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ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Typical cooperative learning strategies used in grades 2 through 12 involve student teams in which students: (1) work on group projects that emphasize analysis and evaluation; (2) study together what has been previously taught, and are later tested individually; and (3) learn about specific parts of a general topic assigned to the group. Programs profiled in this document focus on mathematics instruction for grades 3 through 6; reading, writing, and language arts instruction for grades 2 through 6; reading, writing, and math instruction for kindergarten through grade 5; and science and math instruction for bilingual Spanish-English students in grades 2 through 5. Contact information is included in the profiles. It is noted that outcomes of cooperative learning, which are demonstrated in more than 70 research studies, include increased academic achievement; improved relations among students of different ethnic groups; and improved relationships between students with learning disabilities and other students. A list of four resources for further information on cooperative learning is provided. (BC)

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Cooperative Learning

What is it? Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement.

Why use it? Documented results include improved academic achievement, improved behavior and attendance, increased self-confidence and motivation, and increased liking of school and classmates. Cooperative learning is also relatively easy to implement and is inexpensive.

How does it work? Here are some typical strategies that can be used with any subject, in almost any grade, and without a special curriculum:

- **Group Investigations** are structured to emphasize higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation. Students work to produce a group project, which they may have a hand in selecting.
- **STAD (Student Teams–Achievement Divisions)** is used in grades 2–12. Students with varying academic abilities are assigned to 4- or 5-member teams in order to study what has been initially taught by the teacher and to help each reach his or her highest level of achievement. Students are then tested individually. Teams earn certificates or other recognition based on the degree to which all team members have progressed over their past records.
- **Jigsaw II** is used with narrative material in grades 3–12. Each team member is responsible for learning a specific part of a topic. After meeting with members of other groups, who are "expert" in the same part, the "experts" return to their own groups and present their findings. Team members then are quizzed on all topics.

What are some examples of specific programs? These are just a few of the successful programs available that use specially developed material:

- **Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI) in Mathematics:** An elementary, individualized program that provides direct instruction within a cooperative learning setting, emphasizing concepts, real-life problems, and manipulatives. TAI is for grades 3–6 and older students not ready for algebra.

  Contact: Barbara Luebbe
  Center for the Social Organization of Schools
  3505 North Charles Street
  Baltimore, MD 21218
  (410) 516–0370

- **Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC):** A comprehensive approach to reading and writing/language arts for grades 2–6 that integrates the latest reading research findings with the essential components that make cooperative learning so successful.

  Contact: Anna Marie Farnish, CIRC
  Center for the Social Organization of Schools
  3505 North Charles Street
  Baltimore, MD 21218
  (410) 516–0370

- **Success for All:** A schoolwide program for grades pre-K through 5 that strives to ensure that every child will be performing at grade level in reading, writing, and math by third grade and will be able to maintain grade level from then on.

  Contact: Robert Slavin or Nancy Madden
  Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students
  3505 North Charles Street
  Baltimore, MD 21218
  (410) 516–0274

- **Finding Out/Descubrimiento:** A science and math curriculum for bilingual Spanish–English students in grades 2 through 5.

  Contact: Michael Chatfield
  Stanford University, School of Education
  Stanford, CA 94305
  (415) 723–5992

What else does it do? Schools are using similar strategies with both students and teachers to do the following:

- Develop and use critical thinking skills and teamwork;
- Promote positive relations among different ethnic groups;
- Implement peer coaching;
- Establish environments where academic accomplishments are valued; and even
- Cooperatively manage schools.

What else does the research say? More than 70 major studies—by federally sponsored research centers, field-initiated investigations, and local districts examining their own practices—have demonstrated cooperative learning's effectiveness on a range of outcomes:

Student achievement: When two necessary key elements—*group goals* and *individual accountability*—are used together, the effects on achievement are consistently positive.

Improved relations among different ethnic groups: One of the earliest and strongest findings shows that students who cooperate with each other like each other.

Mainstreaming students with learning disabilities: Significant improvements in relationships occur between these students and other children in their class when these learning strategies are used.

Where can I get more information?

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by Stephen Balkcom

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