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ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning involves students working in small groups or teams to help each other learn academic material. Cooperative learning strategies are organized, highly structured methods that usually involve formal presentation of information, student practice and coaching in learning teams, individual assessment of mastery, and public recognition of team success. By their structure and individual assignments, cooperative learning avoids the problem of letting the smart student in the group do the work while the other students get a free ride. The purpose of this literature review is to examine whether there is a difference in student self-esteem when cooperative learning approaches are used in the classroom. Research literature suggests that traditional instruction fails to meet the needs and interests of individual students. The literature also shows that students who work together develop social skills and have an understanding of multiculturalism, human systems, and group and organizational development. They learn to problem solve, negotiate, and be kind to each other. Students not only learn by imitating, but by taking an active part in their learning. Self-esteem is improved due to positive peer relations and to improved academic achievement. The intergroup relationships, the acceptance of diversity, and the appreciation for peer contributions build self-esteem and commitment to the common good. In addition, frequent opportunities to engage in peer and self-evaluation give students valuable self-esteem and the practice they need to become effective judges of healthy group functioning in school, on the job, and at home. (Contains 15 references.) (HTH)

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THE EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON SELF-ESTEEM:

A Literature Review

Running Head: Cooperative Learning and Self-Esteem

By

Lucyann M. Tedesco

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Cooperative learning involves students working in small groups or teams to help each other learn academic material. Cooperative learning strategies are organized, highly structured methods that usually involve formal presentation of information, student practice and coaching in learning teams, individual assessment of mastery, and public recognition of team success. By their structure and individual assignments, cooperative learning avoids the problem of letting the smart student in the group do the work while the other students get a free ride.

The purpose of this literature review is to examine if there is a difference in student self-esteem when cooperative learning approaches are used in the classroom.

Research literature suggests that traditional instruction fails to meet the needs and interests of individual students. Teachers who use this method tend to look upon students as a homogeneous group with common abilities, interests, styles of learning, and motivation. Instruction is geared to a hypothetical average student, and all students are expected to learn and perform within narrow limits. Students are evaluated, instructional methods and materials are selected, and learning is paced on the basis

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of the group average. The uniqueness of each student is
often lost in the large group.

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INTRODUCTION

Casually glancing through classrooms, many people might notice classroom activities organized to invite competition through a traditional form of instruction. This procedure motivates those most likely to succeed but also guarantees that some students will get poor grades. Those who have analyzed the "hidden" curriculum, or the implicit teachings that schools communicate to their students, have observed that American schools tend to reward competitive or individual accomplishment more than cooperative effort.

What is cooperative learning? There are many different forms, but all involve students working in small groups or teams to help each other learn academic material.

Cooperative learning strategies are organized, highly structured methods that usually involve formal presentation of information, student practice and coaching in learning teams, individual assessment of mastery, and public recognition of team success.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Is there a difference in student performance and self-esteem when cooperative learning is used as compared to

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when traditional practices are employed? Cooperative learning refers to the interdependence among all group members. Each member is responsible for the outcome of the shared goal. Students test their ideas and receive feedback within a relatively safe environment. Traditional learning refers to the teacher giving out information, students listen and speak only when called on by the teacher.

HYPOTHESIS

Students learn more successfully, and have higher self-esteem in a cooperative setting, compared to a traditional setting, where the teacher is the center of the lesson. In cooperative lessons, the emphasis is on social skills and team building, which leads to increased learning and promotes high self-esteem.

RATIONALE

Bandura's social learning theory (1975) emphasized cognitive and processing capacities that mediate social behavior. For Bandura it began with some influence from Skinner's radical behaviorism, although with added concepts such as modeling. It quickly evolved, however, into a form of learning theory heavily informed by concepts from information-processing theory. As he struggled to make theoretical sense of the phenomenon of modeling, Bandura

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quickly abandoned mechanistic conditioning explanations and turned instead to the concepts of information processing. In 1985, Bandura relabeled his approach "social cognitive theory" as a more suitable and adequate a description of what he had been advocating since the middle 1970s (Bandura, 1985).

