COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM: A HANDBOOK

MASTER'S PROJECT

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

An important skill to learn in life is to work and collaborate well with your peers. However, like many things in life it is something that needs to be developed and practiced at an early age.

A large number of research studies have demonstrated that cooperative learning is more effective than individualistic or competitive structures for increasing students' achievement and promoting their cognitive growth (Johnson and Johnson, 1989). Cooperative learning provides another way for students to learn. By working with others their age, students are finding ways to solve problems, learn new material, and having a chance to talk about what they have accomplished. Suddenly things are seen through their eyes rather than the teachers.

Cooperative learning is a method of instruction in which students work together in small groups to reach a common goal. This form of group work has been refined since the early 1970's when researchers and classroom teachers found that group work was more effective when the following components were included: individual accountability, group

goals, task support, and social/task skill development. Group work that includes these components is called cooperative learning (Nattiv, Winitzky, Drickey 1990).

The great thing about cooperative learning is that both teachers and students benefit from its use. A cooperative classroom is an exciting classroom which has a high rate of productivity. It is a very positive gain for the children. The child will grow both socially and academically (Ellis, Whalen, 1990).

There are several other reasons for using cooperative learning. The key ideas to remember are that it provides an environment whereby students learn from each other. It establishes situations fostering problem solving and inquiry learning. It creates a classroom of active learners rather than passive/receptive learners. It directly teaches social skills rather than assuming the skill has been learned. Finally, it heterogeneously groups students versus homogeneous, it takes away the high group, low group status.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a teacher with a basic understanding of cooperative learning and give them ideas on how to get started. The ideas found in this handbook are geared towards the primary grades. Many ideas can be expanded to fit the needs of individuals and their classroom setting.

Definitions

Cooperative Learning- Students working together in small groups or teams to help one another learn academic material.

Heterogeneous Grouping- Mixing students of different ability levels.

Homogeneous Grouping- Grouping individuals on similar ability levels.

Social Skills- Ability to work and relate with peers in order to achieve a goal.

Structures- A content free way of organizing the interaction of individuals in a classroom.

Limitations

This handbook will be used for use in an elementary setting. It will provide teachers with a general knowledge of how to get started in using cooperative learning. The ideas and strategies given will apply to many ages, as with anything the user will need to modify them somewhat to fit a classrooms needs.

Background of the Project

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy involving childrens' participation in small group learning activities that promote positive interaction (Lyman, Foyle, 1988). It provides an environment in the classroom whereby students learn from each other. The use of cooperative learning strategies results in improvement both in the achievement of students and in the equality of their interpersonal relationships.

Not only in schools are people asked to work together, it is found in society and the work force. Higher achievement levels are reached when people are grouped together. Greater achievement is typically found in collaborative situations where peers work together rather than in situations where individuals work alone (Johnson and Johnson, 1991).

Although many teachers are interested in using more cooperative groups they are reluctant to initiate this because they do not know how to use it effectively. Therefore, a handbook on how to use cooperative learning in the classroom is needed.

The significance of this study is to provide the teacher with a handbook on how to use cooperative learning effectively in the classroom. It will give the teacher ways to set the stage for cooperative learning strategies for grouping, teaching social skills, promoting interactive talk among students,and ways of observing and rewarding groups who

achieve their goals. It will be used to promote teacher's use of cooperative learning and see how it encourages students to participate and assume greater responsibility for their learning experiences.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

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, communication skills, and social skills (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

As educators our primary goal is to prepare students for the life ahead of them. Therefore, we must look for the life ahead at the forces that are shaping our economic and social world. As the roles of our society and economy change so too must the roles of our schools. Schools must play a major part in preparing students to think, communicate, and relate.

In a high-technology economy, the norm in the workplace is interaction. No longer can one independently solve the complex problems presented, teams are formed. Our schools must set a priority of teaching the several skills necessary for children to be successful in society and the work force.

Cooperative learning has significant advantages, for both intellectual and social development, over individualized and competitive learning environments. Results indicate that

cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences (Johnson and Johnson, 1986).

Cooperative efforts are effective in learning situations that deal with concept attainment, problem solving, retention, and predicting. There are very few situations where the implementation of cooperative learning is less effective than individualistic efforts. Cooperative efforts are usually more effective in promoting a higher achievement.

The discussion process involved in cooperative learning helps promote a better understanding of the material being covered. With collaborative learning students have the opportunity to hear different view points, exchange ideas, listen to problems and work towards solutions, all of this contributes to the child developing their thinking skills and in turn contributes to a greater understanding.

