groupmates in their first language (mother tongue), instead of their second language, the language they are studying. Different teachers take different approaches to students' use of their first language (L1). These approaches range from attempting to ban the students' mother tongue to the approach advocated by the book discussed here, subtitled "Making the most of the learner's language."

The book's two authors, veteran ESL teachers and teacher educators, offer almost a hundred different activities for utilizing the students' L1 in L2 learning, not as the main ways that students learn, but as a supplement to L2 exposure and use. The book's activities are subdivided in various ways:

1. Whether the class is mono-lingual (they all speak the same L1) or multi-lingual
2. How well the teacher speaks the students' L1(s)
3. The students' proficiency in the L2
4. Whether the activity deals with
    a. setting parameters for L1 use
    b. enhancing cooperation in groups
    c. encouraging student feedback
    d. contrasting the grammar of the L1 and L2
    e. teaching vocabulary
    f. increasing the comprehensibility of L1 input (what students hear and read)
    g. facilitating student output (speaking and writing)
    h. utilizing translation

Activities dealing with enhancing cooperation in groups may be of particular interest to readers of this newsletter. The seven activities described include getting-to-know-you activities, one for discussing learning preferences and another on ground rules for interaction.

There are many issues to consider when deciding how to balance L1 and L2 use and how teachers can attempt to achieve what they believe to be the optimal balance. On one hand, the goal of L2 instruction has always been to add a new language to students' repertoires, not to subtract the old one. On the other hand, in many contexts, students' very limited L2 use outside the classroom, and even inside the classroom, means that progress toward proficiency can be slow or nil. Furthermore, switching to the L1 by students and teachers can too often be the easy way out, when, with a bit of patience, effort and skill, the L2 might be possible. This book is welcome as it adds ideas for teachers and students to consider.

How to Subscribe to the *CL List*

Want to dialogue with others about your use of CL? Not receiving enough email (hahaha)? Then, you might wish to join the CL List, an internet discussion group about cooperative learning. Well-known CL experts as well as "just folks" belong.

Currently, the CL List isn't a busy group, but when discussions do take place, they are often enlightening. Furthermore, you can receive updates on CL related events.

To subscribe, send an email to CL_List-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. You should very quickly receive an email reply with simple instructions. If that fails, just send an email to george@vegetarian-society.org, and he'll do the necessary. Talk to you soon!

IASCE Forum - Why Do Teachers Begin at the Top?

Editor's note: Peter Gobel's article in the last issue of this newsletter, "Dealing with Learning Style Conflicts in the Cooperative Learning Classroom," generated a lively discussion between Peter, an experienced university teacher and teacher educator in Japan, IASCE Board member Yael Sharan, and T.H. Sim, a primary school teacher in Singapore with less than two years experience. To join the discussion, please write to me at gmjacobs@pacific.net.sg or to any of the three authors: pgobel@cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp, yaelshar@zahav.net.il, zonghao@singnet.com.sg. What topic should we suggest for the next issue of the IASCE Forum?

Yael Sharan - The Johnsons write it, Kagan prescribes it, even Cohen and Sharan & Sharan advise it, so . . . what song would Cole Porter write about the fact that so many teachers, contrary to recommendations, begin with complex CL strategies, such as Jigsaw or Group Investigation, before their students are ready?

This issue arose with the reemergence of CL on the educational scene in the 70s. While trainers and researchers were enthusiastically disseminating their models, they didn't always take care to emphasize that actually they, too, set the stage by giving students time to practice the necessary skills. Soon one handbook after another addressed the need to help teachers structure their lessons so that cooperative academic and social skills are mastered "safely," step by step. The major CL methods were ranked from simple to complex, with parallel listings of how concomitantly the teachers' role changes from a very structured one to one more resembling a guide.

