

# Coopertative learning



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Cooperative learning is a teaching method used by educators in all grade levels, in all areas of curriculum, and there are many different ways that cooperative learning can be applied in the classroom. The use of cooperative learning centralizes on the goal of getting students to understand the material presented. Cooperative learning allows students to communicate their ideas with each other, brainstorm responses or ideas, and work together to solve problems.

The importance of students becoming more involved with the learning process has been emphasized and needs to be implemented in classrooms around the globe (Ross, Seaborn, & Wilson, 2002). Multiple studies have been conducted on student-lead learning groups and the results are supportive of cooperative learning. “ Research on cooperative learning is one of the greatest success stories in the history of educational research” (Slavin R. E. , Comprehensive approaches to cooperative learning, 1991).

The enthusiasm for cooperative learning is widespread and this paper will explore the history and methods of cooperative learning. The strategy of cooperative learning was developed to reduce competition in American schools (Knowles, 1971). Knowles explains that in 1959 James Coleman sought to reduce competition in American schools, which he deemed to be a negative component to the education system (1971). Coleman conducted a two-year study of students at nine Midwest high schools and developed what he called a “ climate of values” for the “ adolescent society” in which he conducted his study.

Based on his findings and research, Coleman suggested that instead of encouraging competition in a classroom setting, which he stated he felt impedes the process of education, schools should introduce a more cooperative approach to instruction (Knowles, 1971). Many researchers have since elaborated on the work of James Coleman. Currently, some of the most published researchers in the field are as follows: Dr. Robert Slavin, Dr. Spencer Kagan, David and Roger Johnson. Each of these researchers has developed theories and strategies that can be used to effectively implement cooperative learning. Dr. Robert Slavin suggests cooperative learning for enhancing student achievement focuses on two important elements: group goals and individual accountability (Slavin R. E. , Synthesis of research on cooperative learning, 1991).

Dr. Slavin reported that when group goals and individual accountability are used, achievement effects of cooperative learning are consistently positive (Slavin R. E. , Synthesis of research on cooperative learning, 1991). Dr. Slavin noted that positive results from the implementation of cooperative learning could be found at all grade levels, in all major subjects, and in rural, urban and suburban schools (Slavin R. E. , Synthesis of research on cooperative learning, 1991). Dr. Slavin goes on to state that the effects of cooperative education are equally positive for all levels of achievers (Slavin R. E. , Synthesis of research on cooperative learning, 1991). It is also important to mention that Dr. Slavin has found that the positive effects of cooperative learning have been found in areas such as the following: self-esteem, intergroup relations, acceptance of accountability, handicapped

students, attitudes toward school and the ability to work cooperatively (Slavin R. E. , Synthesis of research on cooperative learning, 1991).

Dr. Spencer Kagan's model of cooperative learning advocates for two basic principles. Dr. Kagan states, " The world is not just competitive and in some important respects is becoming less so; I do not advocate exclusive use of cooperative learning methods, but rather a healthy balance of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic classroom structures to prepare students for the full range of social situations" (Kagan, 1999). Dr. Kagan's structures stress positive interpersonal peer relationships, equality, self-esteem and achievement. Dr. Kagan reported that cooperative learning teaches empathy and an understanding of those who are different from oneself by building ethnic relation between students. In addition, Dr. Kagan has credited cooperative learning with increasing students' higher level thinking skills (Kagan, 1999). Dr. Kagan stresses his ideas by stating, " At an accelerating rate we move into a rapidly changing information-based, high-technology, and interdependent economy.

Along with the traditional role of providing students with basic skills and information, increasingly schools must produce students capable of higher-level thinking skills, communicationskills, and social skills" (Kagan, 1999). David and Roger Johnson have identified five basic elements of cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson state these pillars of cooperative learning to be the following: individual accountability, positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999).

Johnson and Johnson have reported that it is critical for teachers to understand the five basic elements of cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson state that understanding and developing the five elements, "... allows teachers to (a) adapt cooperative learning to their unique circumstances, needs, and students, (b) fine tune their use of cooperative learning, and (c) prevent and solve problems students have in working together (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999). Johnson and Johnson also stress that cooperative learning ensures all students are meaningfully and actively involved in learning, which will limit disruptive, off-task behaviors in the classroom. Cooperative learning is thought of as a versatile method of instruction that can be used in a variety of ways. Cooperative learning groups can be implemented to teach specific topic, to ensure knowledge and comprehension of information presented, or to provide long-term support for academic process (Slavin & Madden, 2001).

Formal cooperative learning groups are created to achieve a specific purpose, have fixed members and can have duration of one class period or several weeks. Johnson and Johnson describe formal cooperative learning groups as consisting of students working together to achieve a shared learning goal (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999). Informal cooperative learning groups are typically temporary and do not have fixed members.

Johnson and Johnson state that, " During a lecture, demonstration, or film, informal cooperative learning can be used to (a) focus student attention on the material being learned, (b) set a mood conducive to learning, (c) help set expectations as to what will be covered in a class session, (d) ensure that

students cognitively process material being taught, and (e) provide closure to an instructional session. " (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999). Cooperative based groups are long term, heterogeneous, and consist of three to four members.

