

## Classbuilding (Key 4)

**Cooperative Learning works best in a caring classroom community.**

We create this caring and cooperative context through Classbuilding. **Simply put** Classbuilding trains the students to ‘want to’ and ‘to be able to’ support, trust, and be enthusiastic about interacting with their classmates.

Classbuilding provides mutual support among all students in a class and creates a positive context for learning. Although students spend most of their time in teams in the cooperative classroom, it is important they see themselves as part of a larger group – the class – not just members of a small team.

Some Kagan Structures are particularly good for Classbuilding; Corners, Fact-or-Fiction, Find Someone Who, Formations, Inside-Outside Circle, Mix-Freeze-Group, Mix-Pair-Share, Similarity Groups to mention just a few. (Over the coming weeks I will add details, structure steps, and content ideas on these and other structures to the staff Uniservity Cooperative Learning web pages ..watch this space!). For a structure to be a “classbuilding” structure, students must interact with classmates.



This means getting up out of their seats and working with classmates beyond their immediate team. Getting up, moving about the classroom, and interacting with classmates is usually a fun time. It is a good idea to do regular Classbuilding with content that is non-academic, for instance we could use Mix-Pair-Share, students pairing up multiple times with classmates and discussing, “What was a fun thing you did this weekend?”, students ‘light up’ when they get the opportunity to discuss their interests, get to know their classmates better, and have fun. **However it is fun with a purpose.**

Structures are content free, so structures that work well for Classbuilding work equally well for academic content. Students could just as easily during the Mix-Pair-Share discuss the most/least helpful parts of the activity they just completed. Even when we use academic content there is still positive social interaction with classmates, and an element of fun, by virtue of the structure steps. Because of the content free nature of

structures you can easily add new content into the Classbuilding structures to make literally thousands and thousands of new Classbuilding activities.

The five aims of Classbuilding:

### **1. Getting Acquainted,**

All too often, students in the same class don't get to know each other. True, they may know each other's names and they may know them by their stereotypes, but do they truly know each other as people? An essential part of Classbuilding is for students to get to know each other. Interaction with classmates breaks down superficial barriers that divide classmates into various cliques. By simply taking some time for students to get to know each other, share their likes and dislikes, and interact on a friendly basis. Students discover that their classmates are just like them- real people with real feelings. They are more prepared to be empathetic and less capable of abusive behaviour. When students feel they are known by others, we meet their basic needs to feel important, to be liked, and to belong. Students less often feel the weight of social isolation and social ostracism that causes students to withdraw, drop out, or lash out violently.

### **2. Class Identity**

The goal of a class identity is to feel that their class is unique. This is not just any class. This our class! Students feel they play an important role in class and are proud members.

### **3. Mutual Support**

Through mutual support activities, students come to feel they can depend on their classmates. Our class gained a sense of mutual support when members feel the classroom is a caring community.

### **4. Valuing Differences**

Students need to know that they are not only known by others in the classroom, but also they are valued and appreciated. The norm in a strong class is that "We accept and appreciate those with values and characteristics different from our own." Through activities in which differences are understood and appreciated, we come to "celebrate diversity". Our class is richer because we have students taking different stances, and have multiple perspectives and insights to issues.

### **5. Developing Synergy**

Synergy is energy released through synthesis. All of us interacting produce and learn far more than the sum of what we all can produce and learn working alone. Students need to feel the power of synergy if they are to enter fully into the cooperative process.

As you will see in the next section, these five aims of classbuilding are parallel to the five aims of Teambuilding, but at the team level. The team can be thought of as a microcosm of the class. We have the same goals for our teams as we do for our class as a whole.

