Strengthening the Social Element of Reading: Facilitating Conjunctions of Readers

George M. Jacobs  
*Kampung Senang Charity and Education Foundation, Singapore*  
george.jacobs@gmail.com

Meng Huat Chau  
*Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*  
chaumenghuat@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

When most people picture reading, they picture someone sitting alone holding a book or a screen of some type, such as a smartphone or tablet. In other words, reading is not seen as a social activity. Just the opposite, reading can be seen as an anti-social act; instead of talking with others, people go off alone to read, maybe even as a means of escape. However, reading is inherently a social activity. It represents an interaction between writers and readers. Writers attempt to put their ideas into words and maybe images, too. Readers develop their own interpretations of what the writers wrote, and they connect these interpretations to their own lives and thoughts. In this article, we propose that extensive reading, which involves students doing large quantities of reading, be combined with cooperative learning as an important way to strengthen the existing social nature of reading. We discuss supporting theories, research, and principles of extensive reading and cooperative learning, before providing and illustrating ideas on how to integrate extensive reading and cooperative learning in the classroom. We hope that the examples provided, based on knowledge of principles from cooperative learning and extensive reading, will inspire and sustain teachers’ efforts to strengthen the social element of their students’ reading, thereby making reading a more beneficial and enjoyable activity for their students that may continue for the rest of their lives.

Keywords: extensive reading; cooperative learning; reading as social activity; integrating extensive reading and cooperative learning; Social Constructivism

Introduction

The present article focuses on one way to strengthen the existing social nature of reading. This involves students of many ages coming together in groups of two to four members to encourage each other to read and enjoy reading. The article breaks the previous sentence into two parts: (1) how students come together (i.e., cooperative learning), and (2) programs to organize students’ reading (i.e., extensive reading):
(1) Students can come together more fruitfully if they and their teachers take guidance from the literature on cooperative learning. Thus, the first main section of this article provides background on cooperative learning, including supporting theories, research, and principles.

(2) The second main section of the article explains extensive reading, a methodology that involves students in doing large quantities of reading. In contrast, too often, the reading that too many students do is confined to reading short passages in textbooks. This section of the article supplies background on extensive reading, including supporting theories, research, and principles.

(Please note that with both cooperative learning and extensive reading, collegial conflicts exist among practitioners, and different terms can be used to refer to the same phenomena, and the same term can be used to refer to different phenomena.)

The third section of this article provides and illustrates ideas as to why to combine cooperative learning and extensive reading. Last but not least, examples are given of how teachers have used various cooperative learning techniques to support various ways of doing extensive reading. The hope is that these examples, combined with knowledge of cooperative learning and extensive reading principles from the earlier sections of the article, will inspire and sustain teachers’ efforts to strengthen the social element of their students’ reading, thereby making reading a more beneficial and enjoyable activity for their students, an activity that students will continue the rest of their lives.

**Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning (CL) is also known by similar terms, such as collaborative learning (Jacobs, 2014a), small group teaching, team learning, problem-based learning, and peer learning, to give just a partial list. To understand what CL is, we must understand that CL is much more than just students sitting in groups. Rather, teachers and students need to give ongoing thought to what helps and hinders effective groups. Students and teachers regularly take action so that the student groups can become increasingly more effective and their group interaction can become increasingly more enjoyable.

“Enjoyable” does not mean free of conflict. Just the opposite; conflict introduces varied perspectives and stimulates thinking. Francis Crick, who was co-winner of a Nobel Prize for the discovery of DNA, was quoted (Jacobs, 2014b, p. 3) as saying:

> Our … advantage was that we had evolved unstated but fruitful methods of collaboration … If either of us suggested a new idea, the other, while taking it seriously, would attempt to demolish it in a candid but non-hostile manner.

The key words here are “candid” and “non-hostile.” That is, groupmates need to be honest with each other. At the same time, they need see each other as valuable allies with whom they need to collaborate productively and skillfully.

**Theoretical Origins of Cooperative Learning**

Many overlapping theories in education and related fields, such as social-psychology, support the use of CL and shape the ways it is used. This section discusses some of these.
Social Interdependence Theory

For the authors of the current article, the most important theory underpinning CL is Social Interdependence Theory (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Lewin, 1935). Social Interdependence Theory borrows from Field Theory which makes an analogy between the relations between magnets and relations between humans. Magnets can attract or repel each other, or have no impact on each other.

