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# Cooperative learning in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools.

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IASCE members continue to publish books and articles that report on their diverse contributions to the development of cooperative learning. Our conferences continue to serve as a platform for the fertile exchange of ideas about theory and practice in the field.

In honor of IASCE's 25th birthday, a collection of articles originally published in the newsletter in 2002 - 2004 will be included in the CD-ROM of proceedings of the Singapore conference. In these articles, several IASCE members candidly write about how and why cooperative learning developed in their respective countries. In introducing, implementing, and disseminating cooperative learning, they encountered problems familiar to all, yet their solutions are varied and will remind readers that there is always much to learn from the creativity and determination of educators all over the world.



***Happy 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday to IASCE!***



### ***Japan Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education Launched***

The Japanese Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (JASCE) was formally inaugurated on May 7, 2004. Ninety people have joined the organization so far, and more than 30 attended our opening ceremony. We are a diverse group: teachers from various levels of education, researchers, students, counselors, administrative staff, workshop organizers, discussion group leaders, and commercial group members. Researchers are from such disciplines as sociology, psychology, education, nursing, and linguistics.

JASCE has been established as a common platform to exchange ideas across disciplines and teaching/learning contexts relative to the theory and implementation of cooperative learning in

Japan. Our goal is to learn from each other, work dynamically, and implement our ideas for education based on a humanistic and cooperative ethic both in our classrooms and beyond classroom walls.

Both the ceremony and the party afterwards were like a family occasion. Some of the participants met for the first time, but made friends on the spot and discussed with each other our beliefs, ideals, goals, projects, and future plans.

For inquiries in Japanese, please contact the JASCE president Prof. Satoru Yasunaga at <[yasunaga\\_satoru@kurume-u.ac.jp](mailto:yasunaga_satoru@kurume-u.ac.jp)>. For inquiries in English, please contact JASCE board member Jane Nakagawa at <[jane@uecc.aichi-edu.ac.jp](mailto:jane@uecc.aichi-edu.ac.jp)>.

### **IASCE Forum - Cooperative Learning in Hong Kong**

*In this issue of the IASCE Forum, Gertrude Tinker Sachs and Dean Tjosvold write about how cooperative learning was introduced in Hong Kong. One avenue was through teachers of English at the primary and secondary levels. This is described in the article below. The other was at the university level through the work of the Hong Kong Cooperative Learning Center. Dean Tjosvold describes this in a separate article.*

#### **Cooperative Learning in Hong Kong Primary and Secondary Schools Gertrude Tinker Sachs**

The adoption of cooperative learning (CL) in Hong Kong primary and secondary schools is still in its infancy. CL is introduced to prospective teachers in teacher education institutions and is touted by Education Department curricula documents as a positive approach for learning. Yet, like most interactive teaching approaches, its adoption at the school and classroom level is, for the most part, lost in the maelstrom of the everyday busyness of meeting the demands of already overcrowded curricula. In order to be accommodated, CL, by its very nature, requires preplanning, some physical space to move around, and some

flexibility in the teacher's timetable. In addition, and more importantly, like any new pedagogical initiative, with CL, the teacher needs to develop familiarity and expertise in the various techniques through consistent use over an extended period of time. The nature of teaching and learning in most Hong Kong's schools and classrooms greatly limits the effective large-scale adoption of this way of teaching and learning.

However, a few Hong Kong government funded projects have made inroads in bringing CL to teachers of English as a second/foreign language. In a two-year project on CL and task-based learning, teachers of English from three secondary schools found that implementing CL tasks was quite challenging. The teachers had been exposed to CL through group workshops and had worked collaboratively with researchers to develop task-based lesson plans. However, teachers felt that time to plan was inadequate, the curriculum too crowded to accommodate CL task-based activities and that it took too long to prepare the students for the activities during the lesson. Despite the difficulties, the teachers recognised that when their students participated in CL activities, they exhibited high levels of engagement and interest and had more opportunities to use English than in their regular lessons (Tinker Sachs, Candlin, Rose and Shum 2003).

