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The Effects of Cooperative Learning on Self-Perceived, Classroom Group Acceptance by Students in a Juvenile Correctional Facility

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The Effects of
Cooperative Learning
on Self-Perceived, Classroom Group
Acceptance by Students in a
Juvenile Correctional Facility

Lisa R. Dyson
Longwood College

Approved By:

Dr. Patty Whitfield Patty Whitfield
(Chairperson)

Dr. Terry Overton Terry Overton

Mr. Steven E. Blankenship Steven E. Blankenship

Date Approved April 22, 1993

Abstract

A group of 53 juveniles in a correctional facility were studied to find the effects of cooperative learning on self-percieved classroom group acceptance. A quasi-experimental, test, re-test design was utilized. Students were asked to fill out a survey, before and after treatment, reflecting upon the ease with which the students shared opinions with other members of the class. The students in the experimental group, where cooperative learning was implemented for four weeks, rated their comfort levels significantly higher than those students in the control condition. The findings show that cooperative learning, when used with incarcerated youth, does have a positive effect. These students, according to the surveys, are more comfortable with classroom communication. This high degree of comfort might result in students participating in a wider spectrum of classroom activities, allowing teachers to be more creative when making plans for the classroom.

I wish to thank my family and friends who have been so supportive and caring through this whole process, especially my mother and Ron. They kept pushing even when I was ready to quit.

Thanks to Amy, Valerie, and Marcia for leaving us a path and thanks to Karen for helping me find the path they left.

Thank-you Dr. Patty Whitfield and Mr. Steve Blankenship for putting up with my endless stream of questions and concerns.

A special thanks goes out to the students and faculty of BLC who worked every bit as hard as I did to make this project a reality, especially you, Mr. Barksdale.

I would also like to thank my father who I know has always and will always be with me, every step of the way. This one's for you, Dad!

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Students in a class where lecture type instruction is used do not have adequate time to develop working relationships with the other students in class. They simply sit and listen to the instructor without interacting with their peers. Cooperative learning, in the group form, allows individual students to work in groups of three to five students. The group works together to complete assignments which must be turned in for a grade. Each member of the group receives the same grade. Therefore, the key to this teaching method is that students must work together to achieve. This type of activity not only allows the students to work together, but also to succeed together which helps to form friendly bonds between individuals.

No literature could be found on the use of cooperative learning with juveniles in correctional facilities or self-perceived classroom group acceptance rates of these students. It is not known how these students view themselves or the other students in a classroom setting. Questions were raised about the degree of comfort students feel when expressing opinions to other students. The use of cooperative

learning in the juvenile correctional facility may provide a way to incorporate all students into a classroom. This integration into the group may alleviate some of the tension and fear experienced by students in a classroom situation. The students in the cooperative learning situation may view their ease in communication with others higher than those who do not participate in cooperative learning.

The purpose of this study is to determine if the students who are taught using cooperative learning will rate themselves higher in group acceptance. The hypothesis states that those students in the cooperative learning situation will view themselves as having more positive classroom group interactions with peers.

Nastasi and Clements (1991) define cooperative learning as "a group learning process built on the belief that students learn better when they learn together". Johnson and Johnson (1984) discussed the importance of cooperative learning to the students of today. In the working environment, people must often work together in order to accomplish the goals set for them. When cooperative learning is not utilized in the classroom and a competitive environment is established for the students, these students begin to feel someone else must fail for them to succeed (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). In a classroom where students work completely independently of one another, they are isolated from peers and begin to look at accomplishment as something which must be obtained without the help of others (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). These researchers suggest that the development of these ideas in students may make the adjustment to the working world very difficult later in life.

Okebukola and Jegede (1990) found that students who showed a preference for working in groups performed better in school both academically and socially than those who chose to work autonomously. Individuals working alone did not have the peer support available

to students working in groups.

Four types of cooperative learning have been described by Nastasi and Clements (1991): (a) team learning, (b) expert groups, (c) collaborative task completion, and (d) collaborative problem solving or investigation. The first type is that of team learning. A "team" of students work together to learn a required amount of material. The students are later tested individually, and the success of the group is based on individual's performances. If a student does well on the individual test, he or she is contributing positive points to the group.

