

From the editors

Greetings,

Welcome to the final issue of our 19th volume. We are pleased to present a special issue on Cooperative Learning in Language Education, edited by and Kumiko Fushino and George M Jacobs.

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Best wishes,

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Introduction to the Special Issue

by Kumiko Fushino and George M Jacobs

Thank you very much for stepping inside this *TESL-EJ* Special Issue on Cooperative Learning in Language Education. Bringing out this special issue required a great deal of cooperation, first and foremost from *TESL-EJ*'s expert editorial team who patiently guided us through the process. We also want to thank Peter Gobel and Yael Sharan who served as reviewers for this issue. All the articles you will be reading benefited from their scholarly insights.

The two of us, Kumiko and George, have been cooperating for cooperative learning for almost 15 years. That cooperation has included a range of projects such as books, articles, courses, workshops, conferences, and membership of the board of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, not to mention personal support and constructive disagreements.

Cooperation, especially in language learning, works best when students become fluent with specific expressions needed to maximize the value of peer interactions. An example of such an expression would be, "Please explain why." In this special issue of *TESL-EJ*, the opening paper, "Useful Expressions for Implementing Cooperative Learning in English Classrooms," Machiko Asakawa, Ayako Kanamaru, Taron Plaza, and Chie Shiramizu report on how they assisted their students in mastering such expressions.

Another look at the student-student interaction can be found in “Students’ Perceptions of Reading through Peer Questioning in Cooperative Learning,” by Makiko Tanaka and Edward Sanchez. In too many classes, most or all of the questions are asked by teachers, with student questions too often limited to procedural matters, such as “When is the test?”

Teachers also ask themselves and their colleagues questions. “What Do We Want Small Group Activities For?” was the question asked by the authors of the next article in this special issues, “Voices from EFL Teachers in Japan,” by Yoshitaka Kato. Perhaps this article will spark reflection by TESL-EJ readers.

Many new developments provide reasons for teachers to use cooperative learning. In “Four Social Neuroscience On-Going Requisites to Effective Collaborative Learning and the Altruistic Turn,” Tim Murphey shares exciting insights from neuroscience that help teachers see why and how to use cooperative learning.

The previous TESL-EJ special issue was on teacher reflection, edited by Thomas S.C. Farrell. Tom returns this special issue with an article linking teacher reflection and cooperative learning: “Practicing What We Preach: Teacher Reflection Groups on Cooperative Learning,” co-authored by George M Jacobs.

Last but not least, George M Jacobs, Harumi Kimura, and Nicolas Greliche return us to the topic of the special issue’s first article, how students interact with groupmates, except rather than focusing on useful expressions, as was done by Asakawa, Kanamaru, Plaza, and Shiramizu, the article by Jacobs, Kimura, and Greliche – “Incivility among Group Mates in English Classes at a Japanese Women’s University” – reports a study of what students say and do that might negatively impact groups.

In conclusion, as highlighted in many of the articles in this special issue, a great deal of research and theory support the use of cooperative learning to promote cognitive and affective benefits for students. Furthermore, a look at the news headlines highlights the desperate need for humans to cooperate at all levels of society for the benefit of people worldwide. This need exists today in 2016 CE, but it also existed in 1016 CE and in 2016 BCE.

What makes the need for cooperation especially urgent now is that in 2016 CE, there are almost 7.5 billion humans, and our impact has grown to the point that some scientists claim our planet has entered a new geologic age, the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2011), an age characterized by the enormous effect that humans have on the Earth. Unfortunately, this effect is too often negative. Therefore, we urge educators to promote cooperation among students and among educators, both to aid learning and to promote cooperation on a wider scale for the benefit of our species and the benefit of the species with whom we share the planet.

References

Steffen, W., Persson, Å., Deutsch, L., Zalasiewicz, J., Williams, M., Richardson, K., ... & Svedin, U. (2011). The Anthropocene: From global change to planetary stewardship. *Ambio*, 40(7), 739-761. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0185-x>