Bandura's contributions to a theoretical understanding of human development have been of major importance for the field. He directed the theoretical focus to a more fruitful basis in cognitive processes, including attention span, social skills and self-esteem. Bandura's work clearly shows learning as a success in a cooperative environment.

The connection between this theory and cooperative learning is making classrooms student-centered rather than teacher-centered, promoting social skills. Cooperative learning designs interactive learning experiences, and promotes cognitive growth. It reaches and involves students of multiple learning styles, and creates and sustains a positive learning environment.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

Johnson (1994) stated how whole group discussions may silence less vocal students. The cooperative method allowed more individuals to test their ideas and receive

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feedback within a relatively safe environment. There was a definite difference in student's self-esteem.

Johnson stated that teachers who try to arrange experiences in cooperative learning recognize that group success depends on individual accountability. A variety of strategies have been recommended to promote this condition.

One option is to average the test scores for members of a team and assign those results to everyone. A similar procedure is to select one student at random from a group and use that person's performance as the basis for evaluating the other members (Slavin, 1995).

For each of these methods, student self-interest in getting good grades is expected to motivate them to support the learning of peers and thereby improve group productivity. These strategies can also cause high achievers to resent working in teams because of peers who are less capable or less willing to work hard.

Students are expected to make a contribution to their group. However no one can reasonably be held accountable for the behavior of someone else. Therefore, the main focus for accountability should be on the efforts each individual makes support group progress. This is the same condition that teachers insist is appropriate for judging their own competence. That is, teachers try many ways to

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facilitate class progress but, in the final analysis, each student is responsible for personal growth and development.

When this premise is applied to cooperative learning, it means students are more motivated to cooperate because they are responsible for their individual teamwork skills and test performance.

In a classic study on traditional teaching, Adams and Biddle (1990) found that for the most part, what takes place in the classroom requires the attention of all the students. Teachers tend to stay in front of the classroom more than 85 percent of the time when teaching the whole class, but they change their location on the average once every 30 seconds. Elementary teachers tend to move around through the aisles more than secondary teachers.

Adams and Biddle further found that student participation is restricted by the environment or physical setting itself in ways that neither the teacher or students are aware. It appeared to them that students who sit in the center of the room are the most active learners, or what they called "responders." The verbal interaction is so concentrated in this area of the classroom and in a line directly up the center of the room, where the teacher is in front most of the time, that they coined the term "action zone" to refer to this area. Formal seating patterns tend

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to reduce student-to-student eye contact and student
interaction and to increase student control and student
passivity.

Whole-group instruction is the most common form of
classroom organization. Teaching is generally geared to
the "mythical" average student on the assumption that this
level of presentation will meet the needs of the greatest
number of students. A common block of content in any
subject is taught on the assumption that large-group
instruction is the most effective and convenient format for
teaching.

In the large group the teacher lectures, explains, and
demonstrates on a topic, asks and answers the questions in
front of the entire class, provides the same practice and
drill exercises to the entire class, works on the same
problems and employs the same materials.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature is divided into two
parts: an overall view of cooperative learning with special
attention paid to social skills and self-esteem, and
traditional teaching where the teacher is the center of the
classroom.

Johnson (1995a) states that teachers should tap into the power of social relations to promote learning. Much research has shown how social interactions in the family and community support early language learning. This occurs naturally in families and groups of children playing together. Such spontaneous social helping is often called "scaffolding" because, just as a temporary scaffold allows bricklayers to construct a wall which finally stands on its own, these interactions support young language-builders along the way, but ultimately leave the child independent. Children are far from passive in this scaffolding process.