Johnson and Johnson describe cooperative based groups as base groups. Johnson and Johnson state, " Base groups give the support, encouragement, and assistance each member needs to make academic progress and develop cognitively and socially in healthy ways. Base groups meet daily in elementary school and twice a week in secondary school. They are permanent and provide the long-term caring peer relationships necessary to influence members consistently to work hard in school (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999). In order for these types of cooperative learning group to be successful, it is essential for the five basic elements identified by Johnson and Johnson to be included. The basic elements are often referenced by the acronym " PIGS FACE". If these elements are not incorporated then cooperative learning is not taking place. The five basic elements are outlined below with a description following each term. Positive interdependence is the perception gains that of individuals or groups are linked, so that one cannot succeed unless everyone is successful (Kagan, 1999) (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999).

Individual accountability exists when each individual group member is assessed and results are given back to the student and the group. Individual accountability tests for understanding from individuals and prevents one member of the group from performing all the work (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999). Group processing exists when

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group members converse on the group achievement and individual achievement of goals. Group processing allows students to work through and difficulties relating to each other or the achievement of the group (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999).

Social skills are the skills cooperative education groups need to develop to effectively work together and maintain the group (Slavin & Madden, 2001). It fosters the growth of social skills that are needed to succeed in the classroom, workplace and community in individuals that are socially unskilled (Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, & Brown, 2010). Face-to-face promotive interaction promotes each group member's success through helping, assisting, supporting, and encouraging each member to be successful (Johnson & Johnson, Making cooperative learning work, 1999).

Once the five basic elements of cooperative learning have been addressed, the teacher can implement cooperative learning strategies in the classroom. There are wide varieties of cooperative learning strategies and a few are described below. Think-Pair-Share as described by Dr. Slavin, " This is a four-step discussion strategy that incorporates wait time and aspects of cooperative learning. Students and teachers learn to listen while a question is posed, think of a response, pair with a neighbor to discuss responses, and share their responses with the whole class. (Slavin R. E. , Comprehensive approaches to cooperative learning, 1991). Jigsaw as described by Dr. Kagan, " Students are divided into competency groups of four to six students, each of which is given a list of subtopics to research.

Individual members of each group then break off to work with the “ experts” from other groups, researching a part of the material being studied, after which they return to their starting body in the role of instructor for their subcategory. (Kagan, 1999) Student Team Achievement Divisions is a teaching method that is made up of five major components including a whole group presentation, student practice teams, quizzes on the presented information, setting goals for improved achievement levels, and team recognition based on performance (Slavin R. E. , Comprehensive approaches to cooperative learning, 1991). Roundtable is a strategy that can be used for brainstorming, reviewing or practicing while fostering teambuilding. There are two variations of roundtable that a teacher and use in the classroom.

In sequential form, students are in groups of three or more with one-piece of paper and one writing instrument. The teacher poses a question that can have multiple answers. Students take turns writing their answer on the paper and passing the paper around the group. When time is called, the group with the most answers listed is recognized. In simultaneous form each student starts with a piece of paper, writes an answer and passes the paper, so multiple papers are being passed at once (Kagan, 1999). The three-stepinterviewis a structured group activity.

Students take turns being the interviewer and interviewee. Pairs then join to form groups of four. Students take turns introducing their partners and share what they learned from their partners (Kagan, 1999). Although aforementioned strategies are imperially based, there is a discussion-taking place about the value of cooperative learning. Most educators agree that cooperative learning celebrates diversity by allowing students to work with

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all types of people and allows students to acknowledge individual differences (Ross, Seaborn, & Wilson, 2002).

Research has shown that cooperative learning can benefit student's interpersonal development and provide more opportunities for personal feedback (Ross, Seaborn, & Wilson, 2002). In addition, researchers have found that cooperative learning actively engages students in learning and there is a variety of methods available for teachers to use (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis, 2000). Some critics of cooperative learning suggest that group work is an avoidance of teaching.

They stress that cooperative learning places the burden of being responsible for each other's learning on group members (Ross, Seaborn, & Wilson, 2002). Some research has shown that lower achieving students could potentially fall behind due to a passive nature or lack of self-confidence in the group. If high achieving students dominate group activities and discussions, lower achieving students might feel uncomfortable and isolated from the group, which could lead to the learning opportunity passing by them (Ross, Seaborn, & Wilson, 2002).

Johnson, Johnson and Stanne summarize the research on cooperative learning in this way, " Knowing that cooperative learning can significantly increase student achievement when properly implemented does not mean, however, that all operationalizations of cooperative will be effective or that all operationalizations will be equally effective. " (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis, 2000) In conclusion,

cooperative learning is an instructional approach that has been shown to promote a variety of positive cognitive, affective, and social outcomes.

The intent of cooperative learning is to foster academic achievement through student discussions, learning from each other and dividing tasks to align with student strengths. I feel that cooperative learning gives students an opportunity to establish a group culture and work within the constraints of that culture. I believe that students will carry this cultural paradigm into adulthood. I also believe that cooperative learning promotes diversity and cross-cultural friendships. Through cooperative learning, I believe schools can play a significant role in reducing racism, prejudice and discrimination in the larger society.