The three most common types of classroom organization education essay

Education

There are three different categories of school learning environments which are competitive, individualistic, or cooperative (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec 1994). Competitive classrooms are based on the concept of ranking. Summative assessment is used to differentiate among individual students. Only one student can be #1, the ‘ every man for themselves’ approach. In the individualistic classroom, standards for success are clearly communicated. The success or failure of any one student depends on that student’s individual actions. Using a point scale system of grading several people can be ranked at the top with a 4. 0 GPA and share the top ranking. In the cooperative classroom everyone is linking together. Accomplishment encompasses the whole class, where each student’s success or failure is tied to their classmates’. The cooperative learning environment does not abandon individual learning, instead appears to enrich the process (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Slavin, 1995, 1996). Cooperative learning is perhaps the most researched and most misunderstood teaching methodology in the past 30 years (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Ellis & Fouts, 1997; Slavin, 1995). Since the research literature clearly indicates the efficacy of cooperative learning for student learning and development, it is one of the most touted teaching methods. Some administrators and teachers, feeling professional pressure to use this research-based teaching strategy, try to implement cooperative learning without adequate training. As a result, students are given " group work" assignment labeled as cooperative learning. These students, teachers, and administrators then grow dissatisfied with the results of their " cooperative learning" experience. These individuals are often " inoculated" against

cooperative learning on the basis of their exposure to group work. Perhaps you are one of those individuals who was turned off to cooperative learning by group work assignments that fell on your shoulders to complete. Cooperative learning is defined in terms of necessary classroom conditions and essential elements, which can be thought of as principles of interaction (Kagan, 1997; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubek, 1994; Slavin, 1996). The classroom conditions necessary to implement Cooperative Learning include organizing your classroom for teams and organizing your students in teams. The essential elements of cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994) are positive interdependence, individual accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face interaction. As with other teaching strategies, you assess your implementation by reflecting on the critical attributes. If one or more of the critical attributes are missing in your lesson, then you are not using cooperative learning but group work. The first principle of cooperative learning is " positive interdependence." Positive interdependence refers to the condition that exists when team members need to work together in order to be successful in completing assigned learning tasks. If positive interdependence is present, it will not be easier or more meaningful for individuals to complete the task alone. While it is possible for cooperative learning to achieve a minimal level of functioning with weaknesses in teams, group processing, or social skills, it will fail without positive interdependence and individual accountability (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Ellis & Fouts, 1997; Slavin, 1996). Positive interdependence can be designed into cooperative learning lessons through a variety of techniques. " Resource interdependence" – Resource

interdependence refers to the practice of limiting the resources available to a team in order to heighten the need for collaboration. " Role interdependence" – Another technique that helps team members need one another is assigning roles. This technique works on the concept of ‘ division of labor.’ " Reward interdependence" – While some educational thought-shapers rage against the use of " rewards" in the classroom (Kohn, 1999), many teachers find that in the real world of the classroom rewards are sometimes very practical tools. " Goal interdependence" – Having everyone on a team working for the same end is the concept at the base of " goal interdependence." This can be accomplished by assigning each team one product to complete and submit for grading. Having each team member complete individual components of a project that combine together to form a final team project can also foster goal interdependence.----Perhaps one of the greatest concerns expressed by teachers and parents who are unfamiliar with cooperative learning and its potential for helping children learn is that individual student’s learning will suffer. It is true that this happens in group-work assignments. Generally one person carries the group and learns a lot (and experiences high levels of stress) while the other group members ride along on his back. The idea behind " individual accountability" is that each individual in a cooperative team must demonstrate her mastery of the assigned learning and document his contribution to the team. Another way to view individual accountability is through the idea of " equal participation." In true cooperative learning, every individual contributes equally to team success. There are no " hitchhikers," those that let the group carry them along for a free ride. And there are no " chauffeurs," those that try to drive

