

Cooperative Learning

After 30 years of research, the evidence is impressive supporting the claim that cooperative learning groups enhance academic achievement; increase positive self-esteem, internal locus of control, altruism, and perspective taking; improve intergroup relationships between students without and with disabilities, as well as the relationships between students of different cultural backgrounds; and provide positive peer support.

The five basic elements that are essential to cooperative learning groups are:

Positive interdependence - success depends on connectedness with others.

Individuality accountability - random selection of one student's work or explanation of a problem can accomplish this element.

Face-to-face interaction - when students assist, help, support and encouragement one another's effort to learn.

Social Skills - specific social and interaction skills are necessary for leadership, communication, trust-building, decision-making, and conflict management.

Group process - monitoring and discussing the interactional process of the groups is necessary. Are they achieving a goal?

Cooperative learning has several aims:

1. In cooperative learning groups, students are encouraged to help and support one another rather than compete.
2. Cooperative learning increases academic performance.
3. Cooperative learning encourages active learning; the need for extensive research and practice.
4. Cooperative learning prepares students for work in today's world.
5. Cooperative learning provides an opportunity to improve race relations in the school.

Cooperative Learning takes numerous forms. Programs are known by names such as: Learning Together, Group Investigation, Team Assisted Individualization, Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, Teams-Games-Tournaments, and Jigsaw (Slavin, 1983) provides a complete review of these cooperative learning methods.

Cooperative learning programs have demonstrated positive affective outcomes that directly address the needs of at-risk youth: motivation, peer support, self attributions, and self-esteem (Slavin, Kurweit, & Wasik, 1994; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).