Children and adults learn more and achieve more when they work in groups, and actually have more fun than if working alone. Students seem more relaxed and begin to have a positive attitude toward both the subject area and the instructional experience. Getting students to enjoy the work they are doing will change their whole outlook on school and learning.

Collaborative learning provides continual opportunities for the development of important leadership and group skills. Children with these learning experiences are

more able to understand another's perspective and have a better developed interaction skills than do those from competitive or individualistic settings (Johnson and Johnson, 1986).

In many subjects the teaching of facts and theories should be secondary to the teaching of critical thinking and the use of higher level reasoning strategies. In a traditional classroom the teacher does most of the thinking for the children, they present facts and expect the students to master them. However, a cooperative classroom allows students to find their own information, talk about facts they have discovered and solve problems they have faced. Cooperative learning promotes the use of the students ability to reason at a higher level.

Overall, the effects of cooperative learning on a variety of factors are extremely positive. It not only promotes higher achievement in the classroom, it prepares students for maintaining collaborative relationships with peers in the future.

All of these positive results of cooperative learning can be accomplished, but it will take some training of both students and teachers. Ways to teach social skills to children and get yourself started in using cooperative learning in your classroom will be found in Chapter 4 of this handbook.

There are several program designs for using

cooperative learning in your classroom. Four of the most popular experts of cooperative learning are; David Johnson, Roger Johnson, Spencer Kagan, and Robert Slavin. When looking at the philosophy these four men have developed you see programs that focus on different aspects, purposes, and underlying principles.

David Johnson and Roger Johnson focus their views of cooperative learning on techniques to improve students' social skills. The interaction that most influences students' performance in instructional situations is student-student interaction. How students interact with each other depends on the type of interdependence the teacher structures among students' learning goals. Learning goals are the ability of a student to demonstrate some type of mastery of the material being studied, every classroom lesson should be aimed at accomplishing learning goals. These goals may be structured to promote cooperative learning. By using cooperative learning students will not only improve academic achievement, however, they will improve their ability to socially interact with their peers.

Robert Slavin and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University develop programs that focus on cooperative learning that improves student achievement.

The principle reason that schools are built is to provide students with the knowledge, concepts, skills, and understanding needed for survival in our society. The most

important outcome of cooperative learning and one that has been most extensively researched, is enhanced achievement. If properly structured, cooperative learning methods can significantly accelerate the learning of all children (Robert Slavin, 1986).

Why do students learn more when they work in a cooperative setting versus a traditional? Slavin has answered this question by separating the theories into two major categories, motivational and cognitive.

Motivational perspectives of cooperative learning deal with the reward or goal structures under which a child operates. From a motivational stand point, cooperative goal structures create a situation where individuals only feel success if the group is successful. Therefore, for individuals to feel they have accomplished something they will need to encourage others within their group and work to also make them successful. As a result, all the children are feeling they have achieved something and feel that they possess the ability to be successful just as everyone else.

In a traditional classroom the competitive atmospher and informal reward system of the classroom create peer norms that oppose academic efforts, one student's success decreases the chances that others will succeed. Students begin to develop negative attitudes towards high achievement suggesting it is for nerds or teacher's pets. However, when students work together toward a common goal, as they do when a

cooperative reward structure is in place, their learning efforts help their groupmates succeed. Students therefore encourage one another's learning, reinforce one another's academic efforts, and express norms favoring academic achievement (Robert Slavin, 1990).

Cognitive theories emphasize the effects of working together, whether or not the group is working toward a common goal. Developmentally, when students work together and interact their mastery of critical facts is increased. They are given the chance to discuss and say things in a way they understand. In a traditional classroom children are rarely given the opportunity to repeat something the teacher has said and put it into terms they understand. Interaction among students on learning tasks will lead in itself to improved student achievement. Students will learn from one another because in their discussions of the content, cognitive conflicts will arise, inadequate reasoning will be exposed, and higher-quality understanding will emerge (Robert Slavin, 1990).

When reading Spencer Kagan's book Cooperative Learning you understand that Kagan focuses on a structural approach to cooperative learning. He views cooperative learning as learning lessons composed of a number of structures. A structure is a content free way of organizing the interaction of individuals in a classroom. It is the social organization of the classroom, involving a series of steps or elements

which define interaction patterns. A structure can be used to deliver a wide range of academic content. When you plug content into a structure you have an activity. Content is delivered via structures (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

Structures provide many advantages to the use of cooperative learning in your classroom; structures can be used over and over, however, activities can not. Structures also provide the teacher with an easier way to promote abstract concepts such as positive interdependence and individual accountability. They make implementing cooperative learning into your classroom easier because you can focus on one structure at a time.