Similarly, teachers of English from three primary schools in Hong Kong participated in a three-year project. Like the secondary teachers they also had very positive things to say about the positive impact of CL on their students' use of English and level of engagement in the class which differed substantially from that found in the typical traditional classroom setting.

However, primary school teachers shared the same dilemmas as their secondary counterparts. They found that the heavily packed curriculum did not allow for adequate opportunities to practice CL over a prolonged period of time, although all the teachers greatly benefited from the professional development opportunities provided by the project team and the expertise of Dr. George Jacobs and Professor Dianne Larsen-Freeman (Tinker Sachs, 2003).

The positive benefits of CL have also been found in the teacher education classroom. Pre-service teachers of English also participated in the above mentioned projects and experienced CL first hand through their teacher education course activities. Their positive response to CL motivated many of them to voluntarily carry out CL during their practice teaching and to investigate aspects of CL in their BA in Teaching English as a Second language (BATESL) final year projects (Tinker Sachs, 2002).

In all the aforementioned projects, the primary and secondary students were excited by this way of learning. They liked being able to ask each other for help, they liked talking in class, although they sometimes talked in Cantonese (the native language of most people in Hong Kong), and most of all, they found CL an interesting way to learn and practice English. But these projects still represent merely a tip of the iceberg in depicting what could happen when teachers incorporate interactive approaches to support their ways of teaching.

Incorporating CL on a larger scale requires more teachers, school administrators and teacher educators to have detailed knowledge of and prolonged contact with the infinite possibilities of CL in their schools and classes. When this is done, CL will not be viewed as a burdensome "add-on" but seen as an easily integrated part of the everyday busyness of teaching and learning. Despite the problems, the previously mentioned projects all confirm the positive impact that CL has on teaching and learning: high levels of interest and engagement as well as increased opportunities to use the target language. CL can blossom and grow where it is planted, if it can be given enough space to breathe, ample sunshine to help it flourish and adequate amounts of water to help it grow and spread; but who will be the gardeners?

## References

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### **Cooperative Learning in Hong Kong Universities Dean Tjosvold**

Hong Kong deserves its reputation as a dynamic city, but lately we have had to adapt to shrinking budgets and deflation. The Education Minister has proposed mergers to form one or two "world-class" universities. As a result, faculty members feel threatened. As the government has become more accountable, it has strengthened its teaching and research surveys and administrative audits. Universities are encouraging "autonomous learning" outside the classroom and reducing the number of credits to graduate to 90 credits to conform to the government's budget.

Nevertheless, cooperative learning continues to be an important, viable approach at Hong Kong universities. Universities cannot be "world-class" unless their graduates have the conceptual, language, and teamwork skills that CL fosters. Indeed, CL is a cost-effective way of making universities more accountable and effective, and helps instructors feel more rewarded and fulfilled in their teaching. Our recent studies document that cooperative relationships among students very much contributes to their learning autonomously outside of the classroom as well as inside.

The Hong Kong Cooperative Learning Center (HKCL) has promoted activities and workshops to help instructors experiment in their classrooms. It sponsored the publication in Chinese of David and Roger Johnson's *Active Learning by Machine Press* in Beijing. David has led an annual 3-day workshop the past four years as well as a weeklong workshop at Chinese University's medical and management schools. He, Karl Smith, and others have conducted workshops at most universities in HK.

The Center also promotes CL in the mainland. David and George Jacobs from Singapore have conducted workshops for teachers from schools and universities through the Center's agreement with the Shanghai Management Association. David also conducted workshops in Beijing, Chendu, Kunming, Shandong, and Guangzhou. Dean Tjosvold led a series of workshops in Hangzhou for management academics from all over China on how they could use CL.

The content of these workshops is not so different from what the workshop leaders offer in the West, in that Chinese participants are asked to consider similar teaching strategies. Participants' concerns are similar too, in that they want to know how to change students' passive role to one where they are motivated and skilled to take advantage of cooperative groups. Hong Kong instructors typically have less latitude than their Western colleagues in terms of curriculum and grading distribution requirements that require "grading on the curve" and making grades at least in part dependent on out-performing other students.