With humans, we can feel that our outcomes are positively correlated, negatively correlated, or that no correlation exists with others. Examples can be seen in sports. If two people form a team to play doubles in badminton, what helps one team member helps the other, and what hurts one team member hurts the other. If Esperanza improves her backhand, that helps Marta, her partner, as now they both have a better chance of winning matches. Thus, Marta may attempt to teach Esperanza how to hit better backhands. Conversely, if Marta twists her ankle, that not only hurts her, it also hurts Esperanza, because now their team is weaker. (Please recall that the relation between variables is still called a positive correlation when both go down, because, although they both moved in a negative direction, they both moved in the same direction.) The relationship between the two partners demonstrates what Social Interdependence Theory terms positive interdependence because their outcomes are positively correlated. For example, when Esperanza’s backhand improves, that helps Marta, too, and when Marta hurts her ankle, that hurts Esperanza too.

Negative interdependence in Social Interdependence Theory results when the two forces are perceived to be moving in opposite directions, just as when two magnets repel and push each other away in opposite directions. In terms of correlation, negative correlation describes the situation when one is seen as moving upward while the other is felt to be going down. Returning to our badminton example, imagine that Esperanza and Marta, instead of playing doubles together, are now playing singles against each other. Now, when Esperanza improves her backhand, her outcomes go up, while Marta’s outcomes go down, and when Marta twists her ankles, Esperanza’s success level will probably rise, while Marta’s fall.

A third possibility exists in terms of interdependence, that is, magnets neither attract nor repel. Connecting this to the human realm, people may feel that their outcomes are not at all correlated with those of certain other people. It seems to them that the outcomes of one have no impact on the outcomes of the other. For example, because of her ankle problems, perhaps Marta decides to spend more time playing chess. How well Marta does at a chess tournament does not impact how well Esperanza does at a badminton tournament. In the parlance of Social Interdependence Theory, this situation can be described as no interdependence.

Of course, humans are more complicated than magnets because humans have both an objective reality, as do magnets, but unlike magnets, we also have a subjective reality. The objective and subjective realities do not always match. In CL, we hope that students will feel (feelings are subjective) positively interdependent with each other, as this will encourage them to help each other. Indeed, the CL literature is replete with ideas for enhancing students’ mutual feelings of positive interdependence, such as groups having common goals, each group member having unique resources that must be shared to achieve the group’s goals, enjoying rewards and/or celebrations if the goals are achieved, and establishing a common identity among group members, just as sports teams have mascots, team names, colors, logos, and songs.
Social Constructivist Theory

Another theory that supports CL has various names, including Social Constructivist Theory. Constructivism contrasts with what was the dominant view of learning in the West in the middle of the 20th century. That earlier view saw learning being driven from outside of the learners, with teachers and instructional materials pouring knowledge into students’ heads, just like people pour water onto the soil surrounding a tree. In contrast, the constructivist paradigm derives its name from a view of learning that prioritizes the internal, not the external. Learners construct their own knowledge, based on their background, interests, and surroundings. It does not matter how much water or what kind of fertilizer people pour onto a mango tree; it will still be a mango tree, and will not grow papayas. People can be more flexible than trees, but nonetheless, the internal remains the driving force in what is learned and how that learning is applied.

The other term in Social Constructivism is social. Yes, people construct their own learning, but they do it with others, including peers, teachers, and family members. One mechanism used in this social construction is scaffolding. This means that people provide support for each other as they learn. This support is gradually removed as people become able to do the learned tasks on their own. The word “scaffolding” makes an analogy with what happens when simple houses are being built. Metal or wooden scaffolds support the new structures as they are being built, and as construction progresses toward completion, the scaffolding is gradually removed.

A non-academic example of scaffolding can be seen when an older family member, Joriz, scaffolds for a toddler, Kidlat, who is learning to walk. Joriz will wait until Kidlat shows interest in walking. Then, Joriz will hold both of Kidlat’s hands. He will give instruction and encouragement in a gentle voice. As Kidlat progresses, Joriz will only hold one hand. The next step involves Kidlat walking on his own, but even then, Joriz is scaffolding in such ways as making sure they are on a flat surface and a surface where Kidlat will not hurt himself when he falls. When Kidlat does fall, Joriz will let him get back up by himself and try again, all the while staying close to provide instruction, encouragement, and reassurance.

