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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest describes research findings, mainly in elementary social studies classrooms, on the effects of cooperative learning on multicultural awareness and cross-ethnic friendships, interpersonal relationships, and prosocial behavior. Research findings on cooperative techniques in the classroom are summarized as follows: compared with other methods, cooperative learning produces greater academic learning, better intergroup relations among black, white, and Hispanic students, enhanced self-esteem, and improved relationships between mainstreamed academically handicapped students and other students. Brief sections describing the positive effects of cooperative learning are followed by descriptions of three widely used approaches to cooperative learning: (1) Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)--a method in which students with widely varying academic abilities are assigned to four- or five-member teams; (2) the "Jigsaw" method--in which students become "experts" on a topic, then meet with other experts to study their assigned topic; and (3) the Group Investigation Model, which attempts to eliminate competition entirely by involving cooperative group inquiry emphasizing data gathering by pupils, interpretation of information through group discussion, and synthesis of individual contributions into a group project. A list of references concludes the document. (LH)

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COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION:
WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

ERIC Digest No. 20

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education

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Cooperative Learning in Social Studies Education: What Does the Research Say?

Cooperative learning refers to students working together to achieve a common goal. In addition to usual learning goals, it includes the goal of establishing a collaborative/helping relationship among participants (McCulloch 1985).

This ERIC Digest describes research findings, mainly in elementary social studies classrooms, on the effects of cooperative learning on multicultural awareness and cross-ethnic friendships, interpersonal relationships, and prosocial behavior. The Digest then provides information on classroom approaches to cooperative learning.

Research Findings On Cooperative Learning

Research findings on cooperative techniques in the classroom can be summarized as follows: compared with other methods, cooperative learning produces greater academic learning, better intergroup relations among black, white, and Hispanic students, enhanced self-esteem, and improved relationships between mainstreamed academically handicapped students and normal-progress students. Studies indicate that cooperative learning develops general mutual concern and interpersonal trust among students and increases students' propensity for prosocial behavior (Slavin 1983; Sharan 1980). In a meta-analysis of the research literature, Johnson and others (1981) reviewed 122 studies on cooperative learning. Their analysis supported the overwhelming superiority of cooperation for promoting student achievement and productivity. Although this conclusion has not gone unchallenged (Slavin 1983; Sharan 1980), the overall weight of the evidence supports these relationships.

Multicultural Awareness and Cross-Ethnic Friendships. Slavin and Madden (1979), in a secondary analysis of data collected in a national sample of high schools by the Educational Testing Service, found that teacher workshops, multiethnic texts, minority history, heterogeneous groups, and classroom discussions of race relations had very limited effects on students' social attitudes and behavior. On the other hand, the assignment of students of different races to work with each other and the participation of students on multiracial sports teams had strong, consistent, positive effects on race relations.

A Johnson and Johnson study (1981), using fourth-graders (N=51) divided into cooperative and individualistic groups, showed significantly greater cross-ethnic interaction in the cooperative learning group during both instructional and free time. Attitude scores also supported the finding that cooperative learning experiences benefit intergroup relations. Studies designed to increase the acceptance of mainstreamed

academically handicapped students demonstrate a similar facilitative effect on student acceptance.

Interpersonal Relationships. Mutual concern among students is measured in many of the cooperative learning studies by obtaining from students ratings of peers and perceptions of being liked by peers. The findings, regardless of the mode of cooperative learning used, have been highly positive with regard to the promotion of interpersonal liking, attraction, trust, and sense of being accepted by teachers and peers.

For example, Cooper and others (1980) found that students who were initially prejudiced against one another evidenced greater interpersonal attraction in an experimental cooperative setting than did students in competitive and individualistic settings.

Prosocial Behavior. Johnson and others (1976) found that pupils in cooperative small-group learning settings respond more prosocially on altruistic versus individualistic choice tasks than do pupils in individual learning situations. In another study, based on the social studies curriculum, it was found that students who had studied cooperatively made more cooperative and helpful decisions in a subsequent simulation game than did students who had studied competitively (Ryan and Wheeler 1977). In this study, fifth- and sixth-grade students played the simulation "Seal Hunt," a component of *Man: A Course of Study*. The cooperative subjects manifested significantly more cooperative behavior, such as instituting and implementing group strategies and rendering assistance to one another.

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Approaches to Cooperative Learning

Robert E. Slavin (1983), a major proponent of cooperative learning, advocates the practice of cooperative learning in order to redress the inconsistency between the obvious importance of cooperation to adult success and the schools' competitive and individualistic academic system. Three of the more widely used approaches to cooperative learning are described below.

1. *Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD)* is a method in which students with widely varying academic abilities are assigned to four- or five-member teams. The study of new material in a group is not finished until all members of the group are sure they understand the material. Scoring is done by teams, and the teams with the highest scores are recognized in a weekly class newsletter.

2. Slavin has modified the *Jigsaw* method of Aronson (1978) into *Jigsaw II*. Students in six-member groups each read a common narrative, then each is given a topic on which to become an expert. Students from different groups meet with other experts to study their assigned topic, then return to their own groups to share what they have learned. Students take individual quizzes, which are formed into team scores. The highest scoring teams and individuals are recognized in a class newsletter.

3. In addition to the competitive/cooperative structure described above, there has also been extensive research on the *Group Investigation Model*, which attempts to eliminate competition entirely. This model involves cooperative group inquiry emphasizing data-gathering by pupils, interpretation of information through group discussion, and synthesis of individual contributions into a group project. The parallels between the Group Investigation Model and the inquiry approach to social studies education are striking.

Conclusion

Cooperative learning appears to be a promising method by which social studies teachers can simultaneously achieve both academic and socio-moral objectives. To date, the research has not examined whether the results achieved persist over time. Also, there has been little research conducted with high school subjects. Nevertheless, the findings are sufficiently promising to warrant future serious consideration by social studies teachers and researchers.

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