The second type of cooperative learning environment is that of expert groups. Watson (1991) found this cooperative learning method particularly useful with older students, such as those in a high school biology class. He found this method increased achievement as well as the students' enthusiasm towards learning. The students are put into groups and are expected to read all of the assignment given. Then the groups are given sections of the reading material on which they are to become experts so they may explain the material later to fellow classmates. The students remain in their groups long enough to learn

the information about which they are to be experts. The students are then placed into different groups which contain one person from each expert group. The students will then exchange all the information, and afterwards the class is tested on an individual basis for comprehension and mastery.

Collaborative task completion is the third type of cooperative learning (Nastasi & Clements, 1991). This is perhaps the most familiar method of cooperative learning. It takes place when a group of students is responsible for completing an assignment. This completed assignment will be graded and everyone who participated in the group will receive the same grade.

Finally, in collaborative problem solving or investigation, students chose the problems on which they will be working as a group. Teacher instructions are kept at a minimum in this working environment. The students are to chose the methods they use to complete the task and work together to form a finished product.

Cooperative learning groups usually consist of three to five students and can be implemented using one of the above methods. Peer tutoring is an

additional method which can be utilized. This type of activity allows a student to work one-on-one with another student in an area of the curriculum which might be difficult.

One must remember that cooperative learning is more than simply placing students into a group and telling them to start an assignment (Nastasi & Clements, 1991). Johnson and Johnson (1984) list four elements which must be present in the learning environment for cooperative learning to be successful. The first of these elements is "positive interdependence" (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). According to this element, each student must have his or her own job which contributes to the completion of the assignment. All students must feel as though they earned the credit they received for an assignment which was a cooperative effort by a group of individuals.

The second element is centered around the actual interactions of the students during the cooperative process. Students must have "face-to-face" contact (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). This does not mean the students have to be sitting directly across the table from one another; however, the need for quality

communication is great. The students must become comfortable with expressing thoughts and ideas to the other students in the group and the students must also receive suggestions openly.

The third element is individual accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). The students must prove that they are making personal gains in knowledge during cooperative learning activities as well as group gains. Stevens, Slavin, and Farnish (1991) found that cooperative learning is most successful when the individual students are held accountable for all the information studied. While the students are working together, in groups, they should also be processing and storing the information they encounter.

Finally, students must know and use interpersonal and small group skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1984). If the children do not know these skills, the skills should be taught before cooperative learning begins. Skills such as these make the process of group work easier and less time consuming.

Both Watson (1991) and Johnson and Johnson (1984) make the point that all cooperative learning must be goal directed in order for it to be worthwhile to students. Students must be able to see where their

work is leading and they need to figure out the steps necessary to achieve the goal. Group learning can be extremely beneficial to all the students participating when they see a goal and structure and define the steps to reach the goal. The students of a group must rely on one another for input, and must work together to succeed.

Maheady, Mallette, Harper, and Sacca (1991) studied the effects of cooperative learning on students' weekly achievement. Test scores were raised significantly when the students were allowed time to work with one another individually and in groups. Harper, Mallette, and Moore (1991) also looked at performance on spelling tests after students used methods of cooperative learning to quiz others prior to the test. Students who had worked together performed much higher than those who did not work in groups or with other students.

Allowing students to work together has been reported to provide a better classroom environment. Zahn, Kagan, and Widaman (1986) showed that students viewed both the class setting and the work they did as more enjoyable when cooperative learning was used. The students did not mind coming to school or doing

the work required once they were there. Chambers and Abrami (1991) noted that students who participated in cooperative learning and who had enjoyable experiences with the group were more likely to have positive, individual experiences in the classroom.

A major emphasis throughout the cooperative learning literature is the socialization of the students participating in cooperative learning. Desforges, Lord, Ramsey, Mason, VanLeuwen, West, and Lepper (1991) reduced negative stereotypes held by students by placing them in cooperative learning situations. The students were instructed that they would be working with a mental patient (a confederate) to complete an assignment. All students felt they would have difficulty working with the mental patient and that the mental patient would be low functioning. However, upon working with the "patient" and seeing that they actually could work efficiently, the students' perceptions of mental patients in general became more favorable.