For an academic example of scaffolding, imagine that Joriz is now at school, in a group in mathematics class, and he encounters difficulties. These difficulties often arise, as Joriz is, for now, the weakest member of his group in mathematics class, although he is, for now, the strongest in science class. Fortunately, just as Joriz scaffolded for Kidlat, so too will Joriz’s groupmates scaffold for him. A bonus of this scaffolding lies in the fact that as the groupmates try different ways to explain and demonstrate for Joriz, their own grasp of mathematics improves (Webb et al., 2009).

Another concept from Social Constructivist Theory is the ZPD (zone of proximal development) (Vygotsky, 1978). This term simply urges teachers to calibrate students’ current level of knowledge and skill, and then to teach students accordingly. Tasks that are too easy may not challenge students, while tasks that are too difficult may frustrate students. The social element of CL speaks to the ZPD, as tasks that might not challenge one group member become challenging when they need to explain to lower achieving partners, and tasks that would otherwise be too difficult now fit into students’ ZPDs, because, as the saying goes, “Two heads are better than one.”
Insights from Social Constructionist Theory have been supported by recent developments in Neuropsychology, as scientists now can see our brains in action as we learn (Cozolino, 2013; Willis, 2007). Murphey (2016) developed three social-oriented guidelines based on these insights from Neuropsychology:

1. Mutual Concern: Environments where people demonstrate mutual concern prepare students to learn by calming the fight, flight, or freeze response in the reptilian part of our brains. Teachers alone cannot create such supportive environments. Fortunately, CL promotes positive interdependence, an atmosphere in which support prevails.

2. Buy-In to the Social: Teachers discuss with colleagues and students the evidence from neuroscience, not to mention their own lives, that supports the use of CL. Lieberman (2013) presented a TED Talk that combined such evidence from his neuroscience research and his own life.

3. Learning Social Skills: Working well with others can be difficult, even when people feel positively interdependent with each other. Therefore, class time is well-spent facilitating students’ development and regular use of social skills.

Humanistic Theory

Another theory that deserves mention as providing strong support for the use of CL is Humanistic Theory (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1969). Maslow’s well-known Hierarchy of Needs explores five levels of needs starting with basic physiological needs, such as having clean food and water and a place to sleep. Next are safety needs. Here, CL can be useful, such as by protecting groupmates and others from bullying, both in-person and online. Belonging needs come next in the hierarchy. Being a member of a CL group that uses social skills can enhance students’ belief that they do indeed belong in school, that someone will miss them if they do not come in or, worse, drop out of school entirely.

Next to the top of the hierarchy are esteem needs which involve self-esteem as well as the esteem of others. A great deal of research across many countries, ages of students, and subject areas supports the view that CL boosts student outcomes on a range of both cognitive variables and affective variables, including self-esteem (for research reviews see Johnson et al., 2000; Sharan, 1980). Research on CL continues unabated (e.g., Abramczyk & Jurkowski, 2020; Chen, 2021). As mentioned above, students are more successful when peer interaction takes place. This higher level of success promises to lift the esteem in which students are held by others as well as the esteem with which they view themselves.

Last but not least, at the top of Maslow’s Hierarchy stands the need for self-actualization, that is, people realizing their full potential. This speaks to a common misconception about CL. Most people believe CL is all about what groups can do by working together, whereas the core of CL actually resides in what groups can empower individuals to achieve. In this way, the group members, by working in their CL groups, play scaffolding roles in each other’s development (see also Jacobs & Chau, 2021).

Dewey’s Ideas

What people do as they enjoy deploying their potential brings us to another famous thinker in education, Dewey (1897; 1929), who inspired many CL pioneers, including Sharan (1980) and Kilpatrick (1918). Dewey’s answer to how students should apply their talents was to see the purpose of education, not mainly to enable students to prepare for their own personal success.
Instead, students need to prepare themselves for active citizenship in democratic societies. From a CL perspective, inspired by Dewey, positive interdependence should be seen as not only existing within small student groups. Instead, students and teachers need to recognize and act on the existence of the positive correlations of the outcomes of everyone in their school, in their town or city, in their country, and in the world (see, e.g., Chau & Kerry, 2008).

Cooperative Learning Principles

Returning to Lewin, whose ideas germinated to become CL, he is cited by Berkman and Wilson (2021) as objecting to the commonly expressed idea that theory amounts to nothing more than impractical concepts developed in ivory towers, and that these concepts are, therefore, largely useless. Instead, Lewin proposed that from a single theory, myriad applications could flow. Presented below are eight CL principles from which many, many CL techniques have been developed, with each technique open to multiple variations.