They learn not only by imitating grownup behavior, but by taking an active part, constructing and testing hypotheses, and initiating behavior themselves. Babies learn language swiftly and effectively without being directed "taught" because they are learning words that help them get their needs met in their families. Following this model, schools can reverse their own counter productive patterns of isolation and silence, tapping the power of social interaction to promote learning.

Some of the most efficient social learning activities are cooperative. When we think of the social side of learning, we most readily envision group discussions, kids

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listening to one another's work, carrying out projects and writing letters and stories for one another. Cooperative learning goes on to promote children's learning with one another. Even in the workplace, we are recognizing how much cooperation actually goes on in American life, and how valuable group problem-solving is, compared to perpetual competitiveness and isolation. Cooperative small-group activity has been shown to be an especially effective mode for school learning, and solid achievement gains have been documented across the curriculum by Johnson and Johnson (1995b), Slavin (1995a), and others. Cooperative work allows learners to receive much more extensive feedback from fellow students than they can ever get from a single teacher who must spread his or her time among all students.

Of course, group work requires training students and carefully designing meaningful, authentic activities, otherwise the efforts of the groups can be inefficient and shallow.

SELF-ESTEEM

Slavin (1995c) describes how 80% of students entering school feel good about themselves. By the 4th grade only 15% do. Only one out of five high school students has positive self-esteem. Cooperative learning teaches students as the active constructor of meaning. The emphasis is on

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process, metacognition, learning how to learn. This
process teaches and enhances self-esteem. As students
improve their self-esteem, their mastery of academics
begins to broaden. Their improved academic achievement
leads to positive peer relations.

Minimizing put-down statements is half of the step
toward building student self-esteem. Put-downs need to
replaced with statements of appreciation. After completing
a group activity, the teacher can write a sentence starter
of the board such as:

"I liked it when...(describe the situation) and "I admire
you for...(describe the quality). This modeling encourages
the sharing of positive statements perhaps more than
anything.

CRITICAL THINKING

Millis (1996) describes how cooperative learning can
be used to stimulate active problem-solving and critical-
thinking skills. This could be the case of "a real-life
problem or dilemma which has no immediate, obvious, single
or correct solution." A cooperative learning discussion
can be more effective than the whole-group traditional
approach. Cooperative learning groups permit simultaneous
exchanges rather than sequential individual participation.
Whole-group discussions may silence less vocal students.

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Cooperative learning allows individuals to test their ideas and receive feedback within a relatively safe environment.

Millis research also examines the cooperative learning studies in middle school and high school. The study suggests that cooperative learning techniques produced higher self-esteem and higher test scores among these learners. Further study reports that cooperative learning has substantial effects on math performance, inter-ethnic relations, and interpersonal interaction in class with handicapped students.

SELF-EVALUATION

Slavin (1995d) stated cooperative learning involved an emphasis on self-evaluation. Cooperative learning provides students with many opportunities to practice self-evaluation, so they are more likely to become self-critical, an essential condition for doing well in groups. Self-evaluation is overlooked as an aspect of critical thinking and decision making. The ability to self-evaluate enables students and people to know when to think well of themselves and when it is appropriate to think well of behavior or make changes.

Every student should know ahead of time the evaluation criteria and process of assessment that teammates will rely on for evaluation purposes in cooperative learning groups.

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Students also need to know that teachers trust them to participate in the evaluation of their own learning. The assumption that teamwork skills can be acquired simply by engaging in unstructured group activities is unwarranted. A more credible way to determine whether desired competencies that have been attained is to solicit the perceptions of students. How have the students succeeded in academic achievement, and how have their social skills improved?

SUMMARY

Students who work together develop social skills and have an understanding of multiculturalism, human systems, and group and organizational development. They learn to problem solve, negotiate, and be kind to each other. Students not only learn by imitating, but by taking an active part in their learning. They learn with one another.

Self-esteem is improved due to positive peer relations and to improved academic achievement. The intergroup relationships, the acceptance of diversity, and the appreciation for peer contributions, build self-esteem and commitment to the common good.

