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Social studies can be rewarding for elementary, middle, and secondary school students. Unfortunately, many students are unable to learn and master social studies because of difficulties in understanding and grasping the content. Social studies teachers have traditionally relied on large group instruction, independent seat work, and objective tests as their principal methods of instruction (Slavin 1991). Research, however, has shown that students learn better through active involvement in activities, small group interaction, and cooperative learning (Slavin 1994). During the past twenty-five years, cooperative learning strategies have been increasingly used in classrooms as alternatives to traditional classroom methods because they have positive effects on content learning, overall student achievement, student self-esteem, and time-on-task (Mills and Durden 1992; Slavin 1991).

In this article, I examine cooperative learning as an instructional model that can be used by middle and high school social studies teachers to improve students' understanding of content and encourage students to become actively and constructively involved in the learning process. I also present cooperative learning strategies that are appropriate for use in the social studies classroom and make recommendations for future research in the area of cooperative learning and social studies.

BACKGROUND

Today's students represent a wide range of academic motivations and abilities, learning styles, and interests (Lazarowitz 1995). Classroom teachers face the challenge of adapting texts and other teaching materials to their students' needs and of deciding which instructional methods will maximize students' learning and success. Middle and high school social studies teachers are not exempt from this challenge. Because most social studies classes are structured around the textbook, traditional instructional methods usually involve teacher talk and students working individually on assignments at their desks. Although learning can take place from lectures and individual student seat work, research has shown that for many students, lectures and individual assignments completed at a desk are neither meaningful nor productive methods of learning (Johnson and Johnson 1991; Erickson 1984). Lazarowitz (1995) contended that traditional whole-class instruction is not an effective way for students to develop academically or socially in a classroom because such instruction encourages individualistic and competitive learning that usually only benefits strong students. It allows little opportunity for students to raise questions, discuss their work, or express their opinions. Van Cleaf (1988) also noted that low-achieving students are at a disadvantage in traditional classrooms because they do not process the information needed to complete tasks successfully. Slavin (1990) contended that in a satisfying learning environment, students are intellectually active—filtering information, integrating and elaborating on ideas, and testing concepts. Harste and Short (1988) also found that strong communities of learners come about when each individual has the freedom to express his or her opinions and the confidence that those opinions will be listened to. Cooperative learning is an alternative instructional method that can help students become more actively and constructively involved in the learning process.

During the early and mid-1900s, social scientists began to investigate the effects that various types of conditions, particularly those that are individualistic, competitive, and cooperative, have on human behavior (Maller 1929; Deutsch 1949). In the late

1940s, Morton Deutsch developed a theory of social interdependence in which he noted that interdependence could be either positive (cooperation) or negative (competition) (Deutsch 1949). During the past twenty-five years, several researchers have reported that a cooperative environment has a positive impact on the learning process (Slavin 1987; Johnson and Johnson 1989; Manarino-Leggett and Salomon 1990).

Slavin (1991) defined cooperative learning as a structured, systematic instructional technique in which small groups work together to achieve a common goal. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1990) held that cooperative learning activities may be used to teach specific content, ensure active cognitive processing of information during a lecture, and provide long-term support for academic progress. According to these researchers, any assignment in any curriculum for any age can be done cooperatively.

According to Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991), cooperative learning consists of the following five basic elements:

1. **Positive Interdependence:** Students must believe they are linked with other students in such a way that one cannot succeed unless the other group members also succeed. If the success of every group member depends on the success of each member (if one fails, all do), then a strong form of positive interdependence is created and team members are motivated to make sure each student does well.

2. **Face-to-Face Interaction:** After the instructor helps students establish positive interdependence, he or she must ensure that students interact to help each other accomplish the task. Students are expected to explain to each other how to solve problems, discuss with each other the nature of concepts being learned, and provide each other with help, support, and encouragement.

3. **Individual Accountability:** The overall objective of cooperative learning groups is to help each member become a stronger individual in his or her own right. To ensure that each member is growing and learning, students are held individually accountable to complete their share of the work. Individual accountability requires the instructor to ensure that the performance of each group member is assessed and to provide the results of this assessment to the group and the individual.