1. Positive Interdependence. This principle has already been discussed extensively. In a nutshell, positive interdependence provides the glue that holds groups together.

2. Individual Accountability. While positive interdependence provides support to all group members, individual accountability provides the pressure. Everyone needs to do their fair share in the group. They also need to let others know what they know and do not know, what they can and cannot do.

3. Equal Opportunity to Participate. Individual accountability encourages everyone to do their fair share, and equal opportunity to participate means that no one dominates the group, impeding the participation of others. Instead, everyone has a chance. However, equal opportunity to participate does not mean everyone must participate equally. What it does mean is that everyone needs to be able to contribute according to their comfort level.

4. Maximum Peer Interactions. This principle has two meanings. First, a large quantity of peer interactions take place. For instance, not only do students work in small groups of two-four members, but sometimes, after interacting with groupmates, instead of reporting to the teacher and the entire class, groups report to other groups or individuals, thereby laying the groundwork for many more simultaneous peer interactions. The second meaning of “maximum” focuses on the quality of the peer interactions, that is, to what extent students are using thinking skills and social skills.

5. Group Autonomy. This principle asks the question, “To whom do students look when they need help: their groupmates or their teachers?” Teachers are still there to scaffold for students, but the first option should be peers.

6. Heterogeneous Grouping. Classrooms are diverse in many ways, such as past achievement, age, gender, social class, and ethnicity. The principle of heterogeneous grouping suggests that groups usually should reflect the diversity of the class (e.g., relatively higher and lower achievers should be present in each group).

7. Teaching Social Skills. As noted above, the use of social skills enhances group effectiveness, and students’ possession and use of these skills often need to be encouraged. Examples of the many important social skills include thanking others, praising others, giving reasons for responses, and disagreeing politely.
8. **Cooperation as a Value.** In keeping with the ideas of Dewey, the feeling of positive interdependence should be constantly expanded to encompass an ever-larger portion of the world’s population. An example can be seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. As long as the virus survives anywhere in the world, the potential remains for it to resurface all over the world. Thus, helping people in poor countries obtain vaccines also helps people in the donor countries.

Later in the article, we will see how CL techniques incorporate the first four principles in the above list.

**Extensive Reading**

**What Is Extensive Reading?**

Sometimes, a good way to understand a concept begins with understanding what that concept is not. Extensive reading (ER) is not intensive reading (IR). IR has three main characteristics. First, the texts are at students’ instructional reading level, which means that students can only understand them with assistance, usually from teachers. The other two reading levels are (1) frustrational, that is, even with teacher assistance, students will have difficulty understanding the texts, and (2) independent, that is, students can understand the texts on their own, maybe not every word, but the main ideas. A second characteristic of IR is that the reading texts used are relatively short texts, texts that can be read and discussed in one class period. This gives teachers time to explain vocabulary, grammar, and other features, such as text structure. A third IR characteristic, which flows from the first two, is that IR fits with teacher-centered instruction. That is, teachers are key, as they choose what is to be read, teachers are necessary to students’ understanding of texts, and they decide what activities the class does before, during, and after reading.

In contrast, ER fits, like CL, in the student-centered learning paradigm (to be explained shortly). In ER, texts are at students’ independent reading level, thereby making teachers less necessary, but still very useful. In ER, students are free to read anywhere, anytime, not just in class during the class period. In this way, ER greatly expands the quantity of reading students do. As a result, students obtain large quantities of what researchers call comprehensible input (Extensive Reading Foundation, 2021; Krashen, 1985): input because it comes in to students’ brains through their eyes when students read ordinary books and through their ears when they use audio books, and comprehensible because the books are at students’ independent reading level (see also Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). Whereas with IR, the emphasis lies with conscious learning of vocabulary or grammar taught by teachers, in ER, subconscious learning comes to the fore. Because the reading is at students’ independent reading level, the large quantities of comprehensible input power acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, spelling, and even text structure (Krashen, 2011).