One of the most important things a teacher can do in the classroom, regardless of subject or grade level, is to make students aware of their own thinking process, to examine what they are thinking about, to make distinctions and comparisons, and to make self-corrections. Students learn both critical thinking and collaborative social skills along with academic content in cooperative learning.

It also provides students with many opportunities to practice self-evaluation. Students can evaluate themselves on participation, discussion, and other activities. They can appraise their own performance without the intervention of the teacher.

Students have observed in a cooperative group what occurs during group interaction, know how teammates influence their thinking, and they can assess their own efforts for enhancing group productivity. Frequent opportunities to engage in peer and self-evaluation gives students valuable self-esteem and the practice they need to become effective judges of healthy group functioning in school, on the job, and at home.

The traditional structure may give each student five to ten minutes a day to speak about academic topics or respond to questions from the teacher (Lyman, 1995). Traditional teaching gives emphasis on parts and isolated knowledge. There is a limited view of intelligence, learning is an individual activity. There is emphasis on product and content rather than process, metacognition.....learning how to learn. Traditional teaching shows one answer-one way, correctness.

Studies verify that when teachers depend upon "whole class instruction" they themselves talk more than two-thirds of the time, and more than 70% of their "teacher talk" is spent disciplining, lecturing, giving instructions, and asking questions. Students are expected to sit passively, to refrain from interaction with each other, and to listen to the teacher. When teachers use whole class instruction, only 30% of their time can be devoted to doing what the majority want to do; to praise, encourage initiative, give feedback, facilitate student communication, and help students.

Studies have shown that teacher centered classrooms tend to pour standardized curriculum into the heads of nonstandardized students. It also awards just the students

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who had the right answers. Traditional teaching shows low expectations for students of different cultures.

TEXTBOOKS

Traditionally, the textbook has been the most frequently used instructional material at all levels beyond the primary grades, and in some cases it is the only one used by the teacher. "The textbook and its partner, the workbook," stated Eisner (1996), "provide the curricular hub around which much of what is taught revolves." (p.111)

Textbooks can have a strong influence or even dominate the nature and sequence of a course and thus profoundly affect the learning experiences of students. Reliance on the textbook is consistent with the stress on written words as the main medium of education, as well as the way many teachers themselves were educated. Dependence on the textbook is also linked to the time when a majority of teachers were poorly prepared in subject matter and read the text one day in advance of the students.

In many classes the textbook becomes the only point of view in the course. In effect, the course is based on theories and biases of the author of the text. Even though the author may try to maintain objectivity, what is selected, what is omitted, and how the discussion is slanted reflect the author's views.

In order to have wide application, and to increase potential sales, textbooks tend to be general, noncontroversial, and bland. They are usually written for a national audience, so they do not consider local issues or community problems. Because they are geared for the greatest number of "average" students, they may not meet the needs and interests of any particular group of students. Moreover, issues, topics, and data that might upset potential audiences or interest groups are omitted.

Textbooks summarize large quantities of data and in so doing may become general and superficial and may discourage conceptual thinking, critical analysis, and evaluation. With the exception of those on mathematics, most textbooks quickly become outdated because of the rapid change of events, but because they are costly, they are often used long after they should be replaced.

ABILITY GROUPING

The most common means of dealing with heterogeneity is to assign students to classes and programs according to ability. In high schools students may be tracked into college preparatory, vocational or technical, and general programs. Slavin (1996) stated that in many middle and junior high schools, students are sometimes assigned to a class by ability and stay with that class as it moves from

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teacher to teacher. In a few cases, and more often in elementary schools, students are assigned to a class on the basis of a special characteristic, such as being gifted, handicapped or bilingual. Elementary schools may use several types of ability grouping. In addition to the types used in the secondary schools, they may assign students to a heterogeneous class and then regroup them homogeneously by ability in selected areas, such as reading and mathematics.

