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## On the Cover

“Unknown” by Lorelei Olk

Lorelei, who was an eighth grade student at Sayville Middle School in 2008-09, received the first place award in The Essential Elements: Schools-to-Watch Art Contest. This contest invited middle-level students from all STW-designated schools to submit artwork based around a central theme: Middle School Students — Who We Are. Submissions were collected in Spring 2009 and voted on by the participants of Summit<sup>2</sup>, held last August in Albany. The first round of voting produced a three-way tie, which was broken by a second round of voting. Page 6 showcases the two top entries in this contest, followed by a new art contest announcement on page 7.



## The “Dual Objective” Model for Cooperative Learning: Towards Affective AND Cognitive Gains in Middle School

Cindy Kline and Dr. Paul J. Vermette

### Introduction

For the past few years, Ms. Cindy Kline has been teaching Spanish to a very diverse student base at a small Catholic Middle School in Niagara Falls, NY. Having graduated from a teaching program at Niagara University, she was fully aware of the power of Cooperative Learning (Vermette, 1998) to raise academic achievement at the middle level and she was aware of its historical record of improving affective dimensions for youngsters as well. A former trainer in private business, she was also aware of the severe limitations of many young people in the work world and the great difficulty many of them had in coping with life’s challenges after graduation. Thus, she committed to the vision of the “collaborative classroom” and took on the challenge of teaching young teens.

Over the past few years, Kline has developed into an outstanding teacher and a consultant on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) matters around the state. (Partnering with Vermette, they have done several successful NYSMSA/Corning Museum of Glass [CMoG] institutes since 2005 on the topic). At the center of Kline’s teaching approach is the notion of the “Dual Objective” — that is, the practice of actually having two desired and measured outcomes for every teamed task, one from the cognitive world and one from the affective. The model they have created (see Appendix A) allows a realistic recognition of the value of both “process” and “product” as separate and important components of the collaborative activity.

While this article discusses the use of the “Dual Objective” from a middle school standpoint, its success is equally effective at the commencement level as well.

This article takes the format of an interview with Cindy, one in which she articulates her understanding of the approach to CL and offers suggestions to fellow practitioners. Importantly, the notion of the six essential questions of this interview have been drawn from the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005), who suggest that deep understanding, the real goal of any thinking enterprise, can be represented by “six facets of understanding.” These separate and equal facets offer a basis for a powerful assessment tool and are worth further study by the reader. (This interview framework was designed by math teachers Jennifer and Karrie Jones and can be found in a 2008 article by Jones, Jones, Vermette and Kline that is now under review for publication).

### Understanding the Dual Objective Through the Six Facets

1. *Cindy, can you please tell us how the Dual Objective Model actually works in your classes? (Explain)*

Any time that I use a cooperative activity, I automatically follow the Dual Objective Model in Appendix A. Since my teams are semi-permanent (lasting about ten weeks), I clarify the task they are going to do, including reviewing the rubrics that will be used for the various assessments.

The focal point of the model is on the duality of having two components at all times: one for process and another for product. The process component focuses on how the work is completed and how the work impacts the students in the affective domain. The product component, on the other hand, focuses on

accomplishing the task assigned and requires and builds cognitive skills and knowledge.

To excel in this work, a student must demonstrate ability in both domains: she or he must contribute to the product and positively contribute to the team.

I assess both aspects, hence the name Dual Objective: each has literally two objectives, a cognitive one and an affective one. For example, their first day activity is a scavenger hunt, involving identifying peers who connect to a set of Spanish vocabulary that they had learned the previous year (e.g., colors, or days of the week). Students interview each other to complete the requirements of the handout and I assess how they interact with each other. In this activity they are expected to be honest and to treat each other with respect. Evidence of such would be the use of the partner's name, a handshake, saying "gracias" and "de nada" as appropriate, and acquiring answers through conversation, rather than by swapping papers.

I see this as a whole-class "collaborative activity" and it models expectations for small group interactions. I observe the students very carefully throughout this 15-minute activity and give feedback to the whole group about the results, both affective and cognitive.

While the cognitive gains of such an activity are pretty standard (basic conversation practice), the explicit social and emotional expectations (being honest and showing respect) are far less likely to be seen as equally important by many teachers. They are, however *EQUALLY* important and measurable to me!