The above should not be seen as disparaging IR. IR can play an important role in students’ reading development, as skills and knowledge learned during IR can be applied during ER. The point being made is that IR should not dominate; ER should. To summarize, ER has three main characteristics: the materials are not too difficult; students read a large amount; the conscious focus is on meaning, not on learning the elements of language, although that will happen subconsciously.
Theories

Many theories underpin the use of ER. However, this article focuses on Social Constructivist Theory, as that theory links closely to student-centered learning, thereby highlighting commonalities between ER and CL. Table 1 contrasts features of teacher-centered and student-centered learning.

Table 1

Features of teacher-centered and student-centered learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Teacher-Centered Learning</th>
<th>Student-Centered Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge is fixed and is dispensed by teaching materials and teachers, who are very seldom wrong.</td>
<td>Knowledge changes. Knowledgeable, well-intentioned people, including teaching materials writers and teachers, can be wrong and can disagree. Students and teachers share the excitement of learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Whom Students Talk</td>
<td>Teachers talk most of the time, and when students talk, they mostly talk only to teachers.</td>
<td>Students also talk to peers, i.e., peer interaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Decides on Content and Pedagogy</td>
<td>Teachers and administrators decide what and how students study.</td>
<td>Students also have a voice in what and how they study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Does Assessment</td>
<td>Only teachers do assessment.</td>
<td>Students also do assessment: of peers, selves, and their classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Learning Tasks</td>
<td>Learning tasks prepare students for exams and careers.</td>
<td>Additionally, learning tasks connect to students’ interests and current lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Extrinsic motivation is key.</td>
<td>Intrinsic motivation is key.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cognitive Level | Emphasis is on Knowledge and Understanding questions. | Emphasis is on all types of thinking in Bloom’s Taxonomy.
---|---|---
Cognition and/or Affect | Emphasis is on cognition. | Emphasis is on both.

As noted previously, in Social Constructivist Theory, learners, not teachers, are core. At the same time, teachers remain crucial, but take on more of a facilitation role. Actually, according to the theory, whether to be teacher centered or student centered is not really a choice for teachers, because the science tells us that learning takes place via student-centered mechanisms, regardless of what teachers do. Thus, the decision for teachers lies in whether or not they want to ignore reality or to work with it.

As can be seen in Table 1, CL resides very much in the student-centered camp, as via CL students use peer power to learn, to decide what and how to learn, to do assessment, to do higher order thinking, and to discuss feelings. ER resides in the same student-centered camp, as students have more power over what they read, what they do after reading, and how they think about what they read. Thus, CL and ER are best seen not as two separate, distinct methods, but inhabiting the same student-centered space. Furthermore, both methods promote intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1997), although there can be a place for extrinsic motivation, especially as a way to lead students toward intrinsic motivation. For example, some students may initially be reluctant readers, who may only read for grades or other rewards. Teachers hope that once they begin reading with books that match their interests and reading level, these reluctant readers will enjoy that process so much that reading will become its own reward. That is, the rewards serve as a form of scaffolding, which is gradually removed. As a saying in education puts it, “Every student is a good reader when they have the right book.”

**Principles of ER**

Here are ten principles of ER. These principles include and expand on the three central characteristics of ER explained earlier.

1. **Comprehensible Input.** Reading materials can be understood by the students reading them. For example, some ER programs use “graded readers,” e.g., books originally written to be at a particular graded reading level indicated on a book’s cover (e.g., Level 3 or Level 5). Other graded readers are modified versions of books written for more proficient, more experienced readers of the same language.

2. **Students Choose What To Read.** This principle is sometimes violated when an entire class reads the same book, but the standard mode of ER is for each student to choose their own books, thereby matching their interests and reading level. Furthermore, even when everyone reads the same book, students’ interests and reading levels are considered. For instance, when one of the authors of the present article was 14 years old, his class read a graded reader version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, a play in which the main characters were also teenagers.

3. **Large Amounts of Reading Materials Are Available.** If every student is to be able to choose the right books for them, a large variety of books must be available. Fortunately, the internet can help in this regard. For example, one of the authors of this article was recently rereading one of his favorite books, *Charlotte’s Web*, online with a nephew of his.
4. **ER Is Great in Any Language.** People who are enthusiastic and skilled readers in any language are more likely to be enthusiastic, skilled readers in other languages (Droop & Verhoeven, 2003). Also, a way to make a book in a second language more understandable is to read it first in one’s first language.

5. **The Focus of Reading Is Meaning.** In this case, the primary purpose of reading is not for learning a language; the primary purpose is to understand the world, to enjoy reading, and to gain information.

