Research Paper

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Cooperative Learning: An effective Pedagogical method

Education

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ABSTRACT

Cooperative learning, one kind of student-centred learning approach helps the students to obtain practical learning skills, abilities for effective communication and proficiency in term of understanding knowledge, and it promotes positive student attitudes towards their own learning. In the traditional learning setting, the majority of interactions are teacher–student. This can create a competitive environment and produce a passive attitude towards learning. Cooperative learning method helps to minimize the competitiveness in the learning environment by encouraging students to work together. In addition, it is claimed to promote more positive student attitudes toward their own learning, enhance more positive relationships between participants. Research based on cooperative learning shows that this is better than traditional method in all aspects. This paper highlights the important aspects of this method in promoting learning and other skills among the peer team.

Introduction

Cooperative Learning (CL) is a teaching strategy involving students' participation in group learning that emphasizes positive interaction. It is a strategy by which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, are engaged in learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. The participation of every student in the group and cooperation among group members is considered important. The students are rewarded for their individual and collective efforts. CL refers to a method of instruction whereby students work together in groups to reach common goals. Cooperative learning is a pedagogical approach that promotes student-student interaction via working in small groups to maximize their learning and reach their shared goal. This type of learning approach decreases competitiveness and individualism but increases opportunities to actively construct or transform the knowledge among students.

Basic elements of Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning consists of five basic elements

- Positive Interdependence
- Face to Face Interaction
- Individual Accountability
- Interpersonal and Social Skills
- Group processing

Positive Interdependence

The first element is positive interdependence. Positive interdependence means that in cooperative learning situations students are required to work together as a cohesive group to achieve shared learning objectives. Positive interdependence may be facilitated through having students occupy complementary. Cooperation occurs only when students perceive that the success of one depends on the success of the other. Therefore, a number of ways of structuring positive interdependence are carried out such as reward, resources, or task responsibilities to supplement goal interdependence. Each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources or role or task responsibilities.

Promotive Interaction:

Promotive interaction occurs as individuals facilitate each other's efforts to accomplish the group's shared goals. As part of cooperative learning condition students are required to interact verbally with one another on learning tasks exchange opinions, explain things, teach others and present their understanding. To construct promotive interaction, groups should be small when students begin learning together to help them develop learning skills. Johnson (2005) suggests that it is necessary to maximize the opportunities for them to help, support, encourage, and praise each other. Such promotive interaction helps to promote the following:

- orally explaining how to solve problems
- teaching one's knowledge to other
- checking for understanding
- discussing concepts being learned
- connecting present with past learning

Individual Accountability

The third element of cooperative learning is individual accountability. Individual responsibility means that students ask for assistance, do their best work, present their ideas, learn as much as possible, take their tasks seriously, help the group operate well, and take care of one another. Individual accountability may be enhanced by keeping the size of the group small. When groups are small, group members tend to communicate more frequently, which increases the amount of information utilized in arriving at a decision.

Interpersonal and Social Skills

The fourth element is interpersonal and social skills. To achieve mutual goals students must:
(a) get to know and trust each other
(b) communicate accurately and unambiguously
(c) accept and support each other
(d) resolve conflicts constructively.

When participants are more socially skilled, the achievement and productivity in cooperative groups tends to be higher. Students must be taught the social skills and be motivated to use them. Social skills which are needed for both teamwork and task work include leadership, decision–making, trust–building, communication, and conflict–management skills.

Group Processing

Cooperative learning promotes academic achievement, is relatively easy to implement, and is not expensive. Group processing helps improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the shared efforts to achieve the group's goals, via reflection on the learning process Reflection helps students decide which action is practical and which action is not practical, and which group processing should or should not be continued if there are problems existing within the group. Evaluating interaction among group members, examining the group's tasks, giving feedback, and celebrating the presentation of the small group and the entire class may be effective ways of constructing group processing. If these basic elements exist in cooperative learning groups, students achieve better, demonstrate superior learning skills, and experience more positive relationships among group members, and between students and the teacher, and more positive self-esteem and attitudes toward the subject area

Social support and positive relationships

In cooperative learning situations, students provide more so-

cial support, both personally and academically, than students in competitive or individualistic situations. Such positive relationships result in an increase in motivation and persistence in working toward the shared goals, as well as more satisfaction, commitment to group goals, productivity and personal responsibility for achievement. The learning atmosphere of classrooms is likely to be associated with the educational policy and values of schools , but cooperative learning results in positive social relationships among participants (learners and teachers); and expands the circle of companionship among the students

Research support for CL to develop positive attitudes towards the learning process

Cooperative learning has been shown to promote more positive attitudes of students toward their own learning than do competitive or individualistic learning environments because students work together for shared goals. This is supported by research studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Mulryan, 1994; Cavalier, Klein, & Cavalier, 1995; Nhu-Le, 1999) which showed a strong relationship between cooperative learning methods and the greater positive attitudes of students toward their own learning. Recently, several other researchers (Le, 2010; Thanh-Pham, 2010a&b) investigated students' attitudes toward cooperative learning, and their attitudes toward subject matter in the Vietnamese setting of higher education. The results of these studies indicate that students working in cooperative learning groups enjoyed cooperative activities and obtained more knowledge because cooperative learning improved their relationships with their peers, decreased conflict in the group and enhanced their self-esteem. Also, students in the cooperative learning groups felt more interested in learning, and less anxious, perceiving cooperative learning as a valuable way to effectively increase their knowledge.

Benefits of Cooperative Learning

- It enhance the use of problem-solving
- It develops critical thinking ability, oral communication skills & interpersonal skills
- Cooperative learning facilitates greater improvement in self-esteem
- It develops more positive feelings toward the learning tasks
- Students felt that they achieved more by learning through this method
- This method improves social relations among students.
- Cooperation can provide opportunities for sharing ideas,
- It provides opportunity to the students to learn how others think and react to problems
- Cooperative learning in early childhood can promote positive feelings toward school, teachers, and peers.

In cooperative learning teams, low-achieving students can make contributions to a group and experience success, and all students can increase their understanding of ideas by explaining them to others.

Conclusion

Cooperative Learning (CL) is a well-studied strategy that has been found effective across various academic levels and subjects. Cooperative learning improves the peer learning and teaching interaction, increases students' cognitive function, enhances academic performance and promotes improvement of social skills. In this approach, students working in a cooperative learning environment is that as they work together, the sum of their efforts is greater than each individual's effort. This pedagogical method provide opportunity to share ideas and construct new meanings through shared discussions and active connection in learning that enriches their experiences. It promotes socialization and positive student interactions and improved attitudes to learning. Cooperative learning promotes student motivation, encourages group processes, fosters social and academic interaction among students, and rewards successful group participation.

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