Another example would be the study conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1986) in which black and white students were integrated into cooperative learning groups. Individual perceptions of different racial

groups improved after working with one another towards a common goal. These types of activities may be useful to teachers working in areas where race relations are poor by providing a structured environment in which the children can work together.

A particular benefit of cooperative learning is the incorporation of special education students into the classroom environment. Mesch, Lew, Johnson, and Johnson (1986) found that socially isolated special education students could be placed in the regular education classroom with little difficulty when cooperative learning techniques were utilized. The regular education students responded well to their new peers, especially when social skills training was also a part of the curriculum. The special education students had effective models of appropriate social interactions and behaviors, and could see how these social skills were used in natural settings.

Cooperative learning also helps disabled and non-disabled students in the socialization process. Lloyd, Crowley, Kohler, and Strain (1988) found that the group process increases the acceptance rates of disabled students by their non-disabled peers. Johnson, Johnson, Warring, and Maruyama (1986) also

support these findings. Regular education students who interact with special education students in a non-competitive, cooperative environment seem to have more interaction with the special education students outside the academic environment.

Johnson, Johnson, Roy, and Zaidman (1985) also found that the regular education students acted as peer tutors for the special education or lower functioning students in the classroom. Whether or not leaving the higher functioning students in mixed level classes is truly the ideal situation, or if these high functioning students are being held back from true achievement has been debated. When cooperative learning is used in these classes, the higher level students do not seem to be held back because they are actually helping to move the lower level students along, and all students are achieving.

Students with learning disabilities have made tremendous gains in the cooperative environment. Peers were able to break material down into pieces which were usable to the students with learning disabilities (Stevens et al., 1991). In addition, the children with learning disabilities were also using those strategies regular education children

use, and the strategies were being used for later academic performance by those children with learning disabilities (Paris & Oka, 1986). Biklen and Zollers (1986) felt that regular education students are acting as models for their learning disabled counterparts. This modeling benefits the children tremendously by allowing them to see exactly what they are capable of doing.

Another benefit of cooperative learning is the effect it has on social skills for both disabled and non-disabled students. Malouf, Wiser, Pilato, and Grogan (1990) showed a significant increase in students' social coping behaviors. Cooperative learning allows children to interact in positive ways, teaching them how to answer and ask questions, show frustration in a controlled manner, and how to accept criticism. This teaching method seems to help children understand that those who are physically or mentally different still have positive ideas and experiences to offer, and all students learn more than what is taught academically.

This study will assess the extent to which cooperative learning affects students' self-perceived, classroom group acceptance rates. It is thought that

students in a correctional facility will rate classroom group acceptance as higher once cooperative learning has been implemented in the classroom. The students will view their interactions with others in a more positive light.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were those students found in level two Language Arts during a normally scheduled day at the correctional facility. There were 66 juvenile males, between the ages of 16 and 19 years old, working at this level who met the criteria for the study. The survey developed for this project was field tested on 13 of these students while the other 53 participated in the experimental and control groups. There were 32 students in the experimental condition and 21 students in the control group.

Students' files were examined to ensure that they were functioning between the sixth grade level and the eighth grade level (the typical cut-off points

for level two students). The students' exit dates were also examined. Any students who had exit dates during the planned time of the study did not participate.

One male teacher from the correctional facility served as the instructor. He was chosen based on his interest in the project, his successful experience at the facility, particularly with regard to classroom management, and his respected status among staff and students.

Instrumentation

The survey consisted of a series of questions that address the ease with which the students feel they can share likes and dislikes with their peers, as well as how often these opinions are expressed (See Appendix A). Subjects were surveyed once prior to the start of the study and once again at the end of the study.