Spencer Kagan also emphasizes two important points to keep in mind when using cooperative learning. One must remember the world is not just competitive and in some important respects is becoming less so, and also the exclusive use of cooperative learning methods is not advised. Rather, use a healthy balance of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic classroom structures to prepare students for the full range of social situations.

When reading the numerous program designs for cooperative learning you understand that the experts have different teaching styles and underlying views behind the importance of collaboration in the classroom. Although this multiplicity of designs for cooperative learning exist, the purpose for using cooperative learning always remains. It

improves student's achievement and it increases the social skills students need both in a school setting and in the future.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This project was conducted in a handbook format to be easily read and understood by those teachers wanting to take steps in using cooperative learning within their classroom. The intent was to give teachers a basic understanding of cooperative learning and to clear up some misconceptions of what cooperative learning is actually all about.

Initially the researcher had some misconceptions about cooperative learning that needed to be cleared up. The interest in using it with the classroom was there, however, the question of using it properly was always at hand. How do you form groups? How do you get children to interact in an effective way? When do I use it in my classroom? How do I make sure one isn't getting a "free ride"? All these questions are quite common and wanted to be cleared up, therefore, research on cooperative learning took place.

First of all, the researcher gathered as many articles dealing with cooperative learning as possible. These articles were found in many of the popular educational magazines available to teachers. Once all the articles were gathered, separated and read, the researcher found out that these were not answering the major questions at hand. The articles were easy to read and gave good ideas, however, without a basic understanding of the philosophy, they were of little help.

Another approach needed to be taken.

At this point the researcher realized that four common names continued to appear in the articles read; David Johnson, Roger Johnson, Spencer Kagan, and Robert Slavin. These four names and books by these philosophers were seen in the bibliography of almost every article read. It was then that the researcher went and investigated the books most commonly seen.

After compiling a list of books and reviewing several written by each, the list was narrowed down to three which were used in writing the handbook portion of this thesis. Circles of Learning by David and Roger Johnson, Cooperative Learning by Spencer Kagan, and Cooperative Learning, Theory, Research, and Practice by Robert Slavin. After reading these three books in greater detail a better understanding of cooperative learning was obtained.

After the information was read the researcher came up with four major points that would be helpful to a teacher who wanted to implement cooperative groups into their daily schedules. The four major points focused on in the handbook portion were; teaching social skills, forming groups, promoting interactive talk, and evaluation. These four factors along with extended reading will allow a teacher to use cooperative learning effectively in their classroom.

For additional information that is not full of philosophy but ideas and tools to use with collaborative

groups Spencer Kagan's book was full of ideas. His book was very easy to read and presented a number of ways to get students to use cooperative groups in a way you feel is useful. The children will enjoy using his ideas and begin to see a purpose for what they are doing.

CHAPTER IV

HANDBOOK

Cooperative learning enables the classroom to become a social system built on students working together in small groups and on groups coordinating with one another.

Students working together in the classroom has not always been popular with teachers. We often question how much learning is going on and how much giving answers and playing is taking place. Students working together in a way that is expected is not going to happen overnight. You will need to teach students ways to work together and the importance of accomplishing their goal. So why add yet another item to the curriculum? When will I find time to work in teaching social skills? Why not stick with the traditional way of teaching, "I know what they need to learn this year so I will teach the materials to them." This is the attitude found among many teachers, however, the great thing to keep in mind then regarding the introduction into school of various forms of active occupation, is that through them the entire spirit of the school is renewed. It has a chance to affiliate itself with life, to become a child's habitat, where he learns through direct living, instead of being a place to learn lessons having an abstract and remote reference to some possible living to be done in the future. It gets a chance to be a miniature community, an embryonic society (Archambult 1964, p.301-303).

When looking at John Dewey's philosophy of education a social context occurs in which students have cooperative interchanges with their fellow students. The process of learning in school was, at one and the same time, a series of social, emotional, and intellectual events. Dewey argues that children's experiences in school should have a high degree of continuity with life in the adult world, not be set apart and conducted in a manner unrelated to the structure and values of the society. Schooling must be deeply meaningful and consistent with students' lives now if the values, knowledge, and skills that schools cultivate are to affect students' lives in the future. Education for the future must be compelling in the present, or its message will not survive (Sharan & Sharan, 1992).

As educators we want children to further knowledge on their own. Traditionally we present information as is and expect students to learn it. Students are not given the opportunity to seek out information, discuss and analyze it, understand it, and relate it to what they have already learned. Too many students leave school not knowing how to seek information and process it on their own.

