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# COOPERATIVE LEARNING: SOLUTION FOR BETTER CLASSROOMS

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**ABSTRACT**

*Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Cooperative learning research has identified the jigsaw, learning together, student teams-achievement divisions, teams –games -tournaments, academic controversy, and the most commonly utilized cooperative learning strategies. Present paper is an attempt to highlight how cooperative learning is the best solution for today's classrooms.*

## Introduction

Cooperative Learning is one of the appropriate teaching techniques which lead to less anxiety and increase students‟ self-awareness from their learning procedure (Powell and Enright, 1990). Cooperative Learning offers a pleasant learning situation for all students, competition is amended as friendship, the spirit of cooperation and participation is reinforced, and all students are entitled to be thoughtful and creative (Keramati, 2001). In this technique students are gathered within small, peculiar groups in which they work together to reach their objectives and

are responsible for their learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). In fact cooperative learning is organised and managed group work in which students work cooperatively in small groups to achieve academic as well as affective and social goals. In hundreds of studies, cooperative learning has been associated with gains in such variables as achievement, interpersonal skills, and attitudes toward school, self, and others (Sharan, 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Slavin, 1990; Cohen, 1994). Beyond these overall gains, research also suggests that cooperative learning may lead to gains in thinking skills (Johnson and Johnson, 1990; Qin et al., 1995). Therefore, as a classroom organisation and instructional method, cooperative learning merits serious consideration for use in History lessons.

Cooperative learning is designed in such a way that it actively involve students in the learning process. This, in most cases, may not possible in a lecture format. Its foundations are therefore founded in constructivist epistemology. Cooperative learning is thus a process that requires knowledge to be discovered by students and transformed into concepts to which the students can relate. The discovered knowledge is then reconstructed and expanded through new learning experiences. All the learning is thus experienced through dialogue among students in a social setting. Cooperative learning employs various learning activities so as to improve students' understanding of concepts and new ideas by using a structured approach involving a series of steps. According to Kagan (1994), this Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies, 2014, 1(2): 57-61 59 requires students to create, analyse and apply concepts in their everyday life experiences.

In cooperative learning both the individual and the social setting are active dynamics in the learning process as students attempt to imitate real-life learning. In fact, by combining teamwork and individual accountability, students work towards acquiring both knowledge and social skills. Cooperative learning is therefore a teaching strategy which allows students to work together in small groups with individuals of various talents, abilities and backgrounds to accomplish a common goal. Every member is responsible for learning the material and also for helping the other members of the team learn. Students have to work until all members successfully understand and complete the assignment. Thus creating an atmosphere of achievement (Panitz, 1996). It is argued that this process results in a deeper understanding of the material and more potential to retain the material. According to Roger and Johnson (1994), there is a difference between simply having students work in a group and structuring groups of students to work

cooperatively. Students who sit at the same table where they do their own individual work, but free to talk with each other as they work, cannot be said to be in a cooperative group as there is no positive interdependence.

This scenario could best be described as individualistic learning with talking. For this kind of setting to turn into a cooperative learning situation, there is need for an accepted common goal on which the group is rewarded for its efforts. If a group of students has been assigned to do a report, but only one student does all the work and the others go along for a free ride, it is not a cooperative group. A cooperative group has a sense of individual accountability that means that all students need to know the material or spell well for the whole group to be successful. Putting students into groups does not necessarily gain a cooperative relationship; it has to be structured and managed by the teacher (Roger and Johnson, 1994).

**Benefits of Cooperative Learning**

Panitz (1996) came up with over 50 benefits from the use of cooperative learning. These benefits can be categorized social, psychological, academic and assessment categories. Cooperative learning promotes social interactions; thus students of History benefit in a number of ways from the social perspective. Cooperative learning helps develop oral communication skills. Because of the social interaction among students, cooperative learning is not only used to help students empathize with the people that lived on earth before them, but also to model the appropriate social behaviors necessary for employment situations. By following the appropriate structuring for cooperative learning, students are able to develop and practice skills that will be needed to function in both their communities and the workplace.

As already alluded to above, these skills include: leadership, decision-making, trust building, communication and conflict-management. It has also been found that the cooperative learning environment develops a social support system for students). Students also get psychological benefits from cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson (1989) claim, "cooperative learning experiences promote more positive attitudes" toward learning and instruction than other teaching methodologies. This would mean students develop positive attitudes towards History as a subject. Also, for the reason that students play an active role in the learning process in

cooperative learning, their satisfaction with the learning experience is likely to be enhanced. Cooperative learning has been found to help in the development of interpersonal relationships among students (Kessler and McCleod, 1985). These authors argue that the opportunity to discuss their ideas in smaller groups and receive constructive feedback on those ideas in cooperative groups helps to build student self-esteem.