Both the *Essential Elements of Middle-Level Education* and the New York State Standards call for developing Universal Foundation Skills, which include personal qualities, interpersonal skills and thinking skills. This activity targets all three, as do all of my CL lessons.

Finally, planning for the Dual Objective requires attention to both ENGAGING class-

room techniques (e.g., Multiple Intelligences, Six Facets of Understanding) for product quality, AS WELL AS attention to social and emotional competencies. Originally, I followed Daniel Goleman's (1998) 25 personal and social competencies for affective planning, but since that time, my practice and research have led me to CASEL (the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) and their five core competencies ([www.Casel.org](http://www.Casel.org)). CASEL is the SEL framework that I think with today. My planning tool box for building these CASEL competencies includes interpersonal and intrapersonal (MI) activities, self-reflection assessment and building empathy activities from the Six Facets of Understanding, and Glasser's Choice Theory (see Appendix A).

2. *You have spent much time observing and reflecting on the Dual Objective in operation. Can you tell us a story that will help us get a grasp on its uniqueness and its value? (Interpret)*

Paul, I have two stories that may help the reader grasp the model's power. The first is a story that shows how students may grow into an understanding of the Dual Objective.

Students in three person teams had to complete a complex set of conversational activities that involved the use of select grammar concepts and Spanish vocabulary and keep a tally of their achievements. They were then to summarize their knowledge in written form. When they finished the task, they had to turn in their sheets showing the accomplishments of each. In one team, two boys were called to the office half-way through the class and the lone girl continued to work. She soon afterward turned their sheet showing that all the work had been completed.

However, when Gina turned in the sheet, I commented that it was very good work, but questioned who had completed it since the boys were missing? Gina had not seen the difference

between finishing the task and everyone doing his or her own work (and learning). She had missed the key requirement that EACH ONE had to do his or her own work in order to LEARN...and to demonstrate the desired social and emotional skills. She could not do the learning or have the social experience for the missing boys.

The second story involves a challenge posed by a concerned parent when his daughter had her teamwork contributions evaluated for the first time. He thought that the responsibility for developing social and emotional skills resided with the parents and in the home. He thought that he had done a good job in this area and that my efforts were not necessary. However, upon discussion, together we realized that teaching and assessing students' skills in these key areas DO have a distinct place in the classroom and are best done as a collaboration between home and school. We both reach the same parts of the child in different ways. (Today, ASCD is concentrating on the whole child: and the dad eventually agreed with me that such an approach was appropriate, especially for the Middle Level. See Armstrong (2005) for more on this viewpoint.

By the way, I should also tell you about the first time that my students made up the CL team-evaluation rubric for their own work. The best evaluation criteria were from the most heterogeneous classes who were very clear on what could go wrong and what was needed for a good partner. The students making their own rubric meant that they owned the need for social-emotional skills, and that they appreciated the chance to examine their own real experiences. However, that would be another story...

3. *The Dual Objective, with its concern for social and emotional assessment, seems perfect for Spanish which has a full Standard for "understanding other cultures." Do you think it could also be widely used in*

*other core disciplines in Middle School? (Apply)*

The Dual Objective could be used anytime and in any subject where a teacher uses a collaborative task for the students. This includes typical "left-brain" tasks such as those found in Math and Science. Students actually use the skills of persevering, seeking help when needed, asking and responding to questions, using school resources, communicating effectively with others, controlling one's emotions, and making logical and reasoned decisions when they do these tasks properly. Simply put, the Dual Objective has complete applicability in K-12 schooling.

4. *The Dual Objective seems to have evolved from two distinct fields: Cooperative Learning and Social-Emotional Learning. How does it fit in the "big picture" offered by those two approaches to education? (Analyze in Perspective)*

CL has always involved two kinds of outcomes: cognitive gain, as is typically done in any instruction, and affective outcomes. Previously, CL included social skill gain, as in the work of Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, T.R. (2009). However, many times teachers leave attention to the affective out of their feedback loop...and that is a fatal error.

The difference between that older approach and ours is in the assessment piece: in the Dual Objective, the teacher is deliberately attending to the actions of the students as they collaborate. That is, the teacher collects evidence of each student's actions AS they actually interact. (This is a real-world phenomenon).

