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Development of argument (analysis, interpretation)						
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Copy of this sheet must accompany all written.

# Cooperative Learning

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## **Introduction**

Cooperative learning has been proven in many studies to be highly effective and successful among students throughout most of the world (David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, 2009). It facilitates students to work in small groups of mixed ability, to gain social skills they can use throughout their lives and to improve their overall understanding of a certain subject. This essay will outline a brief history of cooperative learning and discuss studies on its effectiveness. In addition, the essay acknowledge social interdependence theory and what it entails, it will also outline the five key components of cooperative learning.

‘Individual student performance was superior when cooperative methods were used as compared with competitive or individualistic methods.’ (M. Laguardo, J. 2014, p.51).

## **Background on Cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning gained interest in the early 1980s as a result of the first meta-analysis involving 122 studies on the effects of cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning and has now been considered essential in ensuring successful student learning outcomes and achievements (M. Gillies, R. 2016). Competitive learning was not criticized until the late 1960s (eg. Skinner 1968) as the social construct known as Darwinism had promoted interpersonal competition and individualistic efforts with phrases such as ‘survival of the fittest’ (W. Johnson, D; T. Johnson, R. 2009, p.365). Individualistic learning was then challenged by social scientists who carried out studies which pointed out the importance of peer communication and interaction when learning. (Hartup, 1976; D. W. Johnson, 1980;

D. W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 1981d; Ladd, 1999; Lewis & Rosenblum, 1975). Slavin (1989) reported on a synthesis of 60 studies among both primary and secondary students that compared cooperative learning to controlled groups studying the same material. The results showed 72% of the overall effects that cooperative learning had on student achievement and learning and only 15% favoured control groups with 13% having no significant difference. Cooperative learning is now utilised in schools and universities worldwide (Robyn M. Gillies, 2016).

## **Social interdependence**

There was a shift towards social interdependence theory as a result of Gestalt theory which took over from individualistic learning (Deutsch, 1968).

Kurt Koffka proposed that groups as a dynamic whole constantly shift and interdependence between members might vary. Social interdependence can be positive where there is a common perception of goals and an understanding that collaboration will result in a mutually desired outcome.

‘All group members understand that they are linked together in such a way that one cannot achieve success unless they all do, and they must learn to synchronize their efforts to ensure this occurs.’(M. Gillies, R. 2016, p.41).

Negative interdependence occurs when individuals are interdependent yet they believe their goals do not correlate with another individual’s.

‘Individuals discouraging and obstructing each other’s efforts’ (David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, 2009, p.365). No social interdependence would propose no collaboration because of perception that goals are unrelated.

The basis of social interdependence theory is that how goals are structured determines interaction and pattern of interaction determines outcome (Deutsch, 1949, 1962).

### **The Five Key Components**

There is a lot more to cooperative learning than merely placing students together and expecting them to know how to communicate respectfully and complete the task given. In order to successfully ensure achievement Johnson and F. Johnson (2009) put forward the 5 key components of cooperative learning that must be a part of the structure of groups.

The first being positive interdependence, where common goals are made and awards are given. Group tasks, roles and resources are given to induce positive interdependence while boundaries are established to determine who is interdependent with whom and to attempt to make discontinuity infrequent.

‘Positive interdependence is established in groups when students understand that they are each responsible for completing a part of the task which, in turn, all must achieve in order for the group to complete its goal.’(M. Gillies, R. 2016, p.41).

The second key component is individual accountability and personal responsibility, failing oneself is bad but failing a group including oneself is worse. Larger groups would have less individual accountability but the more one is liked and respected in a group, the more responsibility they will in turn feel (Wentzel, 1994). Achievement in students can be ensured by group composition and by assigning certain tasks to members of mixed ability of a group.

The third key component is promotive interaction which occurs when group members

help each other, they are willing to encourage and facilitate each other's efforts in order for the group to achieve. Unlike oppositional or negative, promotive interaction is distinguished by individuals (David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, 2009). In carrying out promotive interaction, group members can provide each other with constructive criticism and feedback, respectfully communicate any disagreement and compromise to come to a democratic agreement. Students must be taught social skills and use them with each other in order to put them into practice.

The fourth key component is appropriate use of social skills when individuals can cooperate and communicate effectively and respectfully with one another.

'To coordinate efforts to achieve mutual goals, participants must (a) get to know and trust each other, (b) communicate accurately and unambiguously, (c) accept and support each other, and (d) resolve conflicts constructively' (D. W. Johnson & F. Johnson, 2009, p. 369).

Teachers can give feedback to students on their social skills which will increase achievement and help build positive relationships within the group.

The fifth key component is group processing, a way in which individuals can reflect on what they have learned and constructively come to an agreement for change if need be. Putnam et al. (1989) found that more positive relationships formed between non-disabled and disabled students through cooperative learning and group processing than individualistic learning.

'The purpose of group processing is to clarify and improve the effectiveness with which members carry out the processes necessary to achieve the group's goals.'

(David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, 2009).

## **Personal Reflection**

My time at school was mainly based around individualistic learning where there was a clear hierarchy and segregation between students and teachers. That being said, group work would occasionally be set for us students which gave us an opportunity to collaborate. In my opinion, teachers were very encouraging and supportive of us when it came to working together as a group by assigning us certain tasks and responsibilities that each of us had. I was quite social in schooling but group work in the classroom gave me the opportunity to consolidate with team members and come to a democratic decision on how tasks would be achieved, accomplishing social interdependence. It also made me more comfortable with public speaking and confidence as I engaged with my appropriate use of social skills. Cooperative learning encouraged me to get to know individuals I would not have been close to outside the

classroom and gave me the chance to take initiative and feel validation with individual accountability and personal responsibility. I believe that I would have benefited greatly had my time at school been more focused on cooperative learning.

## **Conclusion**

It has been proposed in numerous studies and meta-analysis' that cooperative learning is a highly successful methodology in education. From looking into detail at the psychological and sociological effects, cooperative learning seems to be a more desirable method for teaching than individualistic learning. The theory of cooperative learning outlines the difficulties in competitive learning and builds a framework for functioning in society among other things. Working as a group builds relationships and trust, therefore, affects mental health in a positive way inevitably resulting in a positive outcome. The three categories which Johnson and Johnson, 2009 loosely focus on are: effort to achieve, quality of interpersonal relationships, and psy-chological health.(David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, 2009).

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