The students were asked four questions for which they could answer on a scale of one to seven. When answering the survey, a one described the least amount of time spent expressing opinions and the least degree

of comfort while expressing these opinions. An answer of seven on the survey described the greatest amount of time spent expressing opinions and the greatest degree of comfort experienced when expressing these opinions. These conditions were referred to as least favorable (an answer of one) or most favorable (an answer of seven).

A teacher observation form (Appendix B) was also used. This helped to determine any bias shown towards a particular group which may have affected the results of the study. Observers were asked to rate attitudes, such as degree of frustration shown towards students as well as the degree helpfulness and enthusiasm shown towards the students. The five questions were answered using a scale of one to seven. One was used to describe a characteristic which always appeared and seven, a characteristic which never appeared.

Procedure

Self-perceived, classroom group acceptance was defined as the students' abilities to communicate likes or dislikes and other opinions to classmates effectively without rating their degree of nervousness

as more than three on the research survey. The experimental group comprised periods one, two, and three of the morning classes. They rated themselves before and after the treatment using the student survey. Students in period one of the afternoon classes acted as the control group. They also filled out the research survey before and after the treatment, but they did not receive the treatment.

Before the study began, the teacher and the researcher met to create lesson plans which fit the needs of the study and also maintained classroom guidelines. They decided that the students would complete a compilation of biographies pertaining to famous African Americans. Those students in the experimental condition were randomly assigned to groups of two to four students to complete the biographies. The students in the control condition also worked on the biography project, however they worked independently.

The survey was field tested with those students in the third afternoon Language Arts class. These students gave feedback as to the clarity of the survey. No changes were deemed necessary.

The teacher then had the students in all classes

complete the survey on self perceived group acceptance. The results of this survey acted as a basis for comparison showing whether or not the experimental and control groups were equal at the beginning of the study since random selection was not possible. The teacher had not been using cooperative learning up to this point, so the results of this survey were based on the students' perceptions of classroom group acceptance when a lecture type curriculum was utilized.

The teacher implemented the cooperative learning curriculum for four weeks in the experimental condition. The students used the cooperative learning method of collaborative task completion to complete their assignment. All cooperative groups were monitored by the teacher to ensure all students were participating.

No problems existed which resulted in the rearranging of groups. All students seemed to work well together.

Teacher observations were made by the researcher and two other people. Observation sheets were completed by all observers. The results of the observation sheets were correlated to determine if all groups were treated equally by the teacher.

At the end of the four week period of cooperative learning, the students in all conditions completed the research survey again. Pre- and post- intervention scores were then compared.

Results and Discussion

Group means from the first survey and the second survey were obtained by adding all the scores from the individual conditions and dividing that number by the total number of scores in the separate groups. The differences between the experimental and control groups for the first survey was .43, whereas the difference between these two groups in the second survey was 1.66 (Figure 1).

The results of the first survey were compared across experimental and control groups to determine if the two groups were equal at the beginning of the survey since random assignment was not possible. The frequency of favorability ratings across all student answers were examined using a Chi² test (Figure 1). No significant differences were found, $X^2(6)=6.51$ ($p>.05$). The groups were determined equal at the beginning of the study due to the lack of a