Assessing "process" requires a clear SEL vision...because those are the very skills being used in the lesson and being developed by the interaction.

Truly, the Dual Objective is of both worlds: cognitive and affective. I use a student-generated rubric for assessing and organizing feed-

back about these interactions. Students fill in the form for themselves and for their partners. I then tabulate their “team contribution score” and discuss this with them in either groups or as individuals.

5. *I am very curious about what others say about the Dual Objective. Does everybody involved like it? What do students, parents, colleagues and administrators think about it? (Empathy)*

I certainly have had many discussions about this very thing. In the space allotted here, I can provide generalizations that will hopefully yield additional interest on your part.

Administrators generally buy into the concept, based on its obvious merits in developing the whole child. I thank both of my administrators in supporting such.

To colleagues, it’s a bittersweet concept. It requires for many a change in their teaching culture. For example, it may not fit “comfortably” with how they see their role (as many view themselves strictly as experts in content). This shift in frame of mind does not come about without serious reflection on practice and hopefulness for the future.

Oddly enough, in my experience, parents are the most difficult lot to convince. Some fear that the SEL aspects of the dual objective are unworthy of explicit teaching, are their personal responsibility as parents, or cannot be subject to measurement. We see ourselves as partners with parents, each able to reach and develop the child in different ways. Teachers choosing to experiment with the dual objective must consider their relationships with parents as they begin their journey together.

Lastly, students sometimes react as mirrors of their parents, echoing their concerns or doubts. Most, however, either understand it, or simply accept it as part of their classroom experience. Those who are very astute recognize the value of developing these life skills as

preparation for a successful future and embrace the opportunities.

All students understand that BOTH product and process in our collaborative classroom are equally important.

6. *Cindy, you have been doing CL since you started teaching. Can you tell us how and why you developed the Dual Objective structure and how you assessed the changes you were making in your practice? What do you still wonder about? (Reflective Self-Assessment)*

Let me start by telling you a brief story about the rubric I mentioned above. The rubric we use to evaluate our team interactions (affective gains) was created by my seventh grade students. It came about as the result of ongoing classroom discussions regarding what it takes to be successful when working with others. Not only was it the students’ own work, but it was better than those rubrics available in published materials at the time. Their ownership in this process created in my students a more thorough understanding of how important individual contributions are in team situations and provided them a vehicle through which they may candidly comment on the behaviors of themselves and those in their group. I continue this practice today with consecutive seventh grade classes. Remarkably, without seeing the rubric as sixth graders, each seventh grade class comes up with the same general criteria for successful group interactions. Both self-awareness and empathy are outcomes of this criteria-development process. These are commonly referred to as competencies (learnable skills) in SEL circles.

After 20 years in business I entered the teaching field knowing that these SEL competencies were vital for success in life. These have traditionally been acquired through family socialization. Given the stark condition of our contemporary society, this obligation now clearly falls on our shoulders as educators. The

question in my mind remains...how will we make this our reality?

### In Closing

Cooperative Learning is no longer an innovation; it offers a set of strategies that are effective and easy to use. It turns diversities into key strengths. It is a key part of a gifted teacher's tool bag.

SEL is quickly becoming a recognized approach to helping every teen grow as a person and take ownership of his or her education (Elias and Arnold, 2006). Using SEL strategies takes advantage of the Natural Differentiation process (Vermette & Kline, 2008) that teachers seem to desire, enabling them to reach all students.

By integrating these two dimensions of education, Cindy Kline seems to have created an instructional process that allows all aspects of the student to develop simultaneously, offering many avenues to success and making education relevant and meaningful. By turning her classroom into a life laboratory, students in Kline's classes learn the Spanish language and culture, learn about themselves and learn about how to work effectively with others.