6. **Post-Reading Tasks Are Not Required.** The stereotypical post-reading task was to do a book report. Unfortunately, many students found this task so onerous that it discouraged reading. Happily, many less onerous, perhaps even enjoyable, post-reading tasks exist, or rather than doing any post-reading task, students can instead begin reading another book or reread the book they just finished.

7. **Reading Is Normally Silent.** Reading aloud can be fun, and teachers can read aloud excerpts from a book to “sell” students on reading the entire book silently. On the rare occasions that students are asked to read aloud, they should be given time to prepare to read aloud well.

8. **Teachers Should Guide Reading.** This guidance can consist of suggesting books that suit particular students. Also, teachers can look out for students for whom ER does not seem to be working and then intervene to help.

9. **Teachers Are Role Models.** Students should know that teachers are enthusiastic readers, either of the same books students are reading or of books that fit each teacher’s particular interests.

10. **Peers Can Also Motivate Reading.** As will be discussed in the next section of this article, peers can motivate each other to do ER in such ways as offering reading suggestions, enhancing comprehension, and providing a listening ear for sharing about what students have read.

### How Peers Support Individual Reading

This section of the article lists five ways in which peers can collaborate in CL groups to encourage each other to read more and to gain more from their reading.

**Peers as Motivators for ER.** One slogan used in ER states that “A reading habit is caught, not taught. Infect your students.” Principle 9 above about teachers as role models for ER reflects this slogan. However, most classrooms have only one teacher. “Infections” can occur more quickly if peers are also striving to infect each other. Fortunately, unlike COVID-19 infections, infections with the joy of reading offer a lifetime of benefits to students.

**Peers as Sources of Ideas on What to Read.** Students often give each other recommendations on a wide variety of topics, ranging from food to recreation to family relations. These recommendations can cover what to do and what to avoid doing. In the same way, students can advise each other on what to read and what to avoid reading. In a similar way, the internet is full of ratings sites. Book advice can function somewhat like the “caught not taught” slogan above; if peers are enthusiastic about a particular book, they can recommend it to their classmates.

**Peers as Tutors.** Yes, ER materials should be in students’ ZPDs, that is, not too difficult. However, perhaps some students may be so keen on reading a particular book that they attempt it even though it is above their current reading level. Peers can help here, and not just with vocabulary, but also with background knowledge. For example, a book might be set in a particular country that some peers know little about, certain scientific knowledge may be
important to a fuller understanding of the book, or maybe peers have seen the film version of a book and can add information.

**Peers as Creators of ER Materials.** Students alone, in groups, or even as an entire class can create books. Book creation works especially well with younger students who are reading shorter books. In the case of older, more proficient students looking to read longer books, students can combine to create anthologies, for example, of scary stories. ICT (Internet Communication Technology) offers many tools for creating awesome looking books, and so many ways, such as social media, exist for sharing books (Ivone et al., 2020). Students may be especially interested to see what peers have created, and students can also share books with family members.

**Peers as Audiences for Sharing about Books.** A Native American proverb states that, “To have joy one must share it. Happiness was born a twin.” Reading becomes more engaging when people have ways to share about what they have read. For example, people join book clubs and literature circles (Shelton-Strong, 2012). Teachers can ask students about what they are reading, but peers greatly outnumber teachers, and the hope is that book discussions begun as a class activity will be continued after class, and that books and the ideas, events, and characters in books of any language will generate ongoing discussions among students.

**Ways to Combine CL and ER.** CL techniques are generic. They can be used to teach any subject and skill, from Chemistry to Chinese, from reading to beading, at any level. The remainder of this article describes three CL techniques and gives examples of how to combine the techniques with ER, as well as explaining how the techniques embody CL principles.

**CL and ER When Students All Read the Same Book.** One of our favorite CL techniques is *Everyone Can Explain*. We like it because explanations play such an important role in learning, and while explanations are important with all CL techniques, *Everyone Can Explain* puts “explain” right in the name of the technique. Here are the steps in the technique, which can be done in groups of 2, 3, or 4 members. In the example below, a group of four is used:

1. Students each have a number: 1, 2, 3, or 4.
2. Teachers ask a question, and students discuss, deciding on an answer and an explanation of that answer.
3. The group checks that everyone in the group can give and explain their group’s answer, or perhaps the group has multiple answers.
4. The teacher calls a number, 1, 2, 3, or 4, and the person with that number gives and explains their group’s answer(s).