Furthermore, as adults we should be able to think for ourselves as well as be able to exchange ideas and opinions freely with others. This social skill is not developed by a teacher transmitting information students must master, it is developed by allowing students to debate information's

validity, relevance, and meaning, by permitting students to work together, voice their opinions and come up with results. It is widely acknowledged today that public schooling in its present form is not particularly successful in cultivating students' ability to think critically about knowledge , about themselves, or about their world. (Baron & Sternberg, 1987).

The concern for student becoming more responsible for what they learn is not a recent problem. Dewey was aware of this problem as early as the end of the nineteenth century. "He wished to convey the message that schooling should embody in its very procedures the process and goals of a democratic society." Citizens should take part in the way their lives will be governed. Traditional teaching deprives students the chance to become responsible for what they are learning, through cooperative learning students can become active members of a learning community.

It can not be expected that children will automatically become active members of their learning environment. Small groups of students that cooperate to look at problems, collect information, discuss their findings, and come up with solutions, provide an opportunity to implement the goals of teaching and learning that have been presented. Ways to implement the use of cooperative learning will be presented in the following sections of this chapter.

GETTING STARTED WITH COOPERATIVE LEARNING: TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS

When starting anything new it is advisable to take small steps. The most basic step in developing a cooperative learning classroom is to have students sit in small groups. A change in classroom arrangement can give students the opportunity to get used to working together and seeing how others perceive things. Although this may not be something new to them, working together and solving problems together may take some getting used to. Developing new habits and expectations will take some time. Therefore, taking steps towards a cooperative learning classroom will be a gradual process. Teachers must slowly redefine their roles as direct supervisor to that of facilitators of cooperative learning.

The hardest part in getting started with cooperative learning is having students work cooperatively with one another. For some classes a whole year could be spent on the skill of starting groups and learning how to work as a group. The speed of progress will depend on how much exposure the children have had with working in groups.

Many times we assume that children can work together and possess the social skills it takes to communicate in a group. When teachers assume this they find group work to be very unproductive and feel that cooperative learning simply does not work. Social skills need to be taught just as you

need to teach them to add, subtract, read, and write.

Basic skills which may need to be taught or simply reinforced consist of getting into groups quietly, bringing what materials you need to the group, using quiet voices, listening to your group members, and accomplishing the group goals. You may want to limit this or add more depending on the age of your group.

Susan S. Ellis and Susan F. Whalen recommend using a six-step process whenever you teach a social skill. The amount of time you spend on each step will depend on the complexity of the skill.

1. Define the skill in terms students can understand. Let students know what you expect, be specific about the things they are to do.

2. Help students see the need for the skill. An easy way to do this is to have students describe what would happen if the skill was not used. Role play situations where the skill is used and when it was not used.

3. Have students describe the skill. Ask students what a particular skill looks like and sounds like. Make a T-chart using the students' ideas. Hang it in the room so they can refer back to it if they forget.

4. Have students practice the skill. Ask the students to practice getting into their groups. Tell the students you are going to watch the clock to see how quickly they can do this.

5. Discuss and reinforce students' efforts. Discuss ways to eliminate extra noise.

6. Have students practice the skills as often as needed. Return to a skill whenever students seem to be forgetting to use it.

It is important to evaluate an reinforce the social skills the students are using. If groups are doing well let them know it. If students are not using their skills as you wish, sit down with that group and work out the problem.

Teaching the basic skills are very important to the success of using cooperative learning in your classroom, however, most basic skills should be familiar to students. Once students understand the basic skills you are ready to move on to another important set of skills, Ellis and Whalen refer to these as functioning skills. These skills enable members to work together effectively so that the group can accomplish its task and each member can learn the material. Most functioning skills can be learned by elementary students, however, you will need to decide what your students will be

able to handle.

Functioning skills consist of taking turns contributing ideas, asking for help when needed, complimenting others, checking for understanding and keeping the group focused on their task. When choosing functional skills focus on those that fit what academic task the students are taking part in. Some activities will not require the use of all the functional skills. You may also find that not every group operates the same. Some groups may have trouble using quiet voices while others are not staying on task. If this should result, take time with this group, make a T-chart for what skill they are having difficulty. Allow the group to practice the skill.

Role playing may be an excellent teaching technique, especially when the teacher participates. Choose a simple skill such as taking turns to begin. Sit with a group on the floor and choose a topic to discuss, for example, what they did on their spring vacation. Have those students not participating situated in a way they can all see and hear what is going on. The teacher along with the other group members practice taking turns talking
about their spring vacation.

Writing the skill "Taking Turns" on the chalkboard cues the children in to the particular skill being practiced. When role play is finished, together a list may be made of what was observed. This lends itself to a group discussion

allowing students to talk about what worked and what did not work. Hill and Hill recommend limiting the skills to one for each role play, this focuses the children's attention on that particular skill.

