

# A Co-operative Learning Classroom

**Angela Tulloch**

As the new school year begins, I find myself 'back to basics' in planning my co-operative classroom. I look around and I already see evidence of co-operative learning (CL) being used around the school in classrooms and in teacher training. I reflect that the approach has successfully inspired and motivated the adults I teach on an evening.

So what do CL classrooms look like in my primary setting? How different are they from traditional classrooms? How has teaching and learning changed? I intend to touch briefly on these points.

Organisation is key. Activities are planned so that the children develop co-operative skills and become familiar with CL vocabulary. CL activities are designed to meet National Curriculum (NC) targets for each child. Classrooms are prepared and awash with colour. I introduce group promises, reward-charts and balloons displaying the range of CL activity structures on the walls.

On the first day, I let the children 'find' their CL team through a numbers game that brings them together in teams of four of varying academic ability. This is one way a teacher can organise homogenous groups – a vital element of CL. Each team member takes on a responsibility or 'role' and participates in the activity which has a shared goal. The more able assist other team members but are stretched to employ higher-order thinking skills to help the team achieve a common goal.

The children enjoy the group competitiveness in some CL activities. Groups are called 'teams' and activities are called 'challenges'. I often distribute challenges in envelopes, the contents of which must be kept secret from the other teams. I do try to make the learning fun and rewards (laminated medals) given to the team and not the individual, play a huge part in this.

CL is compatible with nationally directed initiatives eg the primary framework for literacy and mathematics; demands for more peer assessment and guided group work and pupil talk. Recently, the implementation of the restorative practice strategy was delivered to the school staff purely through a CL approach. The process involved each teacher having affiliations to a base and an expert team in order to secure and spread information through 'envoying'.

Why am I committed to CL? I regard CL to be at the core of all learning. For the learners, there is an abundance of enthusiasm, motivation, self-confidence and fun. If students of any age are having fun, they will learn.

My own practice as a teacher has been transformed through working in this way and I would encourage any teacher to embrace it.

## The Author

Angela has been a primary school teacher in Hull for over 15 years. She also works part-time, devising and delivering a Classroom Teaching Assistants programme and has assisted on the initial teacher training programme at the University of Hull on the use of co-operative learning (CL). In 2006, she completed a MEd and her dissertation focused on CL teaching methods. As Global Education Co-ordinator, she has visited schools throughout Europe, the USA and Sierra Leone and in 2002 undertook a Fulbright programme exchange to the USA.