Comparison of Group Means

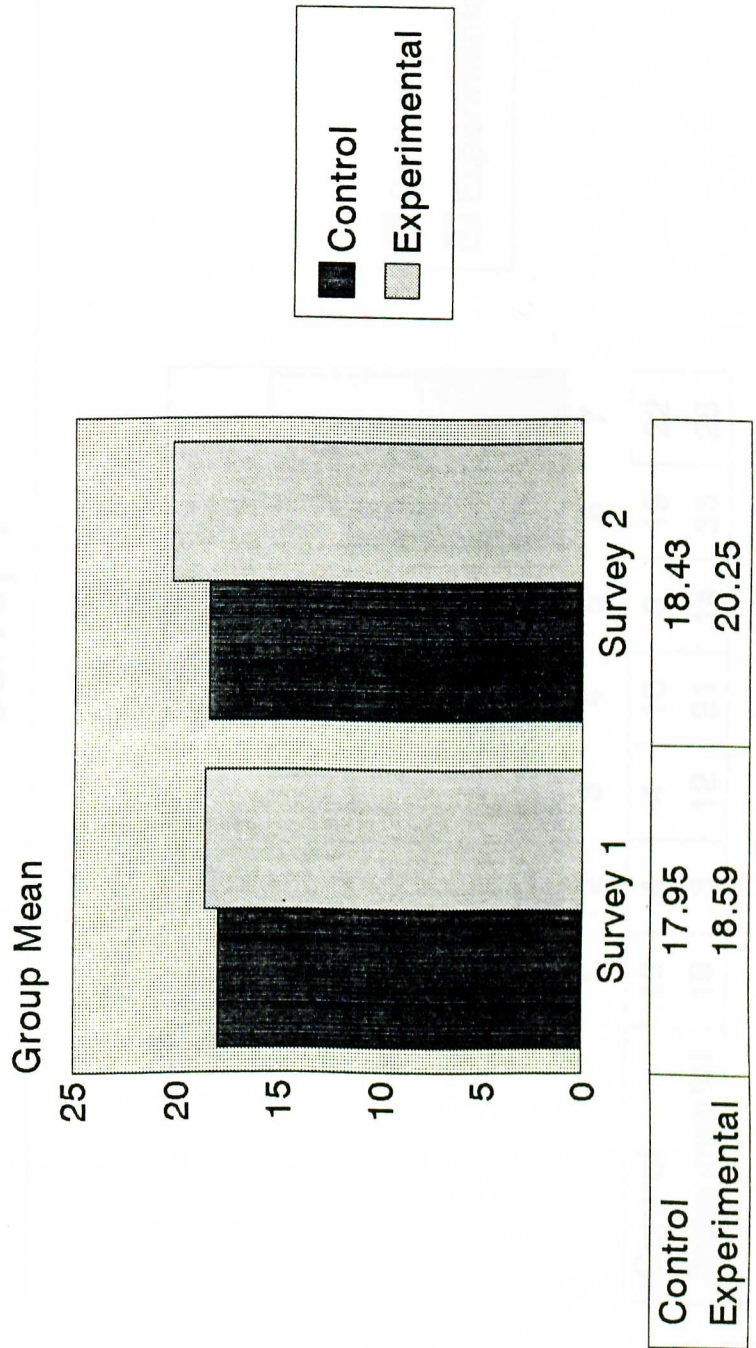


Figure 1

Overall Favorability

Survey 1

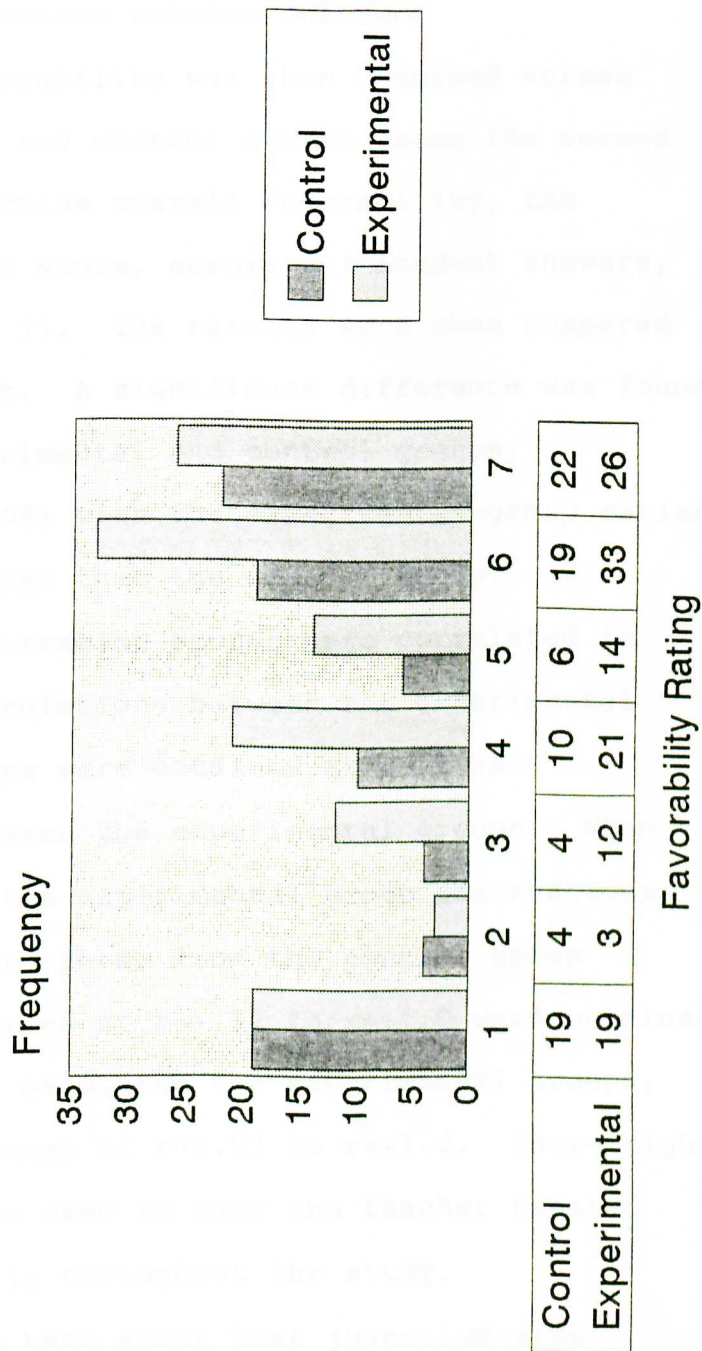


Figure 2

significant difference between the two.

Overall favorability was then examined across the experimental and control groups using the second survey. To determine overall favorability, the frequency of each score, across all student answers, was used (Figure 3). The results were then compared using a Chi² test. A significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups, $\chi^2(6)=12.59$ ($p<.05$) with the experimental group rating favorability higher than the control group.

Teacher observation scores were correlated in two groups. Correlations between the experimental and control groups were obtained as well as correlations between the experimental groups. When the scores from the experimental group observations were correlated to those from the control group observations, values of $r=+.97$ to $r=+1.0$ were obtained. The correlations examining the experimental groups, alone showed a range of $r=+.93$ to $r=+1.0$. These high correlations were used to show the teacher treated all groups equally throughout the study.

The results have shown that juveniles view classroom group acceptance more favorably when working in a cooperative learning environment. This is seen