A final set of skills Ellis and Whalen refer to are Higher-Order Thinking Skills. When looking at these skills you will need to determine what your children can handle, some younger students may be able to learn these skills and some are appropriate only for students in grades four through eight.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills consist of providing clarification, building on other's ideas, having the ability to explain in your own words what you learned, analyzing your group's process, coming to an agreement, synthesizing several ideas, evaluating the group's work and finally, criticizing an idea, not a person who presented it.

When looking back at all the social skills presented one may feel overwhelmed. You need to keep in mind that not all of these skills will be taught. Primary teachers will want to focus on just three or four of these skills the entire school year. Intermediate and middle school students may work on more skills throughout the year. Several skills presented should be familiar to students, review with students your expectations of the group when using these skills. It is up to you as to what skills you want to focus on, choose those that are appropriate to the activity the group is engaging in.

Two ways that have been presented when teaching social skills have been the Six-Step Process by Ellis & Whalen and the use of role playing by Hill & Hill. Another approach to teaching social skills is taken from Spencer Kagan's COOPERATIVE LEARNING, he refers to this as The Structured Natural Approach.

As addressed earlier, taking time out of our regular academic curriculum may not always be possible. The alternative is a Structured Natural Approach in which students acquire social skills while they are doing other subjects with little or no time off the regular curriculum. Using this approach will keep your class functioning smoothly.

Learning about social skills is not the same as acquiring them. For example, you can teach children words when they are learning to read, quiz them over this vocabulary and have them all pass. However, when it comes time to reading these words in a book, they can not link them together in a way that is meaningful. Children learn to speak by speaking, they learn to read by reading and they learn social skills by acquiring them, not just learning about them.

The Structured Natural Approach uses four tools in an integrated approach: 1. Roles and Gambits, 2. Modeling and Reinforcement, 3. Structures and Structuring and 4. Reflection and Planning Time. Most importantly these four tools are used in an integrated approach. (Spencer Kagan,1992)

To understand how to use the four tools Kagan suggests

following this seven step approach.

STEP 1: SET UP A SOCIAL SKILLS CENTER

The Social Skills Center consists of a place to record and post the name of Skill-of-the-Week, and post the gambits associated with the skill. The gambit charts should be in a form that will allow add-ons, storage, and reuse.

The Social Skills Center is the heart of the Structured Natural Approach. The center allows the four tools to be integrated toward one objective, the acquisition of one new social skill each week. This center can be used as a reminder to all about what skill is being worked on that week.

STEP 2: CHOOSE A SKILL-OF-THE-WEEK

To choose a Skill-of-the-Week it is important to look at functioning levels of your group. Observe what skills the groups are having difficulty with and focus on those. There are several social skills and it is important for you to choose which are most important in keeping your cooperative groups going.

As stated earlier, children need to learn or acquire

social skills just as they need to learn other subjects. When looking over what math skills a child will need to know we teach them individually, in a way we feel most effective. We would never dream of teaching all the skills at once. Keep this in mind when choosing what social skill you would like to focus on for the week.

STEP 3: INTRODUCE SKILL-OF-THE-WEEK

There are a number of ways Kagan suggests on how to introduce the Skill-of-the-Week. Teacher Talk has the teacher talk with the children about problems she has been seeing in the use of a specific skill. For example, if you are unhappy with the noise level used during group work you might tell the students you have decided the Skill-of-the-Week will focus around talking in quiet voices.

Ask "what if?" Ask students to think about what would happen if the skill were never used. Give students an example of skills you see missing when they are working as groups. Discuss with the class the importance of this skill and explain to them they will be focusing on this skill for the week.

Students can discuss and share the importance of a skill with their teams. When each team has had enough time, pull the groups together and allow the teams to share their ideas. Add ideas to your Social Skills Center and focus on that skill for the week.

Simulations are another way of introducing a skill.

When introducing the importance of having specific roles for each member within the group give all the teams a difficult puzzle to solve. Tell them they will each have "Secret Roles." Hand students their role cards and inform them the importance of keeping their role a secret. What the students will not know is that in all the teams one student was assigned the role of Off Task Captain, and only half the teams were assigned a Taskmaster.

EXAMPLE ROLE CARDS:

Off-Task Captain

Off-Task Captain: "Try to get the group off the task. Without getting wild or obnoxious, attempt to distract the group by talking about interesting things other than the puzzle. Do not let anyone on your team know your role, and try to act in a way they do not discover your assignment.

Taskmaster

Taskmaster. Your job is to keep the group on task. If anyone distracts the group, simply get everyone to pay attention to the task by saying things like, "This puzzle is really interesting." "Do you think we will be able to solve the puzzle before the time is up?" Keep your role secret so no one on the team knows you have been assigned the role of Taskmaster.