the team where they want to go. Teachers must take specific actions to ensure that there are no hitchhikers or chauffeurs on a cooperative team. Until students have been taught how to function in a collaborative fashion, hitchhiking and chauffeuring come as natural behaviors.----Group processing means having cooperative team members think about and then discuss how they are interacting and functioning as a group. This is often referred to as reflection, debriefing, or processing. The need for group processing is not uniformly emphasized across different approaches to cooperative learning. However, if we expect students to take the process of cooperating seriously and work at getting better at it, group processing becomes imperative. In the cognitive domain, scholars do not question the need for meta-cognition – the need to think about our thinking processes. In fact, many of the well-researched strategies include a phase of the lesson where students engage in meta-cognition. The prefix ‘ meta-‘ expresses the meaning of a higher level of development. That is, individuals move beyond merely ‘ thinking’ to develop their ability to ‘ think about how they think.’ This allows persons to increase their repertoire of thinking skills by explaining their thinking processes and listening to a description of how others approached the same problem. It is just as important in the interpersonal domain of learning that students engage in meta-interaction, or a higher level of interaction. The meta-interaction process focuses on group processes and functioning. The group moves their level of interaction beyond the simple completion of classroom tasks to work on improving their cooperative functioning and group processes. This is the key to helping students learn how to thrive as a team member. Since humans are naturally social beings, we often assume

all people know how to work together. But we are naturally egocentric and have typically been socialized to be competitive and individualistic. The tendency toward competition and individualism exists in schools as well as in the larger society. We tend to emphasize cooperation in " non-academic" areas such as with sports teams, drama productions, choirs, bands, and so on. But in " academic" classes, working with peers is often labeled " cheating." As a result of natural tendencies toward egocentricism and our socialization toward independent action, most students (and many adults) have not developed the skills needed to be functional members of productive groups. It then becomes the responsibility of the teacher to teach these skills explicitly as a part of the classroom curriculum.----Face to face interaction of the students is literal. When students are engaged in face to face they are in close proximity to each other, close enough to share a common set of materials and to use group voices. Group voices are speech patterns that can only be understood by group members. This helps the groups focus only on the conversation of their group and not be distracted by large across room chatter. A cooperative structure is " a content-free way of organizing the interaction of individuals in a classroom" (Kagan, 1997, p. 5: 1). Structures present a series of steps or actions that organize and focus classroom social interaction on assigned content knowledge. Structures are content-free since any single structure can be used with any subject area material. Kagan’s presentation of the structural approach is ideal for most teachers, beginning or experienced, as it allows incremental implementation of cooperative learning. Teachers can add as few or as many structures to their daily routine as they choose. As their ability and comfort levels

increase, so does their use of cooperative learning. In the structural approach, content is added to a cooperative structure to create a cooperative learning activity. By design, structures automatically include the two most important elements of cooperative learning, positive interdependence and individual accountability, as well as Face2Face Interaction. Group Processing and Social Interaction Skills can then be included in the lesson plan. Table 1 presents an assessment of how well each structure presented in this article addresses the essential elements of cooperative learning. Cooperative structures have been developed by many different scholars (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994; Kagan, 1997; Slavin, 1995). Kagan (1997) has compiled the largest single collection of cooperative structures. In this article I the presentation to eight simple structures. Many other structures exist and range from simple to quite complex. Teachers wishing to add additional cooperative structures to their personal repertoire should seek specialized training in cooperative learning and consult the resources at the end of the article. One of the easiest cooperative structures to use is Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, cited in Kagan, 1997). Think-Pair-Share begins with the teacher posing a question and allowing individuals " think time." Then each student pairs with one of their teammates to discuss their responses to the question. Then the teacher uses a technique such as Random Call to ask individuals to share their response or their partner’s response with the entire class. An added advantage of this strategy is that it has several variations including Think-Pair-Square, Think-Square-Share, and Write-Pair-Share. To understand the Think-Pair-Share family of structures it is important to understand the language used to name

the structures. All of these structures begin with a question posed by the teacher, either orally or in writing. This is followed by " think time" which sometimes requires students to " Write" their response. " Pair" means that students discuss their responses with one other team member. " Square" describes a whole team discussing their responses, while " Share" refers to sharing responses with whole class. RoundTable (Kagan, 1997) is another useful cooperative learning structure with multiple variations. RoundTable begins with the teacher posing a question to the class. The teacher informs the teams which person (designated by role or number) will begin the team response. Then response to the question begins simultaneously in all groups. The first student in each team writes a response to the question on a sheet of paper then passes the paper to the next student. The second student writes a response and passes to the next student. This process continues around the table at least once until all persons have responded. For some questions, you may want the answer sheet to go around the table only once. For other questions you may want to have the process go around the table several times with students giving multiple responses. Typically after the RoundTable is finished the teacher has teams to share their responses with at least one other team or the whole class. It is common to assign a follow-up activity based on the list generated during the RoundTable. Elliot Aronson (Kagan, 1997; Slavin, 1995) first developed the Jigsaw structure. The Jigsaw concept is based on the division of labor idea. Each cooperative team member is responsible for mastering a unique portion of content and presenting that content to her teammates. Since its original development, cooperative teachers have created multiple variations of Jigsaw. In this text

