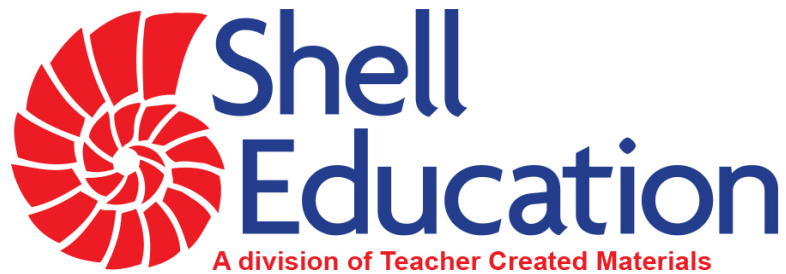


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STRATEGIES

for
Cooperative
Learning

Sabrina Winkleman

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Welcome

What are your experiences with wholeness in education? How often do you consider and plan for the many domains of development: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional, particularly as they connect to your and your students' identities? How frequently do you think about the brain in relationship to the nervous system? And how might wholeness move us toward equitable learning environments where both adults and students thrive?

I know these aren't easy questions—yet I believe answering them is critical to your students' well-being and learning, as well as your own. And my hope is that the strategies in this book help you build and support the skills, habits, and mindsets needed to not just navigate but embrace wholeness. Wholeness honors the differences and complexities of humanity and moves us toward a more caring and just world.

Navigating wholeness has been a long journey for me. Slowly developing reflective practices like mindfulness and focusing on cultivating my own social and emotional skills are steps that have positively impacted my nervous system, mental health, and sense of joy and humility in the world. I find this particularly important as someone who has a high adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) score. The score is not destiny. I am proof, as are many others! High ACEs scores are not destiny for our students and communities either. When we choose to implement strategies that consider and welcome our students' wholeness, we create identity-affirming learning environments that protect against mental health risks, support joy, boost academics, and interrupt historical inequities.

Cooperative learning, alongside transformative social and emotional learning (tSEL), is a powerful way to practice wholeness in the classroom through its emphasis on student voice and collaboration. You probably already use many elements of both cooperative learning and social and emotional learning with your students. This book's simple and effective strategies emphasize the relationship between the two concepts, offering ways to create an identity-affirming learning environment that honors wholeness and well-being for all of us—adults included.

This book does not contain a list of basic cooperative learning lessons or activities. Instead, each strategy offers a way to explicitly pair a tSEL competency with the academic goals and objectives of any cooperative learning lesson. These strategies also highlight the importance of cooperative learning that is responsive to all student identities; the strategies are therefore centered in healing. This partnership of the tSEL strategy with your responsive cooperative learning lesson supports well-being for you and your students.

When I was a first grade teacher, this kind of partnership ensured both joyful engagement and academic growth. For example, my classroom co-constructed a call and response to use for SEL skill reflection at the end of a responsive cooperative learning lesson. Students looked forward to singing while referring to a visual list of SEL skills such as “work the whole time” and “try your best.” I would sing the phrase, “Did you work the whole time?” Students would sing back “work the whole time” and give themselves a private, close-to-their-bodies thumbs-up, thumb to the side, or thumbs-down for reflection. These reflections often echoed success with academic goals and objectives associated with the responsive cooperative learning lesson.

Similarly, when I was a literacy specialist, community agreements paired with responsive cooperative learning lessons ensured both meaningful interaction and academic progress. Students led SEL reflection time at the end of cooperative learning lessons by volunteering to review our community agreements and provide examples of what went well and what could be improved for next time. Again, these reflections often echoed academic growth during a lesson. Truly, explicitly focusing on wholeness in this way cultivates a joyful classroom climate and leads to academic, social, and emotional success.

This wholeness approach prioritizes safety, belonging, and dignity for all—things I needed as a child and young person. Writing this book has been part of my journey toward my own healing. It is also a way for me to advocate for other educators to create learning environments that honor all of us as whole, unique individuals, so we can, in turn, restore our collective humanity. I wish you well on this powerful journey!