Later reflect as a group what happened in the teams. This simulation works well in getting students ready to learn what Kagan refers to as Roles and Gambits. Having introduced the importance of each team member being assigned a role, the students are ready to use the first of the four tools to ensure skill acquisition.

STEP 4: ASSIGN ROTATING ROLE & DEVELOP GAMBITS

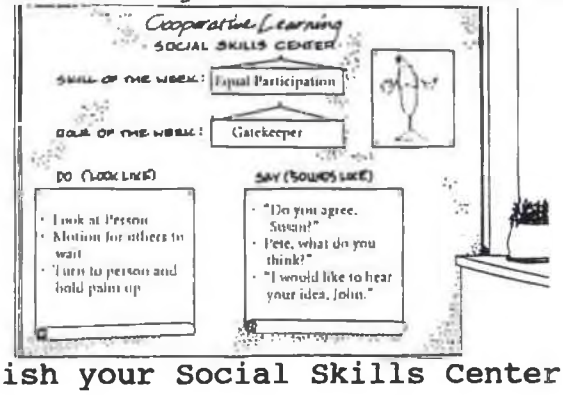
Once you and the students are comfortable with the Skill-of-the-Week you are ready to assign a Role-of-the-Week. The role will correlate with the skill and each student will get a turn at the role because the role rotates each day. (Monday student 1, Tuesday student 2, Wednesday 3, and Thursday 4)

There are many roles that may be assigned to team

members, like social skills not every one will be used, you will need to decide which are best for the activity your group is taking part in. Some social roles Kagan refers to are: Encourager, Praiser, Cheerleader, Coach, Question Commander, Checker, Taskmaster, Recorder, Reflector, Quiet Captain, and Materials Monitor. Keep in mind that these are suggestions from Kagan, feel free to add more or change names to fit you and your students needs.

For example, if the Skill-of-the-Week is Staying on Task, the Role-of-the-Week will be Taskmaster. If the skill is reflecting on the groups progress the Role-of-the-Week is Reflector.

The Role-of-the-Week is posted in the Social Skills Center, along with the gambits associated with the role.



To finish your Social Skills Center you will need to generate from students what Kagan refers to as gambits. Gambits are the verbal and non-verbal behaviors which allow role fulfillment. This as you can see is similar to making a T-chart, "what does the skill look like? what does the skill sound like?" These ideas are to come from the students and may be added to during the week.

STEP 5: STRUCTURE FOR SKILL

It is important in the beginning to have quite a number of structures available to students for skill development. These structures will act as reminders to students about skills they need to use while working in cooperative groups. For example, a Talking Chip may be a structure used for taking turns talking. Each member of the group will get an equal number of chips, when they want to speak they use one of the chips, when their chip is in the middle of the group they are the only one talking. Thumbs up or down may be a structure used as a silent way of agreement or disagreement. Kagan describes many structures in his book, however, you may find ways to make up your own to fit the students needs.

STEP 6: MODEL AND REINFORCE SKILLS

The Skill-of-the-Week may be modeled and reinforced in many ways. Role plays and simulations are popular with children and are a useful tool in developing skills. Skills may also be reinforced by the teacher. You may need to work individually with groups, not every group will be having problems with the same skill.

STEP 7 : REFLECT ON SKILL

Students need time to reflect on how well they are

using the skill. At various times during the week take time to have groups think about how well they are doing. If they are having trouble then they will still have time through the week to improve their group. Reflecting can be done in a number of ways, by using reflection questions, team observers, reflection forms, and self evaluations. The following forms may be found in Cooperative Learning by Spencer Kagan.

Without some instruction in working with groups your students and yourself will feel frustrated. Social skills are very important to the success of using cooperative learning in your classroom. Teaching social skills will take some time at first, although to have it work successfully, it is very necessary. It is also important to stress the importance of these skills to your students, keep the tone very serious so the children realize that this is business and not a time to get together and play.

FORMING GROUPS

What makes us human is the way in which we interact with other persons, and we learn how to interact within the groups in which we are socialized and educated. (Johnson & Johnson)

When composing groups there are many factors you will want to keep in mind. Using cooperative groups moves away from a traditional way of learning. Traditional classrooms often group students in a homogeneous manner. Cooperative groups emphasize heterogeneous grouping, heterogeneous teams maximize the potential for cross-ability, tutoring, and efficient classroom management. It is important to keep in mind that homogeneous grouping is not wrong when using cooperative groups. If we always use heterogeneous teams the high achievers would never interact missing important academic stimulation and the low achievers would never be on the same team missing leadership opportunities. (Spencer Kagan, 1992)

There are several ways to form groups, the four most common cooperative arrangements are: 1. Heterogeneous 2. Random Groups 3. Interest Teams and, 4. Homogeneous Groups. You will want to evaluate the purpose behind using the group work and then decide which arrangement will work best for accomplishing your goals.