Examples of questions or tasks that could be used with *Everyone Can Explain* if the entire class had read *Romeo and Juliet* include:

a. Make a plan for stopping the fighting between Juliet’s family and Romeo’s family.
b. Are Juliet and Romeo too young to fall in love? Instead, should they focus on their studies, their hobbies, or doing projects to help people or others, such as nonhuman animals, where they live?
c. If the play happened today, how would it be different?
d. Create your own question or task.
Table 2 looks at how the first four CL principles come to life in *Everyone Can Explain*.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CL Principle</th>
<th>The Principle in <em>Everyone Can Explain</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Peer Interactions</td>
<td>Many peer interactions take place while students discuss in their groups (quantity). Students need to do higher order thinking to respond to the questions/tasks (quality).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity to Participate</td>
<td>Students do not know who will be called; so, they need to check everyone in their group to see if they are ready to give and explain answers/responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Accountability</td>
<td>Students cannot let their groupmates answer for them, as whoever’s number is called must answer. This contrasts with what often happens in non-CL groups, where the star of the group always answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Interdependence</td>
<td>If someone gives what is judged to be a good answer and explanation, that person is not praised; their partners are praised for helping them prepare to give a good answer/explanation. In other words, the group sinks or swims together.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CL and ER When Students Each Read a Different Book**

The standard practice in ER is for each student to read a different book, according to their interests and reading level. In such cases, many CL techniques can be used. Here are two of them: *Circle of Speakers* and *Circle of Interviewers*.

**Circle of Speakers**

*Circle of Speakers* is an easy-to-use CL technique that can be used in groups of 2, 3, or 4. Here, it will be modified, as all CL techniques can be. The basic procedure for *Circle of Speakers* as seen in a group of three is:

1. Everyone has a number: 1, 2, or 3.
2. Students take turns to speak. They can go around the circle multiple times.
3. The teacher calls a number, and the person with that number shares their partners’ answers.
An example of what students can talk about when doing *Circle of Speakers* after each reads different books is that each student can make a bookmark to represent an important character, event, idea, or place in the book they read. When it is their turn to speak, they stand, and show and explain their bookmark. Groupmates ask questions. Teachers might want to demonstrate this with two students to assist students in understanding how to do the bookmarks, the talk based on the bookmarks, and the questions about their partners’ books. Table 3 looks at how the first four CL principles come to life in *Circle of Speakers*.

Table 3

Four CL Principles in *Circle of Speakers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CL Principle</th>
<th>The Principles in <em>Circle of Speakers</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Peer Interactions</td>
<td>In a class of 48 students sitting in groups of three, potentially 16 peer interactions are happening at the same time (quantity). Tasks can be designed so that student need to do higher order thinking (quality).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity to Participate</td>
<td>Students take turns to speak, and everyone has a turn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Accountability</td>
<td>When it is someone’s turn, they face pressure to speak, although if they are having trouble, their groupmates can help them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Interdependence</td>
<td>Students need their groupmates to say something so that if they are called by the teacher, they have something to share.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Circle of Interviewers*

*Circle of Interviewers* demonstrates one way in which to mobilize the CL principle of Maximum Peer Interactions by having groups report to other groups, instead of the usual practice of groups reporting to the teacher and the rest of the class. *Circle of Interviewers* is normally done in groups of four divided initially into groups of two. The basic procedure for *Circle of Interviewers* is:

1. Students begin in pairs, with each person interviewing their partner.
2. Two pairs combine. Each student takes a turn to report to the other pair what they learned about the book their partner read.
3. Students ask questions about the books the other pair read. They can also discuss such matters as: (a) have they read the same book or a similar book?; (b) would they like to read one of the books read by the other members of their foursome?; and (c) do
they have book recommendations for the other members of their foursome? Adding “Why?” to any question provides a good way to raise questions’ thinking level.

Before doing the interviews, teachers might want to lead students to brainstorm possible interview questions, although students should always have the flexibility to add, subtract, and modify questions based on their own interests and the books read by their partners. Possible interview questions include:

- Where did you find this book?
- Did you enjoy it? Why or Why not?
- To whom might you recommend this book?
- Which person in the book is least like you?
- Would the book be different if it happened in a different time or place, such as in the present and in the place where we live?
- Would you like to change the ending of this book? What might happen in a sequel to this book?
- What emotions did you experience while reading this book, such as fear, excitement, boredom, happiness, regret, sadness, pessimism, optimism?

