

Kagan Structures

Based on the initial research and development of Dr Spencer Kagan in the 1990s, teachers across the world have developed over 200 classroom "structures".

The structures have various aims, such as building and developing:

- Team spirit and positive relationships among students
- Information sharing
- Critical thinking
- Communication skills
- Mastery (learning/remembering) of specified material.

Many of the structures can fulfill a number of aims simultaneously, depending on how the teacher uses them.

Structures can be mixed and matched, and adapted to the particular pupil group.

By establishing heterogeneous groups of pupils (Kagan Groups), based on a mix of abilities, and by carefully controlling thinking time, talk and accountable responses the structures allow for the maintenance of a climate for learning that promotes:

- social interaction,
- psychological safety
- appropriate emotions
- nourishment of the brain
- effective knowledge processing.

PIES

Kagan's structures are based on four principles:

1. **Positive Interdependence** - is a gain for one a gain for another?
2. **Individual Accountability** - is individual public performance required?
3. **Equal Participation** - how equal is the participation?
4. **Simultaneous Interaction** - what percentage are overtly active at once?

Kagan Structures

1. **Positive interdependence** means a "win-win" condition in which the success of one pupil is linked to the success of others in the class in a positive way. In other words, pupils need each other to succeed, and a gain for one pupil is a gain for others. In this kind of relationship, pupils care about each other and help each other so that all learn.

Positive interdependence is built into Kagan structures in that the activity cannot be successful unless the pupils cooperate - the pupils need each other for success. They cannot do the activity alone but if they cooperate well the result will be success.

Research has found positive interdependence to create better results in terms of learner achievement, human relationships, and psychological health, versus negative interdependence or no interdependence.

Johnson and Johnson (1989).

2. **Individual accountability** means a procedure to check that each participant individually contributes a fair share to a group effort. It also means there is a way to evaluate the quality of the effort/result of each member.
3. **Equal participation** means that all pupils receive the same chances and incentives to be involved in class. Kagan's approach uses careful task design, rewards, and accountability procedures to encourage equal participation.
4. **Simultaneous interaction** means that all students are actively engaged at the same time during the class.

In Kagan's view, these four characteristics (PIES) must be built into the activity itself (i.e. be part of the task design).

The principle is that any learning activity that lacks one or more of these key features is not cooperative learning, it is group work. The significance of this is that research has shown that cooperative learning is more effective than direct instruction; but unstructured group work is less effective than both.

All teachers and teaching assistants are trained in the use of Kagan Structures by Gavin Clowes and Elaine Brown of T2T (UK).

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