Overall Favorability

Survey 2

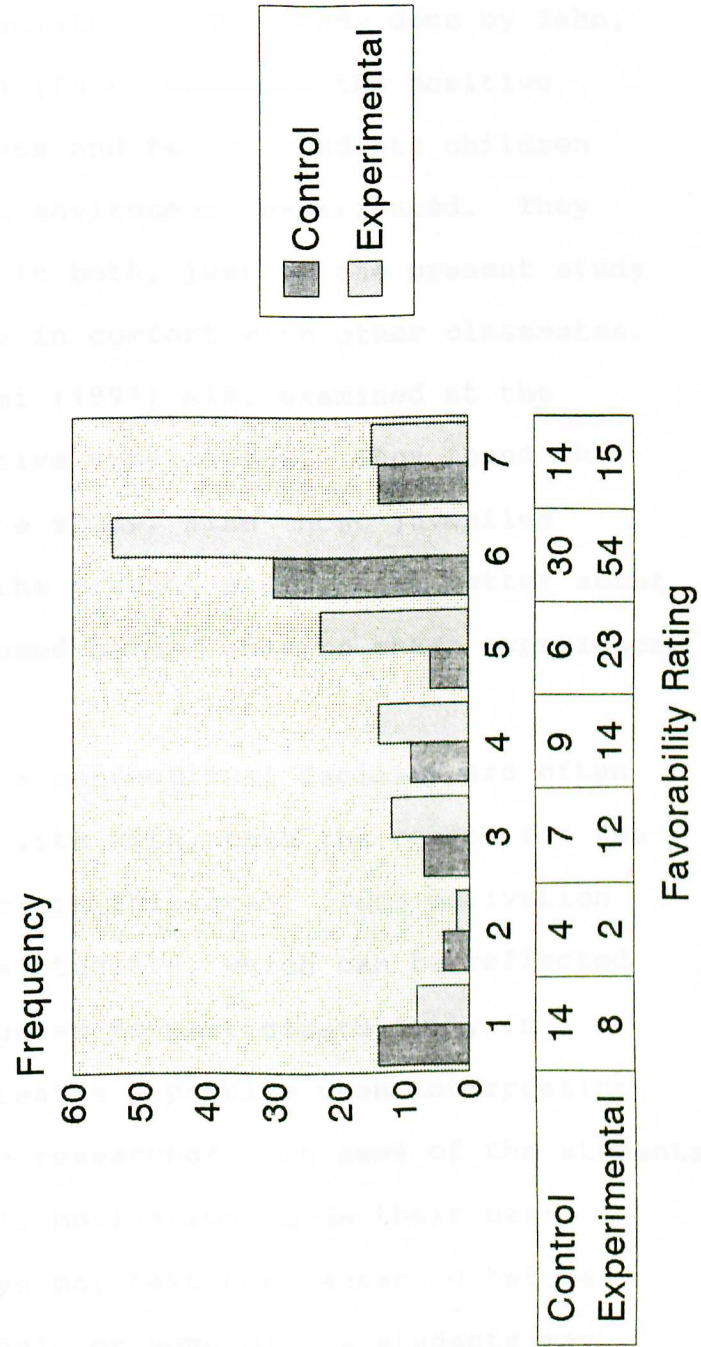


Figure 3

by the increase in comfort ratings when sharing opinions with classmates. The study done by Zahn, Kagan, and Widaman (1986) examined the positive feelings about class and fellow students children in the cooperative environment experienced. They noted an increase in both, just as the present study showed an increase in comfort with other classmates. Chambers and Abrami (1991) also examined at the individual's positive experiences. They found that the students in the study, like those juveniles participating in the present study, felt better about themselves and seemed better able to share experiences with classmates.

Juveniles in a correctional facility are often difficult to deal with with, thus the reason for the absense of research in this area. Poor motivation on the part of the students, which can be reflected in their unwillingness to participate fully in research, often creates a problem when interpreting significance. The researcher felt some of the students may have had little motivation to do their best. Some of the surveys may have been answered before being read thoroughly or some of the students may not have participated in their groups as they were

told. This may affect the generalizability of this study.

It might also have been more effective to implement cooperative learning for a longer period of time. A third survey might have been used to determine if students' attitudes change after a longer period of time. The students might not view cooperative learning so favorably after it has been implemented for many months. The students may become bored with the group work or even frustrated with the others in their groups.

The results of this study should be examined by those teachers working with incarcerated youth. If students are more comfortable in a school setting where cooperative learning is utilized, teachers may find the students are more willing to participate in activities and perform better on assignments. If students are comfortable with their peers, they may participate in classroom discussions more readily, thus broadening the spectrum of lessons which can be taught and the methods used to teach them.

These results show that even students who are difficult to work with and to motivate, such as incarcerated youth, do benefit from cooperative

learning. Further research should examine the limitations cooperative learning may have in an environment such as the juvenile correctional facility. Researcher may also want to examine the teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning when incorporated into their classroom environments. These areas should be examined and the results compared to studies such as this to decide the complete effects cooperative learning has on juveniles.

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Student Survey

1. How long have you been at this facility?
 - a. Less than one week
 - b. Two weeks
 - c. Three weeks
 - d. Longer than three weeks
2. Do you plan to be released within the next three weeks?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. How often can you tell those people in this class that you like and do not like about the work done in the classroom?