we use " Jigsaw" to refer to the simplest level of jigsaw which is accomplished within a single team (Kagan, 1997). To teach with the Jigsaw structure, the teacher first prepares the information needed by the students. This could be dividing a chapter of a text into four roughly equally portions, finding additional material, or creating original material on a topic. If you are creating handouts for students, label these #1, #2, #3, and #4. Next the teacher assigns or distributes the information to the groups. In each cooperative group, each individual is given assigned one part of the information. Each individual then begins working on his information. Each student reads his information, decides on the most important details from this information, and decides the best way to teach this information to his group. Next the students take turns teaching their information to the cooperative group. Each student has an assigned amount of time to present. Jigsaw concludes with an assessment of learning. This could be done with a traditional quiz or an alternative assessment. It is important to include group processing in the assessment of Jigsaw. Cooperative learning works because humans are social beings. This assumption is supported by naturalistic observation. In fact, we have developed special terms to describe persons who do not fit the " natural" mode: hermit, recluse, loner. Interacting with others, discussing ideas with others, and comparing and contrasting our ideas with those held by others all contribute to learning. Cooperative Learning is based upon the premise that all learning is socially derived. The theory of social interdependence, developed by Morton Deutsch in the 1940s and 1950s, serves as the foundation for cooperative learning (Ellis & Fouts, 1997). Deutch’s theory states that social interdependence occurs when

members of a group affect the attainment of group member’s goals. Deutch’s work was influenced by the Kurt Lewin’s field theory – the " synergy" idea that a group is more than the sum of its individual members. Lewin’s work had in turn been influenced by Gestalt theory arising from Austria in the late 1800s. The social learning theories presented by Vygotski have helped educators since Deutsch’s time refine their understanding of Cooperative Learning (Ellis & Fouts, 1997). Cooperative Learning also promotes intrinsic motivation in students as it meets their natural need for interaction, for belonging, for power and control, and it provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate competence (Maslow, 1968; Kagan, 1997; Slavin, 1995). In our increasingly more complex contemporary society, problems seem to be multiplying (Kagan, 1997; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994; and Kohn, 1999). Our health and our peaceful survival depend on educating ourselves to get along well in social groups. Being able to keep and to advance in our jobs or professions depends, to a great extent, upon our ability to work collaboratively (Secretary’s Commission on . . ., 1991; Kagan, 1997; Goleman, 1995). Cooperative learning strategies and structures are designed to take advantage of our social nature and to help us learn more powerfully. The research speaks for itself, for cooperative Learning has perhaps the largest research base of any current educational innovation, with research available at three levels: theoretical, application, and evaluation (Ellis & Fouts, 1997; Friedman & Fisher, 1998). Research documents the efficacy of Cooperative Learning to produce outcomes in three domains: cognitive, affective, and interpersonal. In a foundational study (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson,

& Skon, 1981) Cooperative Learning was compared to intergroup competition, individual competition, and individual work. No difference in outcomes was found for cooperative learning when compared to cooperative groups competing against one another. However, when comparing cooperative learning with two forms of individual work the effect size was . 78. That would translate into a 28 percentile test-score gain (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). In his meta-analysis of research on cooperative learning, Slavin (1996) identified positive interdependence and individual accountability as the two factors consistently present in studies which documents significant positive learning effects. He also argues that there is research-based evidence that additional benefit may be gained by structuring group interactions during cooperative learning. Slavin (1995) also reports that positive results for cooperative learning are consistent across all grade levels from 2-12, all curriculum areas, all school types, and all students. Cooperative learning has been shown to increase student self esteem, group relations, acceptances of at-risk students, attitudes toward school, and collaborative ability. Cooperative Learning has also been shown to promote the development of higher-level problem solving abilities.