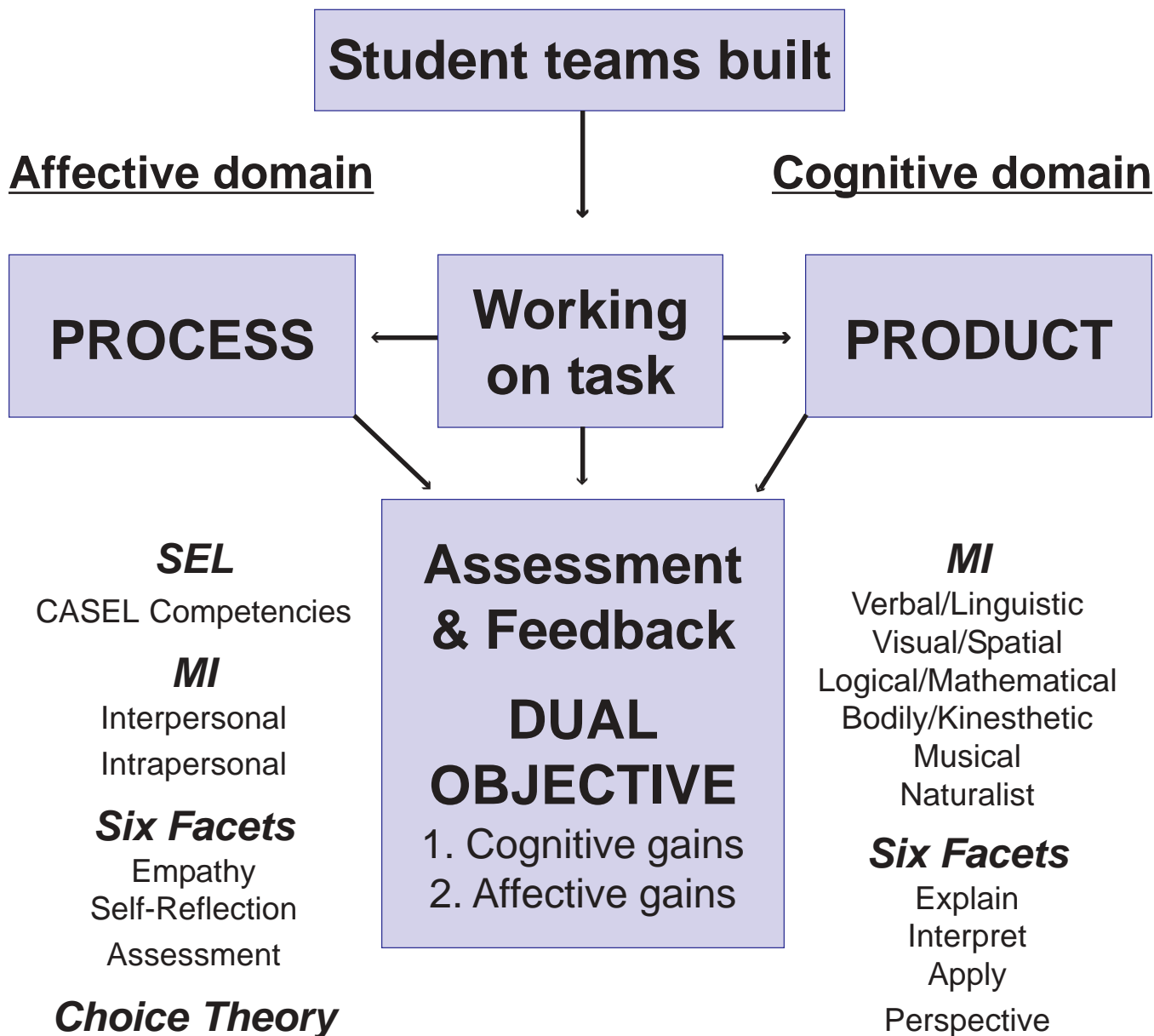
Some say school is preparation for life; Kline, like Dewey, thinks school IS life, especially at the middle level (again, see Armstrong, 2005). In her class, students find that doing schoolwork is their job, communicating respectfully with others is their responsibility, and understanding themselves helps them become better people.

The Dual Objective approach allows Señora Kline to concentrate on both realms of learning and helps her structure her assessments of student growth "systematically and gradually" (Elias and Arnold, 2006). The burden on teachers at the Middle Level is to meet academic standards and help youngsters grow holistically...and this is one well-developed way to tackle that responsibility.

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## Cooperative Learning and the “dual objective” approach



(Vermette & Kline 2009)