With Circle of Interviewers, it might be useful to give time limits to encourage all groups to end at more or less the same time. Please remember that often the group that finishes last has done the task the best, because they might have had the most in-depth discussions. Table 4 looks at how the first four CL principles come to life in Circle of Interviewers.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CL Principle</th>
<th>The Principles in Circle of Interviewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Peer Interactions</td>
<td>In a class of 48 students sitting in groups of two, potentially 24 peer interactions are happening at the same time (quantity). Students need to do higher-order thinking to answer most of the interview questions (quality).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Opportunity to Participate</td>
<td>Everyone has an opportunity to do the three roles of interviewer, interviewee, and reporter of what they learned in their interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Accountability</td>
<td>Students need to play all three roles, as well as the role of the reader. If they do not play those roles well, their partners can see. Thus, students face pressure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive Interdependence

Each student is essential to the success of the group. Each students’ experience is diminished if their groupmates do not do the tasks well. Therefore, students may want to take steps to motivate and otherwise scaffold for groupmates.

Conclusion: Facilitating Conjunctions of Readers

In this article, we have considered how ER offers an important means for students to be independent learners. Our central argument is, however, that CL allows and encourages these independent learners to work together. While reading is often seen as a solitary or even anti-social act, we hope we have made clear how using CL principles and techniques in the classroom helps to strengthen the social element of students’ reading. We have illustrated how this can be done through three CL techniques, Everyone Can Explain, Circle of Speakers, and Circle of Interviewers, and explained how these techniques embody CL principles.

The focus of ER is on the unconscious acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, and other language elements. IR can supplement ER via teacher instruction and conscious learning, for example, of the names of parts of speech, including noun, verb, and conjunction. In this article, we have focused on another meaning of conjunction, not as a part of speech, but as a part of life, as a way to bolster the social element of reading and other activities. Reading, as many of us agree, is like an infectious disease: it is caught from others, not taught by others. Just as happiness was born a twin, we believe combining CL and ER makes the whole process more creative, engaging, and enjoyable.

Recommended websites

1. Extensive Reading Foundation: https://erfoundation.org/wordpress
2. Reading in a Foreign Language (journal): https://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/

References


Jacobs, G. M. (2014a). Collaborative learning or cooperative learning? The name is not important; Flexibility is. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED574149

Jacobs, G. M. (2014b). *Quotes on cooperative learning and education generally*. http://www.academia.edu/3460176/Quotes_about_cooperative_learning_and_education_g enerally


About the Authors

Dr. George M. JACOBS has published and taught widely on student-centered learning, environmental education, the shift toward a post-positivist paradigm, and activism for animals. Currently, he is co-editing Being a Community Engaged Educator for Springer. He has served on the boards of local and international organizations in the Education and Charity sectors, including Extensive Reading Foundation, International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, International Ecolinguistics Association, International Vegetarian Union, Centre for a Responsible Future, and Kampung Senang Charity and Education Foundation. George’s current research and publication projects involve B12 fortification of foods, memoir writing by seniors, the role of English as a Foreign Language in meritocracy, the use of the relative pronoun “who” to refer to nonhuman animals, conservation of aquatic animals, and community gardens.
(email: george.jacobs@gmail.com)

Dr. Meng Huat CHAU is Senior Lecturer at Universiti Malaya (UM), where he teaches and mentors students conducting research in Applied Linguistics. Before joining UM to take up a fellowship in 2010, he spent over ten years working with students, teachers, and teacher educators from primary and secondary schools as well as from other universities. He is currently Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Modern Languages (see https://jml.um.edu.my/). He also holds adjunct and visiting appointments at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies and De La Salle University-Dasmariñas. Meng Huat’s main areas of research are corpus linguistics and educational linguistics, spanning learner corpus research, Second Language Acquisition, Global Englishes, multilingualism, and language education with a focus on agency, feedback, and student engagement. His more recent research and writing consider the contribution of Applied Linguistics to a better, more sustainable world.
(email: chaumenghuat@yahoo.co.uk)

Acknowledgments

This article is based on a workshop on extensive reading and cooperative learning given at the 3rd Linguistic Society of the Philippines International Conference (LSPIC2021) held on March 11-13, 2021. We wish to thank the participants for their enthusiasm and feedback.

Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

None