These sources and many others are still available, so why is it that many teachers jump right in with Jigsaw or some other way of organizing cooperative learning that requires skillful communicative and social behaviors? Recently the heightened awareness of cultural differences has added urgency to the problem. Putting aside the written sources that counsel teachers to progress slowly and periodically check their students' mastery of the required skills, life itself should be example enough. Children learn to walk slowly, step by step; athletes are careful to warm up before strenuous action; budding violinists and singers spend hours on "easy pieces". . . .

And don't teachers themselves learn cooperative learning gradually? No seasoned workshop leader would throw teachers into a multilevel investigation task without first having them experience Roundtable or Numbered Heads and simple CL tasks.

Well then, if the cause does not lie in responsible authors of CL books or in experienced workshop leaders, or even in the visible course of human development, where does it lie?

While writing this, I realized that I set myself the traditional trap for teachers and walked right into it. My dilemma is based on the assumption that because there are written guidelines for gradual, systematic, and structured introduction of CL skills and behaviors, and many people have talked about them with teachers, teachers would therefore learn them. If in the beginning there was the word, then surely the rest would follow easily.

Long ago, the educator John Holt was inspired by watching a toddler build a tower of blocks on his own. Every time it fell, the child tried again, till he succeeded. From Chinese sages to Piaget and beyond, it's an accepted truth that to learn something one has to experience it. Knowledge is what people construct out of elements of information, feeling and experience.

So it must be with teachers. Hearing or reading <u>about</u> the need to build collaborative skills, <u>about</u> the need to structure safe and successful activities, even experiencing these in workshops with peers, does not guarantee that's the way it will be done in the classroom. I suppose teachers must watch the blocks fall several times before they stop to think why they fall and how best they can build a tower that stays up. In addition to hearing and reading about how to create cooperative classrooms, teachers must habitually reflect on their practice. When they stop to ask a few pertinent questions of themselves and of their students to find out what went wrong, as did

Peter Gobel (2006), then they can modify their teaching accordingly. Hopefully the lesson will "stick" when they learn it themselves, through their own experiences and reflections.

Peter Gobel - I think that perhaps teachers take too much for granted. The interface between real life and the classroom is a tenuous one at best. Look at all of the other skills that we feel students should inherently have at their disposal because they are available to them in their L1 (first language, i.e., mother tongue). For example, depending on the community, personal and social skills can go out the window the moment students enter a classroom. I see this all the time with exam-oriented students in Japan. Although they frequently collaborate with their family and friends during their free time, academic test-oriented study has become an individual effort (and in fact, collaboration is often frowned upon, as has been mentioned frequently in the literature). Or, look at reading skills and strategies, used every day in the L1, which do not seem to be readily available (or readily accepted as viable strategies) to the students in the L2. Teachers have to carefully lead students to the point where they can employ various skills in the L2, and this can best be done in a step-by-step, and recursive manner.

Ah. . . . I think you (Yael) hit one nail on the head with your use of the word "methods" in the second paragraph. Is it possible that, like many methods that have been advocated over the years, many teachers and teacher trainers blindly follow a procedure, without fully investigating what the underlying principles are? This, I think may be one point. In other words, teachers look at CL and think, "This is great; I can get my students talking right away," without carefully considering how difficult it can be to get students to cooperate in a second language in a traditional learning environment like the classroom. Having had lots of experience with various 'methods' and teachers who taught in these methods, it all starts to sound a little familiar.

You know, reading and writing teachers often emphasize the need for the entire class--including the teacher--to engage in ten minutes of silent reading or journal writing every class. Having the teacher as a reading or writing role model has a positive effect on student performance. Although I believe this, we might go one step further by saying that having the teacher actively experience activities and reflect on them is one of the most important parts of teaching. It is this active reflection, often found in action research, which can be missing from many teachers' repertoires. Of course, many teachers are overworked as it is, but time spent analyzing, questioning, and reflecting on classroom practice and the student responses to classroom tasks never goes unrewarded.