4. **Social Skills:** Students cannot be expected to accomplish mutual goals if they do not know and trust each other, communicate effectively, and support and encourage each other. If students are required to collaborate in an effective way, the teacher must make sure students have the social skills needed for group work. As such, teachers must teach leadership, trust-building, decision-making, communication, and conflict-resolution skills just as thoroughly as they would teach academic skills.

5. **Group Processing:** If cooperative learning groups are to know if they are functioning effectively, time must be allotted for group reflection. Group processing involves having group members reflect on a group session to “describe what actions of the group members were helpful and not helpful and to decide what actions to continue or change” (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 1991, 22).

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Research on cooperative learning in social studies classrooms supports the use of various strategies as positive alternatives to traditional pedagogical methods (Johnson 1994). In this section, I describe the ways in which five cooperative learning strategies can be used in social studies classrooms. It should be noted that because the particular methods vary in their degree of effectiveness for different grade levels, careful choice must be exercised regarding which method to use.

GROUP INVESTIGATION

Group Investigation is a classroom organization plan in which students work in small groups to inquire, question, discuss, and plan projects (Sharan and Sharan 1976). In

this method, students form groups of two to six members. After the group selects a topic to study, the group members each research one aspect of the topic and then combine their information into a group presentation to the entire class.

Social studies teachers can use Group Investigation to study a major event, such as the Civil War. One group could study the causes of the Civil War, with individual group members investigating topics such as the events that occurred immediately before the war, the debate in the country during that period about slavery, and the role that leaders from various states played in deciding whether to lead the country into war. Another group could study the course of the war itself, and another its political and social aftermath.

JIGSAW

Jigsaw was first developed by Aronson and his colleagues (1978) with the purpose of placing students in a situation of intense interdependence (Kagen 1992). In the Jigsaw method, students are placed into six-member “home” teams to work on material that has been divided into sections. Each member of the group is then assigned a section to study on which he or she becomes an “expert.” Next, each expert meets with the experts in other groups who have studied the same section (in “expert” groups) to discuss the best way to present the information to other members of their home teams. After students have learned and mastered the material, they return to their home teams to teach other members the material.

An example of how Jigsaw might be used during a social studies class is the following guide for a unit on forms of government.

Assignment for each home team member: Read a two- to five-page report about a particular type of government (e.g., communism, dictatorship, democracy, monarchy).

Assignment for each expert group: (1) Outline the major points of the government; (2) develop a chart that shows the organization of the governing body and a list of its strengths and weaknesses; and (3) prepare an oral presentation for the class that covers the basics of the government.

Assignment for each home team: Write a constitution for a colony on Mars, incorporating the knowledge the group has learned about different forms of government. Include the following information for each government studied: history (how the government began); basic philosophy; how the government is established (e.g., elections); other countries with this type of government; and your opinion of this type of government.

Jigsaw II, which was developed by Slavin (1986), is a modification of the original Jigsaw method. In the Jigsaw II method, students read a common narrative. Each student then chooses a subtopic related to the narrative and is expected to become an expert on this material. Students who have the same subtopic meet in expert groups to discuss the material; they then return to their home teams to teach other group members the material.

An example of how Jigsaw II can be used by social studies teachers would be to have students develop a newspaper on a particular subject—say, a space flight mission. First, each student becomes an expert on one aspect of writing for a newspaper. The news expert from each group meets with his or her fellow news experts to learn how to write the lead to a news story; the editorial writers meet and discuss various issues, such as how to weigh the costs against the benefits of undertaking a particular space flight mission. The human interest columnists, the science writers, and the editorial writers also meet. The students then return to their original teams. Each team develops a team newspaper.

Jigsaw strategies can be used quite successfully in social studies, particularly during a mastery-oriented lesson where a textbook chapter is divided into sections. Slavin (1990) noted that the instructional material for Jigsaw strategies should usually be a chapter, story, geography, or similar descriptive material. Because the only way students can learn material other than their own is through peer instruction, they are motivated to show interest in each other's work (Slavin 1991).

LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning Together, which was developed by Johnson and Johnson (1987), is one of the simplest of all cooperative learning methods. In the Learning Together method, students work on worksheets in groups of four or five. At the conclusion of their work, each group submits its worksheet to the teacher and receives praise and rewards based on the group's work. Group rewards might be based on the sum of subsequent individual test scores or the degree of improvement group members show. Students might also receive rewards for assisting each other in the learning process. Learning Together should be preceded by team-building activities; in addition, regular discussions should occur within groups about how well group members are working together. Almost any limited social studies topic is appropriate for this method. For example, students might complete a worksheet on Native American cultures—perhaps on the differences between the Iroquois and Hopi in terms of lodgings, family structure, foods, and religion.

STUDENT TEAMS-ACHIEVEMENT DIVISIONS

The Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) learning method combines a group-study structure with a cooperative incentive structure in which student teams earn rewards based on individual learning (Slavin 1991). In STAD, the teacher assigns students to four-member teams that are mixed by performance level, gender, and ethnicity. After the teacher presents a lesson, the teams work together to make sure all members of the team have mastered the material. Students then take individual quizzes on the material (they may not help each other). After the quiz, the teacher computes group and individual scores and awards points based on the students' performance. The central idea behind the STAD method is that students should motivate and help each other master the material presented in the classroom. The STAD method is particularly useful in teaching social studies material that has a single right answer (Slavin 1991).

TEAMS-GAMES-TOURNAMENTS

The Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT) learning method is similar to STAD. The basic difference between the two methods is that TGT involves the use of weekly tournaments to demonstrate individual student learning. Also, TGT groups are homogeneously grouped by past performance. The implementation of the TGT method begins with instruction by the teacher to the entire class. Students then form three-member teams, called "tournament tables." Each week, students demonstrate their individual ability in the tournaments by competing as representatives of their group with students at their own ability level. As in the STAD method, high-performing teams earn team rewards.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research summarized in this article suggests that student learning and achievement in social studies can be improved with the use of cooperative learning methods. However, many questions still remain unanswered in the literature about cooperative learning in social studies classrooms. The following list is not at all exhaustive, but it does highlight the need to examine important questions in future investigations about cooperative learning in social studies classrooms.

ACHIEVEMENT

1. What aspects of cooperative learning enhance students' academic performance in social studies?
2. What aspects of cooperative learning hinder students' achievement in social studies?
3. What impact does the group-study structure have on students' academic development?
4. Are cooperative learning methods harmful to the academic progress of high-ability students?

GROUP PROCESSING

1. What is the role and importance of group processing in cooperative learning activities?
2. What aspects of group processing enhance individual and group performance?

APPROPRIATENESS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING METHODS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES

1. What kinds of cooperative learning activities work best for different types of students in social studies classrooms at the elementary, middle, and secondary school levels?

REWARDS/INCENTIVES

1. What effect does the particular incentive structure (rewards) used in a classroom have on group study?
2. How do cooperative learning incentives function as motivators for students?
3. Does the use of group rewards enhance or hinder a student's ability to think independently?

TEACHER CONCERNS

1. How should teachers deal with problems of nonparticipation, students not using time effectively, students in groups who do not get along, obstructive behavior among students, and student absence?
2. How can teachers maximize the impact of cooperative learning in social studies classrooms?
3. What type of teacher preparation and training is needed to ensure the proper implementation of cooperative learning techniques in classrooms?

SUMMARY

In many social studies classrooms, the majority of time is spent on conveying basic information, which some teachers assume cannot be taught in a cooperative way (Montague and Tanner 1987). Yet research studies (Joyce, Weil, and Showers 1992) have shown that performance in content areas is higher in a cooperative group than when students work individually or in competition. According to Slavin (1985), the benefits of cooperative learning include not only improved achievement and intergroup relations, but also improved self-esteem and more positive attitudes toward school and fellow students. Cooperative learning is particularly suitable for social studies teachers concerned with the difficult task of teaching content mastery while also attempting to nurture democratic values and interpersonal skills.

ADDED MATERIAL

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