Appendix A

Student Survey

4. How nervous do you become when telling people in the class your opinion?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
never _____ often
extremely nervous _____ very comfortable
5. How often do you express your opinion about events other than homework to your classmates?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
never _____ often
6. How comfortable are you when expressing these opinions?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
extremely nervous _____ very comfortable

Student Survey

1. How long have you been at this facility?
 - a. Less than one week
 - b. two weeks
 - c. three weeks
 - d. longer than three weeks
2. Do you plan to be released within the next three weeks?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
3. How often can you tell those people in this class what you like and do not like about the work done in the classroom?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
 never often

4. How nervous do you become when telling people in the class your opinion?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
 extremely very
 nervous comfortable

5. Do you express your opinions about events other than classwork to your classmates?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
 never often

6. How comfortable are you when expressing these opinions?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7
 extremely very
 nervous comfortable

Teacher Observation Form

1. Are the teacher's instructions to the students clear?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never _____ always

2. Do the students follow instructions quickly, without much effort from the teacher?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never _____ always

Appendix B

Teacher Observation Form

3. Does the teacher remain helpful to the students throughout the lesson?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never _____ always

4. Does the teacher show enthusiasm while in class?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never _____ always

Teacher Observation Form

1. Are the teacher's instructions to the students clear?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
very very
vague clear

2. Do the students follow instructions quickly, without much effort from the teacher?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never always

3. Does the teacher seem to get frustrated easily?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never always

4. Does the teacher remain helpful to the students throughout the lesson?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never always

5. Does the teacher show enthusiasm while in class?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____
never always

Cooperative

40

Lisa E. Dyson
2001 Benton Drive
Richmond, Virginia
October 13, 1992

To whom it may concern:

I would like to gain permission to collect experimental data from a group of students. These data will be in the form of a survey and will be completely anonymous. These data will be used solely for the purposes they are intended.

Appendix C

Letter to Department of Correctional Education

to gain permission to collect experimental data from a group of students. These data will be in the form of a survey and will be completely anonymous. These data will be used solely for the purposes they are intended.

I would like to gain permission to collect experimental data from a group of students. These data will be in the form of a survey and will be completely anonymous. These data will be used solely for the purposes they are intended.

Lisa E. Dyson

Longwood College
Graduate Student

Cooperative

41

Lisa R. Dyson
2001 Denton Drive
Richmond, Virginia
October 13, 1992

To whom it may concern:

I would like to gain permission to collect experimental data from a group of students. These data will be in the form of a survey and will be completely anonymous. These data will be used solely for the purpose they are intended.

This information will be used during the preparation of a Master's thesis on the topic of cooperative learning. I will be assessing the effect cooperative learning has on self-perceived, classroom group acceptance rates of students in class.

Thank-you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely:
Lisa R. Dyson

Longwood College
Graduate Student

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Department of Correctional Education (DCE)

DCE Youth Center
Reston, Learning Center
Reston, Virginia 2019

January 27, 1993

Dear _____

I am writing in regards to your request to complete your
study, "The Effects of Cooperative Learning on Self-
Esteem, Academic Group Acceptance, and Intrinsic
Motivational Satisfaction." Your request has been processed by the
DCE staff and we are happy to grant your request. Your study will
be conducted in the DCE Youth Center, Reston, Virginia.

Appendix D

Permission Letter from Correctional Facility

The DCE staff has reviewed your request and we are happy to grant your request. Your study will be conducted in the DCE Youth Center, Reston, Virginia. We will be providing you with the necessary information to complete your study.

Sincerely,

Director
DCE



Cooperative

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COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Correctional Education (DCE)

DCE Youth School
Beaumont Learning Center
Beaumont, Virginia 23014

Office of
Principal
Phone: 804-556-3316
Fax: 8-236-4212

January 27, 1993

Dear Ms. Dyson,

I am writing in regards to your request to complete your thesis study, "The Effects of Cooperative Learning on Self-Perceived, Classroom Group Acceptance", here in the Department of Correctional Education. Your request has been granted on the basis that no names, numbers, or other forms of identification will be used in reference to the students: their anonymity will be protected above all else.

I understand that cooperative learning will be implemented in the regular classroom setting for a period of three weeks during the month of February; two research surveys will be administered to the students during that time. This will be the only data collected.

I wish you luck in your endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph D. Perine".

Joseph Perine
Principal
DCE School