**Classbuilding creates a safe, comfortable place where students like to be and learn.**

**Even if you were never going to use Cooperative Learning, Classbuilding would still be worth the effort.**



## Teambuilding (Key 5)

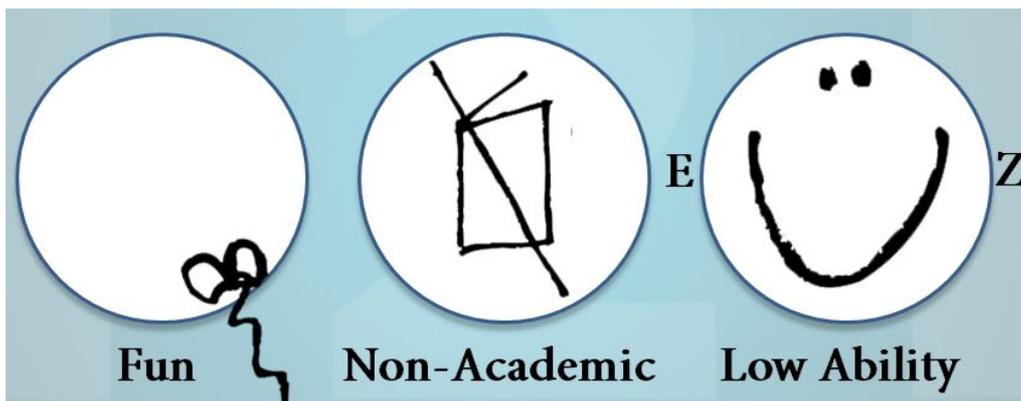
**Through Teambuilding students come to know, like and respect their teammates.** In the process we convert a group of virtual strangers into a powerful learning team.

To create heterogeneous cooperative teams in the classroom, we seat students of different sexes, ability levels, and races at the same team table. Often students find themselves sitting with classmates they would least likely choose as teammates.

How do we get this group of students with different backgrounds and experiences to work together as an effective team? Answer = Teambuilding. Teambuilding is the process of converting a heterogeneous group into a cohesive team. It is the process by which different students come to **know, trust** and **respect** their teammates.

Teambuilding lays the foundation for effective teamwork. The apparent paradox is we take time off academic work to complete extensive teambuilding. The result is that we create enthusiasm, trust, mutual support, which in the long run, lead to more efficient academic work. Wouldn't you rather ask or offer help to someone you know and like?

If there are racial or other tensions among students, teambuilding is a must. To go on with cooperative learning without dealing with interpersonal tensions is like driving your car with flat tyres.



Many Kagan Structures work well for Teambuilding. The criteria for a teambuilding structure is that it is team-based, involves the entire team, and furthers one of the aims of teambuilding. (See below 'The five aims of Teambuilding') Selected Kagan Structures good for Teambuilding; Find-the-Fiction, Match Mine, RoundRobin, RoundTable, Team Interview, Three-Step Interview. (Over the coming weeks I will add details, structure steps, and content ideas on these and other teambuilding structures to the staff Uniservity Cooperative Learning web pages ..watch this space!).

The five aims of Teambuilding:

### **1. Getting Acquainted**

When students are first placed on the same team, they need to feel a sense of comfort with one another. When seated next to a stranger, we all feel a bit apprehensive. Getting acquainted activities help students to get to know their teammates so they no longer feel anxiety. As teamwork progresses, students can get acquainted on a deeper level, resulting in familiarity, acceptance, and friendship.

### **2. Team Identity**

A team forms an identity by defining itself in a unique way such as creating its own name, handshake, or solution to a problem. Successful completion of any team project can enhance the sense of team identity if the team is allowed to complete the project in its own unique way. When students are active in forging their team identity, they feel a solidarity with teammates and belonging to the team.

### **3. Mutual Support**

It is not enough for students to know each other and to feel they are part of a team. The team gains strength as the members feel they can count on each other for support. Any situation of positive interdependence creates the feeling of mutual support as students know they need each other, can depend on each other, and are on the same side.

### **4. Valuing Differences**

Activities that clarify values have several goals. These type of activities demonstrate that different individuals have different values and that there are no right or wrong values; that the values of others are to be understood and respected. Students learn that the different values are to be accepted as enduring individual differences with which the team must work. Successful value clarification activities prepare the students to live in harmony in a diverse society.

### **5. Developing Synergy**

Synergy refers to the increased energy released when individuals are working in cooperation. Because of the synergetic effect, the group product can be better than the product of even the best individual working alone. The sum of the parts interacting is greater than the sum of the parts alone. There are various ways of generating synergy within teams. Synergy is released by tasks that encourage students to build on each other's ideas. Interaction causes stimulation and refinement of ideas.

**Teambuilding is an investment, we invest a little classroom time to meet students needs: to feel known; to feel liked; to feel accepted; to feel a sense of belonging; to be successful.**

**When student's social needs are met, they are free to focus on academic work. Teambuilding is investing in our students and that is never a poor investment.**