Many teachers I meet in Japan have an aversion to research, feeling that it is far removed from their classroom and that Monday morning lesson. Although I understand their attitude to some degree, I don't feel it is a healthy one. Research is discovery and reflection, and the best place for this to begin is in one's own backyard, so to speak. Many interesting action research projects have started with classroom problems to be solved, and these have led the investigators to modify their practices and outlooks in such a way that everyone benefited. What's better than that?

Yael Sharan – On the other hand, teachers can learn to spend a few minutes reflecting on their practice even if they're not engaged in any kind of research, especially if research is threatening in some way. Reflection in

action should be a habitual part of the teacher's craft.

T.H. Sim - Learning in Singapore has always been associated with assessment. From the tender age of four till we are in the workforce, almost everything we learn is assessed. As teachers, even during our in-service training, we cannot escape rigorous assessment. The traditional focus on end-product assessment is deep-rooted and, in most schools, is still the main form of assessment. This assessment can have quite an impact on staff appraisal.

Assessment of CL use is no exception. To do well on assessments of a teacher's use of CL is no easy feat; one has to showcase the ability to handle CL strategies, and, sometimes, teachers have only a few opportunities or only one opportunity to demonstrate their competence. As such, when preparing to be evaluated on CL use, teachers may have a tendency to jump into the difficult strategies.

The goal of obtaining a positive evaluation may not be the only reason that teachers start at the top. Two insights from psychology should also be taken into consideration. One is the Yerkes-Dodson Law of Arousal (1908). This law states that people find moderately difficult tasks to be more stimulating than easier ones. Then, there is Covington's (1998) Self-worth Theory, which suggests that people tend to avoid taking up tasks that might imply low ability or incompetence. Thus, educators who jump the gun and use complex CL strategies soon after they begin with CL may well be following their psychological instincts.

A final thought on this issue of why teachers start at the top has to do with the intended learning outcomes when teachers begin to explore the use of CL. Often, training focuses on exposing teachers to a repertoire of techniques and their implementation. Thus, teachers may imagine themselves to have achieved a mastery of CL based on knowledge of techniques. My feeling is that this is a mistake, because knowledge of CL principles and general principles of education is more important than knowledge of techniques. In the same vein, when we start CL in our classrooms, we should examine our underlying intentions for doing so. In this way, we can maximize the benefits of CL as well as impart to students the principles of collaboration.

In conclusion, I would like to share that I was able to start CL with the simpler techniques because of my CL trainer, as well as my school's approach in evaluating in-service learning. Progression was a key focus in their assessment. This provided me space to explore strategies which allowed students to succeed at cooperation and appreciate the benefits of CL. In addition to CL being taught based on principles, rather than a set of protocols, there was also time for my colleagues and I, as a community of teachers learning CL, to do joint reflection on CL and to fine-tune strategies to suit the students and the targeted learning outcomes.

This reflection helped me in two main ways. First, I learnt that CL is not about acquiring techniques with big names; it is about discovering how we can organize learning to take advantage of cooperation. Second, CL is not something that can be done alone, it is a journey of a party of people sharing and reflecting on its use, implementation and improvisations. Thus, the implementation of CL should not be a journey of one. To teach cooperation, one must start with cooperation.

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Gobel, P. (2006). Dealing with learning style conflicts in the cooperative learning classroom. *IASCE Newsletter, 25*(2), 2-6.

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Writing for This Newsletter

There are so many things happening world-wide related to cooperative learning! Help others find out about them by writing articles or short news items for inclusion in this newsletter, and by submitting abstracts of published work for inclusion in the From the Journals section of the newsletter. Short pieces (1000 words or less) are preferred. The newsletter appears three times a year. Please email submissions or questions about them to the editor of the IASCE Newsletter, George Jacobs, at george@vegetarian-society.org. Put "IASCE Newsletter" on the Subject line of the email, please. Thank you for your submissions.