In lectures, individual students are simply called upon to respond to a question in front of the class without having much time to think about their answers. Cooperative learning makes students feel secure and protected as solutions come from the group rather than from the individual. Any mistakes that are likely to occur in conclusions are corrected within the group before they are presented to the class. Students also tend to be inspired by instructors who take the time to plan activities which promote an encouraging environment (Janke, 1980). It has also been argued that receiving encouragement in a cooperative and supportive setting from both the instructor and peers helps to develop higher self-efficacy. As a result of higher self- Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Management Studies, 2014, 1(2): 57-61 60 efficacy, student grades tend to increase; thus, cooperative learning methods provide several academic benefits for students. According to Johnson and Johnson (1990), several studies have shown that students taught by cooperative methods learn and retain significantly more information than students taught by other methods. It is argued that requiring students to verbalism their ideas to the group helps them to develop more clear concepts. As such the thought process becomes fully embedded in the students' memory.

Cooperative group discussions lead to more frequent summarization as the students are constantly explaining and elaborating their line of thought. This in turn validates and strengthens thoughts (Ibid). Students also benefit from cooperative learning academically in the sense that there is more of a potential for success when students work in groups. Individuals tend to give up when they get stuck, whereas a group of students is more likely to find a way to keep going (Ibid). It is also important to note that cooperative learning calls for self-management from students as they must not only come prepared with completed assignments but they must also understand the material which they have compiled. As a result, a more complete understanding of the historical material is developed.

Cooperative learning has been found to be of great benefit to both students and their teachers. It provides instant feedback to the students and teachers. This is so for the effectiveness of each class can be observed. As teachers move around the classroom and observe each group interacting and explaining their theories, they are able to detect misconceptions early enough to correct them. Only a few minutes of observation during each class session can provide helpful insight into students' abilities and growth. Cooperative teaching methods also utilize a variety of assessments. According to Johnson and Johnson (1990), grades are not dependent solely on tests and individual assignments which only allow for right or wrong responses, leaving no room for reflection and discussion of error or misconceptions. With cooperative learning, History teachers can use more authentic assessments such as observation, peer assessment and writing reflections.

**The Effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in the College Setting**

Cooperative learning is among the most well researched of all teaching strategies. Forty years of research has shown that when compared to other methods of instruction, cooperative learning is one of the most effective ways for students to maximize their own learning and the academic accomplishments of their classmates (New Horizons, 2008, Johnson & Johnson, 1994, Slavin, 1996, Williams, 2007). Highly structured cooperative learning allows students to develop their own understanding of key concepts all the while encouraging and assisting others. Thus, the major benefits of cooperative learning at the college level fall into two categories: **academic benefits and social-emotional benefits**.

**Academic Benefits**

Concentrating on academic achievement at the post-secondary level provides the unique the opportunity to examine the effects of cooperative learning on a population of students who are largely self-motivated and self-directed learners. These students have learned to work and succeed in variety of instructional setting throughout their schooling careers. Thus, the hundreds of studies showing increased academic achievement using cooperative learning in the college classroom suggest that cooperative learning promotes significant cognitive results even for the most esteemed of student populations.

**Social- Emotional Benefits**

- Sociability- demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy

- Self-Management- assesses self accurately, sets personal goals, monitors progress, and exhibits self-control
- Ability to participates as member of a team- contributes to group effort
- Ability to exercises leadership- communicates ideas to justify position, persuades and convinces others, responsibly challenges existing procedures and policies
- Ability to work with diversity- works well with men and women from diverse backgrounds.

As evident from these demands, knowing content academic is not enough to make today's college graduate competitive in the workplace. No longer can students just have sound academic standing, but they must be taught and have the opportunity to practice the social and personal competencies necessary to survive in the workplace. Research indicates that compared to other forms to instruction cooperative learning helps students become better communicators and listeners, cooperative members of a team and effective leaders (Strom & Strom, 2003; Lie 2008; Goodwin, 1999). Using cooperative learning the college setting helps break the stereotype that students working together are "cheating." Instead, it enables students with the mindset that one must exercise their collaborative skills and work with others to achieve a common goal. In addition to promoting social skills, cooperative learning also enhances personal competencies of self-reflection and accurate self-assessment. By working closely with others students, learners can evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses, utilizing the diversity of the group to accomplish their mutual goal. By considering how well the group worked together, the effectiveness of social skills used as well as the creation of goals for further growth, cooperative learning encourages students to become reflective practitioners and strive for continuous improvement (Williams, 2007).

**Conclusion**

In the end I want to conclude Cooperative learning is a very well-researched yet underutilized pedagogical strategy in the college classroom. Regardless of subject matter, the age of the students or academic ability, if utilized correctly cooperative learning will only enhance student performance and success.

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