When first announcing team assignments make it

something special, when students see your enthusiasm often it creates an excitement in them. Rather than reading each student's name and team assignments, turn it into a scavenger hunt to find your group, make maps children need to follow to find their team, or number mobiles above each team table with team members listed. If you create a tone that says, "this is important" students will follow.

A number of researchers and theorists have taken heterogeneity of teams as a defining characteristic of cooperative learning. Usually, and most often stressed, four members make up a cooperative team. Heterogeneous teams are usually formed by having a high, two middle, and a low achieving student on each team. Keep in mind gender and ethnic diversities as well.

Much of the rationale behind using cooperative groups is the active participation that takes place on the children's part. The amount of active participation increases with a group of four children versus a group larger. It is not wrong to have students work in groups smaller than four, however, try to avoid letting the groups get much larger. Also, four is a number which will allow pairing to occur within the team.

If your class does not divide evenly, place the one student in a group that will benefit both the group and the student. If you have two extra students break a group and make two groups of three. A smaller group will allow more active participation than a larger.

To ensure your heterogeneous teams consist of one high, two middle and one low rank your class from highest to lowest achievers. This can be done based on instinct or by past test scores. Next, to select your first team choose the top student, the bottom student, and two in the middle. This will make up team one. If you have problems and need to make a switch due to gender, ethnic background, or have two students together who should not be, move up or down one student in the area needed. To select the remaining teams repeat the process.

Random teams have much to offer including variety, new group members, new leadership opportunities and are quick and easy to form, however, with random teams the factors you hope do not occur have a better chance of happening. You could come up with a team where no one knows the content well, teams of one sex or gender, and unbalanced "winner" and "loser" teams. Random teams are best used when reviewing content is taking place.

Interest teams are formed by allowing students to form their own teams. This can give students an opportunity to explore something of interest in depth or let best friends work together.

Homogeneous Language Teams will not be used in all situations. If you have a class with different levels of English proficiency this type of team grouping may be very helpful.

The teams you have set up will work together over a five or six week period. It is important to keep these groups together so they have time to bond and learn other team members work habits. Use games or other techniques for team members to become acquainted with other members. Have groups come up with team logos, allow them to make a poster or banner which represents their group. Team building creates enthusiasm, trust, and mutual support which, in the long run, lead to more efficient academic work (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

DEVELOPING INTERACTIVE TALK AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS

Talk is a way by which students explore their ideas, clarify them to themselves and to one another, expand and modify them, and finally, make them their own (Sharan, Sharan, 1992).

The success of cooperative learning teams as well as success later on in life is a persons ability to communicate. Many factors in life rely on a persons communication skills, communication skills are learned (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

One of the most characteristic features of the cooperative classroom is that several groups frequently conduct discussions simultaneously in different parts of the room. This conflicts heavily with the values of a traditional classroom where the teacher does most of the talking. The traditional teacher fears the interactive talk is disruptive to a child's learning and that most of the talk taking place is unproductive. However, if children are trained properly in cooperative learning students will interact in an effective way.

Increasingly we will move away from defining education success exclusively in terms of the quantity of information mastered. Instead, to a large extent, we will define educational success as the ability among students to generate, question, combine, categorize, recategorize, evaluate, and

apply information; primary will be the thinking skills (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

One can not expect effective talk to take place when children are put into cooperative groups. Once again it is something you will need to work on with your students.

Before having students work with their groups pair students and give the two a topic to discuss. Have them share their ideas, questions, and solutions. When the two have been given enough time, have them share what they talked about with the class, this could lead into a class discussion. Be very firm when it comes to students sharing ideas, make sure they know that only one person may talk at a time. When you have worked a few times with paired discussion use the same technique with your cooperative groups for a team discussion.

Another technique Spencer Kagan suggests is called Teammate Consult. This strategy would work well if you were having the groups work on a puzzle or worksheet. First, have all team members put their pencils in the center of the group. Next, a student reads the first question and the students seek answers. Once an answer has been suggested one student needs to check for agreement and understanding. When an agreement has been reached then students may pick up their pencils and write the answers in their own words. When the group has reached a consensus on question number one the group changes rolls and moves on to the next question. This process is repeated until the puzzle or worksheet is complete.

A third technique which is used most often with cooperative groups is brainstorming. This is an effective way to help the students relax and let themselves be creative. Based on what cooperative activity you choose, brainstorming is a useful way to get a large number of ideas in a short amount of time. Be sure to keep groups structured when they are brainstorming, remind them only one person may contribute at a time.