JASCE Holds Third General Conference

On August 5-6, 2006, JASCE (Japan Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education) successfully held its 3rd general conference. Under the theme "Cooperation as a Learning Process and Its Own Goal," about 150 participants gathered at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan.

On the afternoon of the 5th, the JASCE general meeting was held, with about 30 members in attendance (JASCE now has over 120 members). Following the meeting, the conference's keynote speech was given by Prof. Manabu Sato (Tokyo University). He addressed the importance and promising future of cooperative learning by describing two examples of successful implementation of a collaborative learning community approach that he has participated in over the past ten years or so. Prof. Sato encouraged the audience to strive to build a new era of cooperation in education in Japan.

After the keynote session, three forums (roundtables) and two paper sessions took place. In the forum sessions, the three topics were all related to higher education. In each forum, 20 to 40 participants enjoyed listening to the presentation and exchanging their ideas.

In the paper sessions, six papers on a variety of topics were presented. Topics included cooperative learning with special needs students, the effect of cooperative learning in high school reading classes, career education in elementary school, and readiness for cooperative learning in university English courses.

At an evening party on the first day of the JASCE conference, with about 50 participants in attendance, two important pieces of news were announced. One, under the leadership of Prof. Katsuyoshi Suzuki, JASCE's 4th conference will be held at Tokoha Gakuen University in Shizuoka, Japan in 2007. Two, JASCE is going to prepare to invite IASCE to hold its 30th anniversary conference in Japan. Toward that goal, English sessions are planned at the 2007 conference.

On the second day of the JASCE conference, four workshops were offered:
1) Basics of Cooperative Learning
2) Learning through Experience Based on a Laboratory Method Approach
3) Cooperative Learning Basics for English classes
4) Fostering Spontaneous Learning through Cooperative Learning.

The workshops were well received, inspiring some participants to become IASCE members.

Two European Conferences Show CL's Progress

Yael Sharan, yaelshar@zahav.net.il

1. Report on a conference in Bardolino, Italy

For three days in the beginning of September, 2006, while tourists were strolling along Lake Garda, eating gelato and enjoying the view, 400 Italian educators met at a conference in Bardolino, on the eastern shore of the lake, to discuss cooperative learning in a multicultural society. The conference was jointly convened by the city of Bardolino and the Department of Intercultural Studies at the University of Verona, chaired by Prof. Agostino Portera .

The major promoter of CL in this part of Italy is Prof. Mario Comoglio of the Salesian University in Rome. He has helped a generation of teachers and researchers who are well versed in CL, and has joined forces with Prof. Portera to examine the effects of CL on various aspects of the intercultural classroom. The main thrust of the conference was the impact CL has on students' social skills and on conflict management in the classroom, at all levels.

Each of the three days of the conference was organized in an intriguing way. The first session was a plenary, with lectures on theory, projects and methods. During the second session, all the participants spread out in several Jigsaw teams, which focused on various aspects of cooperative social skills. After lunch there were reports on projects, followed by workshops on implementation of CL in a variety of content areas. On the final day, several schools exhibited their projects.

At the final session, Prof. Portera reiterated the advantages of CL in the intercultural classroom. Prof. Comoglio emphasized the need to "transpose our enthusiasm for CL into precise implementation . . . meaningful and deep." He reminded teachers that CL required a "long haul" and that they need to help students build their CL skills gradually. Both speakers look towards CL as a way to build a cohesive community of learners in classrooms and in schools. Throughout the conference, several speakers referred to CL as a philosophy of life, and to the CL classroom as a "symphony."

This was the first of a planned series of annual conferences on the connection between CL and the intercultural classroom. Prof. Comoglio and Prof. Portera will keep us informed of developments. Several participants in the conference promised to write up their school experiences for the IASCE newsletter.

2. Report on a conference in Vilnius, Lithuania, to mark the end of a three-year nationwide School Improvement Project (SIP).