—Sabrina

How to Use This Resource

Choose a strategy and give it a try! And of course, you know your group best—so don't hesitate to modify these strategies to suit your students' unique needs. All the strategies in this book are designed to be flexible and to apply to all grade levels and topics.

This introductory text provides a description of the strategy.

Differentiation ideas are provided for three grade ranges.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING | Strengthening Self-Awareness to Cultivate Identity

Honor Emotions

Transitioning to a responsive cooperative learning lesson sparks multiple emotions for students. Having intentional space and time to check in and name emotions strengthens self-awareness, calms the nervous system, and prepares students for the lesson's academic goals and objectives.

Activation: As a whole group, using one of the Activation Tools on page 12, invite students to brainstorm potential emotions and the ways in which they can honor the different ways each individual expresses those emotions. After discussing the academic goals and objectives of the day's responsive cooperative learning lesson, invite students to share aloud what emotions they are feeling in relationship to the lesson. Encourage students to share their feelings throughout the lesson.

Reflection: At the end of the lesson, use a Reflection Tool from page 13 to provide time for students to debrief their experiences with naming emotions throughout the lesson. How did naming their emotions support their academic learning? How did it feel to articulate their feelings to fellow group members?



Make It Real

Grades PK–1

During the activation brainstorm, offer the sentence stem "I feel . . ." Prompt students to share pleasant and unpleasant feelings and how they express them. Encourage students to honor different ways of expressing emotions.

Grades 2–5

During brainstorming, invite students to consider multiple ways of naming pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Discuss how we express feelings differently. How can students support one another in naming their emotions?

Grades 6–12

Invite students to consider the complexity of pleasant and unpleasant emotions and how they are experienced differently based on our individual cultural identities. Also discuss how multiple emotions can happen simultaneously. How can students honor complex emotional experiences?



Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with emotional awareness? How can naming your emotions support your well-being? Model the importance of honoring emotions by naming your own emotions in relationship to the responsive cooperative learning lesson's academic goals and objectives.

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50 Strategies for Cooperative Learning—154085

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This section prompts you to reflect individually on your tSEL skills and how they connect to the lesson and to your students.

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Honor Emotions

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Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with emotional awareness? How can naming your emotions support your well-being? Model the importance of honoring emotions by naming your own emotions in relationship to the responsive cooperative learning lesson's academic goals and objectives.

Stress Strategies

Stress is a part of life, and having strategies to respond instead of react to daily stressors boosts our sense of influence and agency over our lives, which deepens our self-management skills. To support students' stress management, encourage them to pause when they are stressed, name their feelings, and choose a helpful action.

Activation: Using one of the Activation Tools on page 12, invite students to brainstorm what they can do when they feel stress. After discussing the academic goals and objectives of the day's responsive cooperative learning lesson, invite students to share aloud what they can do when they feel stress during the lesson.

Reflection: At the end of the lesson, use one of the Reflection Tools on page 13 to provide time for students to discuss their experiences. How did their stress strategies support their academic learning? How did students navigate obstacles or conflicts during their group work?



Make It Real

Grades PK–1

During the activation brainstorm, offer the sentence stem “When I feel stressed, I . . .” For example, “When I feel stressed, I take deep breaths,” or “When I feel stressed, I wiggle my body.”

Grades 2–5

Invite students to work in their small groups. Prompt students to discuss how they can support each other with stress. What stress strategies do they think will be most effective for them? How could moving their bodies be helpful?

Grades 6–12

Invite students to work in their small groups. Prompt students to discuss examples of when stress can be helpful and when it is more harmful. What strategies can they use to support each other when they feel dysregulated?



Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with stress? How can explicitly navigating stress support your well-being? Model navigating stress by sharing the “Pause, Name, Choose” stress plan you’ll use for the day’s responsive cooperative learning lesson.

Other Views

Perspective-taking during responsive cooperative learning lessons encourages empathy and connection. Making intentional space to reflect on the views, feelings, and experiences of other group members fosters belonging and care. This cultivates social awareness.

Activation: Using one of the Activation Tools on page 12, invite students to brainstorm why it's important to consider everyone's thoughts, perspectives, and experiences during learning. After discussing the academic goals and objectives of the day's responsive cooperative learning lesson, invite students to share aloud how they can honor different perspectives during the lesson.