There are several other ways to get students thinking and interacting the way you want. Spencer Kagan and Yale and Shlomo Sharan have given a number of ways in their books to get kids to develop their thinking skills. It is important to remember that in order for students to be productive with working in groups you will need to model and give the students an opportunity to practice, as with so many things in life practice helps a person improve.

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

With a collaborative classroom, assessment is based on a democratic relationship between the teacher and students and evaluation procedures differ from those of a competitive learning environment (Hill and Hill,1992).

In traditional classrooms assessment focuses almost entirely upon the curriculum content and how individual children perform. Traditional classrooms rarely base grades on other abilities a child possess. However, in a collaborative classroom the assessment of children's cooperative skills and their knowledge of curriculum are equally important.

With a cooperative classroom the teacher seeks ways to encourage peer and self-assessment. Together the teacher and the child monitor the child's progress throughout the year. Periodically, they meet and reflect the progress that is being made and discuss what needs to be worked on. Continuing feedback is very important in a cooperative classroom.

Susan Hill and Tim Hill present a number of assessment techniques which may be helpful in a collaborative classroom. One option they present is referred to as a Goal-Based Assessment. This works well in a cooperative classroom because it gives the students an opportunity to take on more responsibility for their learning. Goals may be set for the individual, the group, or the classroom. They can be set as

weekly, monthly, quarterly, or yearly goals depending on the age group of your students. The goals should range from social skill development to academic achievements. Children should be given the opportunity to choose their own goals, and they should meet regularly with the teacher to discus their progress. Forms can be made for children to record their goals. These may be kept in their portfolios so both you and the student have easy access to them.

Another idea Hill and Hill suggest is to keep a daily record or a chart of weekly achievements. Some children need to refer to specific daily goals, for example, keeping your hands to yourself. Set up a form that will allow the child to assess themselves on their daily progress.

Learning to cooperate is a long term process. It does not magically take place. Taking the time to make the cooperative skills explicit and providing feedback help build a cooperative classroom. Finding time to evaluate all the students in your classroom may be difficult. Develop your one form for collecting data. Use a system that is quick and takes as little time as possible.

Almost every study of cooperative learning in which the cooperative classes achieved more than traditional control groups used some sort of group reward.

Teachers should try to make what they teach cooperative groups intrinsically motivating, but if they want to encourage students to expand the efforts to truly master a

subject, they should use group rewards (Spencer Kagan, 1992).

Robert Slavin feels it is very important to reward children for a job well done. Rewards usually consist of certificates for teams whose average performance on individual assessments exceeds a pre-established standard of excellence. Although some experts disagree and feel that extrinsic rewarding destroys intrinsic interests, and that this is likely to happen when using awards with cooperative learning, Slavin strongly disagrees. He believes outstanding achievement always produces extrinsic rewards of some kind, how else do outstanding achievers maintain their motivation.

Spencer Kagan also employs a similar reward system. Through award certificates and improvement charts, Kagan believes that just because you show a child you are pleased he is eating ice cream, it will not make him less motivated to eat ice cream in the future.

Remember, what works for one person may not always work for the next. When using cooperative learning utilize techniques for evaluation that best meet your needs.

Implementing the use of cooperative learning will take time and work, however, the positive effects will be rewarding. It is important to modify activities to your needs and the students'. And finally, as with anything new take small steps and continue climbing slowly as you gain confidence with those already taken.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Research shows that cooperative learning does have a positive effect on a child's social development and their academic achievement. By giving the students a chance to interact with others they begin to discover what they know and what they do not yet understand. Students are given an opportunity not only to become responsible for what they learn, however, they are able to develop a very important skill they will need later on in life, the ability to interact with their peers.

The idea of cooperative learning has been around for a number of years and has proven to be effective when used properly. In entering an educational period where many changes are taking place we need to be careful and educate ourselves before jumping into something new and unfamiliar. A large mistake made by many teachers is that they try something new and it doesn't work as well as they would like. This is when a poor attitude towards change occurs. Cooperative learning is a positive change taking place in education, however, it is important to take time when implementing it into the classroom, a few unsuccessful attempts may leave a bad impression on a positive thing.

Society is changing at a rapid speed and so too are the children teachers are encountering in school. With the many changes taking place education needs to prepare students for the future ahead of them.

The ideas found in this handbook will help a teacher get started in using cooperative learning, however, further knowledge will need to be pursued. Feelings of frustration are bound to happen as with beginning anything new. The results of using cooperative learning in the classroom will be a rewarding one in the end.

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