

Cooperative Learning in Classrooms Today

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to shed light onto the cooperative learning method in the classroom. This paper includes much information from studies that have looked at classrooms who have adopted cooperative learning groups, and studies show how this method affects student's learning. There is much information presented about the positives of being in a small diverse group and how these groups help students develop social skills, identity roles, and help students develop goal setting as well. Many researchers question if cooperative learning is the way to go in the classroom, especially when the world is such a competitive place and is a "fend for yourself" environment, but much research shows that there are plenty of positive effects this learning style has on students in the grade area of Kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Key Words: *Teamwork, Group Projects, Team-Learning*

Throughout every student's academic career, there will always be times when teachers assign group projects. Some students love group projects, while others would rather just work by themselves. With every learning method come positive and negative effects. With cooperative learning there are different rewards and different ways of achieving rewards. The one criticism of cooperative learning is that for once, students do not have to compete nearly as much as they would if they did individual work, and we all live in such a competitive world that many researchers wonder if it is positive on students development or not (Alfiie, 1992). Many researchers believe that there are far more positives outweighing this negative idea about cooperative learning.

The American society we live in today is competitive in almost every aspect. "Competition is so pervasive, in fact--infecting the workplace and the classroom, the playing field and the family--that many of us take it for granted, failing to notice its destructive consequences" (Kohn, 1992). So many schools have become competitive as well, regardless of the grade level. With group work, researchers have found that students do not put as much blame on themselves if they receive a bad grade. Group work is a team effort, so one person cannot be blamed for the failure of a project. This creates a teamwork environment in any classroom. Within these small

groups students are able to find their strong points and contributions, rather than their shortcomings in working alone.

One great thing about cooperative learning is that there is no basic cooperative learning method. Teachers do not have to make small groups to only do projects; teachers can have other activities lined up for groups. There are four main models that teachers base cooperative learning styles on; they include, Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT) Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Jigsaw, and Small Group Teaching (Slavin, 1980). These four structures allow teachers to be able to form small groups of about four students to get different tasks done, and the focus is not only on group projects, but can focus on helping students build bonds and create a team.

With Teams-Games Tournament (TGT) students are able to work together, study, and have some fun. "Students are assigned to teams according to a procedure that maximizes heterogeneity of ability levels, sex, and race" (Slavin, 1980). With this method teachers feel that they are giving their students a chance to go out and be with students who they would not normally choose for a group. This creates diversity in the classroom and as well as into student's lives. In this model students are able to sit together gather information from a lecture, finally they are able to take in the information and start prepping for tournaments of trivia. There are usually tables that are numbered usually from 1-5, each group is split amongst the tables, the more questions a student answers correctly, the more that student will move up. Whichever student succeeds to the highest table for an amount of time, wins for his or her team. So students are setting goals to get to the higher tables.

Student Teams- Achievement Divisions (STAD) uses the same diverse groups as Teams-Games Tournament, but instead of these fun tournaments there would be small quizzes for each team to take. This focuses on what the group learned rather than going off and doing individual work. Jigsaw is another method that uses these same exact groups. With Jigsaw, groups are expected to take small sections of content, learn it, and figure out a way to teach it to other groups. So with this students are pieces of the puzzle, and no one can get a full picture of what they are learning without one another. This

strategy seems to be very helpful to many students because they are relying on each other. Small- Group Teaching is a lot like Jigsaw but it is more in depth than just reading different parts of the classroom book. Students are given subtopics, students with the same subtopic come together and pick even smaller parts of the subtopic and they prepare to teach their information to the class. So this is much like Jigsaw, students are still relying on one another. All four of these groups have something in common; they are all composed of diverse groups.

There are many younger students in every classroom that are not introduced to any sort of diversity until they become school age. There have been many issues with violence in schools because of diversity. Many teachers feel the need to introduce diversity at a young age, so when these students get older they will not have such a "culture shock" when they go into the world. Cooperative learning is a great way for students to come face to face with students of different race, religion, and social class, and with this learning method they are forced to rely on the people they may have never chose as their partners. There have been studies that have reported positive cross-racial friendships, because of cooperative learning activities, not only in the classroom, but outside as well (Oishi, 1983). This should give teachers motives to put this strategy in their classroom to benefit students socially and cognitively.

This method has one of the most diverse outcomes. Students are able to work face to face with their peers and figure out their strongpoints and what they have to offer as a team member. Some of the many "diverse outcomes include, achievement, higher-level reasoning, retention, time on task, transfer of learning, achievement motivation, intrinsic motivation, continuing motivation, social and cognitive development, moral reasoning, perspective-taking, interpersonal attraction, social support, friendships, reduction of stereotypes and prejudice, valuing differences, psychological health, self-esteem, social competencies, internalization of values, the quality of the learning environment, and many other outcomes" (Johnson, 2000). With these many other outcomes, found by researchers, people can see why teachers would want to implement this style of learning in their classroom.

With cooperative learning, students are finally not alone during class time. Teachers often find that students become scared or embarrassed to ask

questions during lecture, so this student will never receive an answer if a question is not asked. Cooperative groups help make students feel much more comfortable asking questions to one another rather than asking in front of all of their peers. Many students in these groups will start to form identities as well. There will be some natural leaders, and others that just go along with everything, but everyone has a job in a cooperative group. Many students like this style as well because it is a lot like a sports team, and many students either play sports or enjoy sports in general, and the team members all have to work together to get the job done.

Researchers have found so many positive outcomes of this style of learning, and are continuing to study the positive outcomes that this learning style has on both teacher and students. This is one of the most social ways of learning for students. There is a time for students to build a team rather than just focusing on themselves. Students have a chance to teach and become "masters" of specific information. Friendships starts with cooperative learning and social skills develop more as well. Cooperative learning has proved to work for many teachers in diverse classrooms, and will hopefully continue to grow and become more popular in other teacher's classroom. Making students feel more comfortable in social situations and helping them find their role in a group can prepare students for the world.

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