Reflection: At the end of the lesson, use one of the Reflection Tools on page 13 to provide time for students to share their experiences with supporting different views. How did perspective-taking impact their academic learning? How did it feel to put themselves in others' places? How did this strengthen connections within their groups?



Make It Real

Grades PK–1

During the activation brainstorm, offer the sentence stems "I think my group might feel . . ." and "I will support them by . . ." to help students brainstorm a list of other perspectives and possible responses.

Grades 2–5

Invite students to consider other times when they have included everyone's perspectives in a conversation. What did students learn about others? How did seeing a different perspective impact students' personal views?

Grades 6–12

Invite students to consider the complex emotions associated with different perspectives. How can students honor their groups' collective complex emotions during responsive cooperative learning lessons? How can different perspectives offer new learning pathways?



Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with perspective-taking? How can perspective-taking support your well-being? Model the importance of perspective-taking by sharing how you will be open and curious about students' views during the responsive cooperative learning lesson.

Seeking Support

Responsive cooperative learning lessons provide space for students to explicitly ask for support from each other. Asking for support and having needs met is critical to collaboration, problem-solving, and relationship-building. Acknowledge that asking for support can be difficult, so establishing trust among group members and knowing members will be there for each other is essential.

Activation: Using one of the Activation Tools on page 12, invite students to brainstorm ways they can ask each other for support when they need it. After discussing the academic goals and objectives of the day's responsive cooperative learning lesson, invite students to share aloud the supports they may need in relationship to the lesson.

Reflection: At the end of the lesson, use one of the Reflection Tools on page 13 to provide time for students to share their experiences with seeking support. How did asking for support impact their academic learning? How did it feel to do this? Did they learn anything they can use next time they need to ask for support?



Make It Real

Grades PK–1

During the activation brainstorm, offer the sentence stem “When I have a problem, I can . . .” For example, “When I have a problem, I can ask a friend to listen” or “When I have a problem, I can ask a group member to explain something again.”

Grades 2–5

Invite students to gather in their small groups to brainstorm previous times they wish they’d had more support. For example, if they’ve struggled to process directions in the past, they could say, “I can ask a group member to talk through the directions with me one-on-one.”

Grades 6–12

Invite students to gather in their small groups to discuss the vulnerability of asking for support and ways to move through that discomfort. It may be reassuring to remember that everyone needs support sometimes.



Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with asking for support? How can asking for support impact your well-being and strengthen your relationships? Model the importance of seeking support by sharing how you will ask for support during the responsive cooperative learning lesson.

Curiosity Connections

Approaching decision-making from a place of curiosity encourages exploration and supports possibility during responsive cooperative learning lessons. Having intentional space and time to generate possible ways to complete a lesson can be joyful and fun.

Activation: As a whole group, using one of the Activation Tools on page 12, invite students to brainstorm possible questions they may consider when making group decisions about the responsive cooperative learning lesson. After discussing the academic goals and objectives of the day's responsive cooperative learning lesson, invite students to share aloud potential questions that spark curiosity for them and that they could use for decision-making during the lesson.

Reflection: At the end of the lesson, use one of the Reflection Tools on page 13 to provide time for students to share their experiences. How did the questions impact their academic learning? How did asking questions help their group make decisions before and during learning? How did it feel to approach decision-making with curiosity?



Make It Real

Grades PK–1

During the activation brainstorm, model questions for students if needed, such as “How can we listen to everyone’s ideas?” or “What supplies will we need to collect?”

Grades 2–5

Invite students to brainstorm with their small groups first. As they do, encourage them to consider group dynamics. For example, “How will we make sure everyone is heard as we reach a decision?”

Grades 6–12

Invite students to engage with the complexities of learning through the lens of curiosity. For example, “How can we look at things in a new way when we are having trouble reaching a decision as a group?”



Adult tSEL

What is your relationship with developing questions associated with a learning activity? How does approaching tasks and decisions with curiosity impact your well-being? Model this practice by sharing a question that you will think about and act on during the responsive cooperative learning lesson.