For two days in September the Lithuanian Ministry of Education hosted a conference that brought together all the regional and foreign consultants involved in this remarkable project. Since the country's independence 15 years ago, Lithuania has valued education as a primary tool for forging its identity and sees CL as an integral part of this effort. They are struggling with the effects of globalization and membership in the EU, and are looking for the best way to balance foreign influences on their educational system with local needs.

The components of the project included formulation of educational policy and assessment, advised by Prof. Noel McGinn and Dr. Haiyan Hua of Harvard; school improvement, advised by Dr. Linda E. Lee of Manitoba, Canada; and CL, advised by Dr Pasi Sahlberg and myself. At the first session, speakers focused on how the project laid the foundation for promising future developments in Lithuanian education and the ensuing challenges. The foreign consultants opened the second session with short presentations about "How schools should prepare for the 21st century," after which the audience took part in a discussion on the topic. All agreed that CL would continue to play an integral part in future developments.

On the second day, the consultants were divided into pairs. Prof. McGinn and I went to the Vilnius Pedagogical University to address the faculty and later met with teacher candidates to discuss educational policy and CL.

Everyone involved in the project was impressed by how enthused, committed and dedicated the Lithuanian educators were to its success. For more information please contact Egle Pranckuniene at egle@osf.lt.

Hopefully, we will hear more details about projects and challenges from the Italians, the Lithuanians and others, at our next international conference.

IASCE Executive Board of Directors

The IASCE, established in 1979, is the only international, non-profit organization for educators who research and practice cooperative learning in order to promote student academic improvement and democratic social processes.

What does IASCE do?

- Supports the development and dissemination of research on cooperative learning, particularly educator research and inquiry that fosters understanding of the effects of context on implementing cooperative learning.
- Helps organizations develop structures that enhance cooperation in education, working through the inclusion of people of diverse backgrounds in our schools and society.
- Works with local, national, and international organizations to extend high quality practices of cooperative learning.
- Sponsors collaborative conferences and projects that extend the understanding of cooperative learning principles in different settings.

How does IASCE do this?

Through our MEMBERSHIP DUES!

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS INCLUDE:

Our NEWSLETTER is published three times a year and provides information essential to anyone involved in cooperation in education through:

- Research and project reports from the international perspective.
- New ideas from leaders in the field.
- Reports on recent publications and web resources.
- Reviews of books and other media.
- Articles by practitioners linking cooperative learning to topics such as information technology, the teaching of different ages and populations, and teacher education and staff development.

Our international conferences bring together cooperative educators from around the world to share ideas, compare successes, discuss challenges, and review the latest research.

The IASCE website, which is supported by membership dues, offers many links to sites related to cooperative learning and announces opportunities for face-to-face learning about cooperative learning.

- IASCE also offers a membership directory (upon request) for the purposes of networking.
- A list of board members, who are veteran experts in the field, to contact for consultation and professional assistance.
- Occasional discounts on publications and conferences.

Please visit us on the web at:
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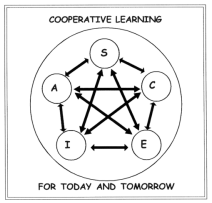

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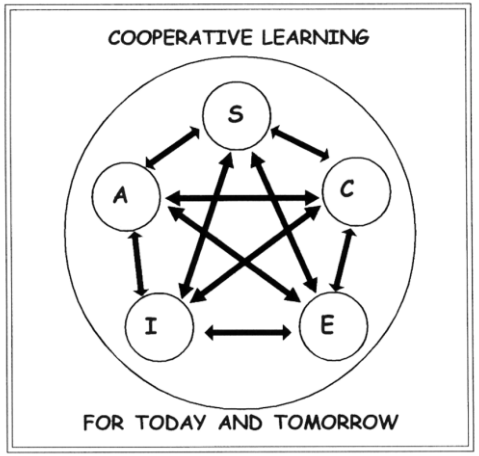

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