SUMMARY

Findings indicate that when teachers depend upon "whole class instruction" they themselves talk more than two-thirds of the time, and more than 70% of their "teacher talk" is spent disciplining, lecturing, giving instructions, and asking questions. Teacher-centered classrooms tend to be more competitive than cooperative.

The "teacher talk" approach ignores the fact that we are social creatures stimulated and motivated by social interaction. The transfer of responsibility to students themselves for their own learning is not present in a teacher-centered classroom.

Textbooks sometimes do not provide enough background information for students to understand their meaning. Textbooks in every subject and grade level can cover too

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many topics, and the writing can be superficial, and
lacking in depth. They can fail to capture the imagination
and interests of the students or make students think.
Today's students are accustomed to getting information
about the world from television and movies; many of them
know how to get information electronically. A textbook
alone may not hold the students' interest.

Many teachers overwhelmingly support the idea of ability
grouping because of the ease in teaching a homogeneous
group. Separating students into high and low achieving
groups can foster corresponding expectations among teachers
and students. Some high-ability students can benefit from
such grouping, but this does not compensate for the loss of
students in low-ability groups

CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative learning is a huge subject and narrowing
it into certain areas was quite challenging. However, one
thing was apparent throughout: Most educators believe that
in America's best classrooms, again, the emphasis has
shifted. Instead of individual achievement and
competition, the focus is on group learning. Students
learn to articulate, clarify, and then restate for one
another how they identify and find answers. They learn how

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to seek and accept criticism from their peers, solicit
help, and give credit to others.

The words, the structure, the roles, and the pattern of interaction between teachers and students has changed very little over the past 100 years. The pattern, which also dominated the management of schools, is one of command and control. The message to students has been that the teacher gives out information, students listen and speak only when called on, some people are smart and valued, and some students just can't learn. Most of all, students have to compete to be recognized, to have status and get rewards. Few would disagree that improving the quality of education requires letting go of assumptions that are no longer working well.

Students are responsible for themselves and each other. Our teachers designed learning experiences to reach students who learn in different ways. The emphasis is on learning, not on teaching. Students are the active constructor of meaning and the teacher as co-learner and facilitator. Learning also as a social activity, as collaboration enhances learning. When students become responsible to each other, accountability for performance and behavior is shared by the students and the teacher, the wall between teacher and students melts away.

Most teachers are right-answer oriented in their teaching and testing. They are unwilling or unable to change from textbooks that are characterized by low-level cognitive demands and are divorced from how students think or reason. Don't be afraid to be a critic of textbooks. Sometimes they contain inaccuracies or poor writing. Sometimes they don't provide enough background information for students to understand the meaning.

Put yourself in the students' place and then ask yourself, would you read this if you didn't have to? Does it hold your attention? Would you be tempted to read more than the assigned number of pages? If the answer is "no" to all of these questions, then think about de-emphasizing the textbook in your classes. The best way use a textbook is to treat it like a reference work. Use it as background. The main source of learning should come from the other materials, experiences, and technology that you supply, either through hands-on activities or through the use of supplementary materials that are livelier, more vivid, and more motivating for students than the textbook.

Developing resiliency and the potential of all types of children in our schools cannot become a reality unless teachers learn to make the critical shift from 19th century methods to those that are effective with 21st century

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students. If we acknowledge that the force feeding of
textbooks and seat time has failed for too many students
who simply do not learn that way. Cooperative environments
and methods support the development of children, no matter
what their culture, race, gender, or way of learning.
Teachers will do more than teach, they will reach.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lucyann Tedesco received her Baccalaureate of Art in Liberal Studies and her Masters of Science at Dominican College of San Rafael. She is currently a teacher in Sonoma County. Her interest in cooperative learning stems from working with students in both traditional and cooperative classrooms and the realization that students have very real perceptions of their self-esteem based on their classroom environment.



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