



CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING – NEED OF THE HOUR

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Abstract

This article presents an overview of co-operative learning, an instructional technique developed to enhance academic achievement through social and inter-personal skill development. Co-operative learning plays a paramount role in education, as it is one of the most widespread and fruitful areas of research and theory. Over the past several decades, it has attracted growing interest due to the vast amount of research conducted in education context as well as in social and clinical settings. The central tenet of co-operative learning is that through interaction and dialogue with others around a topic of study, achievement of students increases, attitude towards learning improves, students learn and retain more information than through other more intra-personal, instructional methodologies (i.e. teacher directed/lecture style formats). Research points to all of these positive effects, improved inter-group, inter-ethnic, gender co-operation as well as increased self-esteem and confidence for student population.

Keywords:- *Co-operative learning, Globalization, Traditional Method*



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*You cannot teach people anything
You can only help them discover it within themselves & with
others*

~ Galileo

Concurrent with the process of globalization, the pendulum in education is swaying towards interactive ways of teaching-learning. Education in the past decades has experienced a shifting paradigm from text-based pedagogy towards context-focused andragogy.

The hegemonic trends of market economy in the context of ongoing globalization tends to impose individualistic forms of competition. Unfortunately, educational systems in many parts of the world have been promoting teacher-fronted and highly individualistic ways of learning and achieving. Traditionally, they have emphasized individualistic achievements and unfair competitions resulting in a division of winners and losers, which in turn has nurtured a sort of hostility amongst students. It is also true that such educational systems have also contributed to capitalist modes of accumulation of wealth besides being conducive to the numbing of critical sensibilities amongst students. Despite the flair and flame for individualistic achievements, there is an innate urge for humanistic ways of achieving the

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things together. Educators and learners need to realize that the benefits of learning and achieving together are immense in terms of interdependence.

On the other hand, it seems that the experience of ‘study and forget after the exams’ is no more helpful in problem solving in real life situations. Consequently, students are the losers. Not only they are getting deprived of a modern-world class education which they deserve, but they are also missing better opportunities for effective learning in their academic life. Co-operative learning, as a drastic shift from traditional models which have become unbelievably unsatisfactory, provides better opportunities for learners to develop successful learning and communication strategies. Therefore, it is likely to address and solve the deficiencies found in the conventional models. Co-operative learning, a modern approach is rapidly evolving by virtue of the demand of such a context.

The origin of co-operative learning, as Cooper⁽⁴⁾ (1979) put it, goes back to the first century. A structured view of co-operative learning, however, came into existence in 1970s and the Communicative Language Teaching paved the way for its employment in language teaching classrooms. Well-known scholars like Johnson and Johnson⁽⁹⁾ (1989), Slavin⁽²⁰⁾ (1991) spearheaded the development of co-operative learning. They have contributed their insights to improve as well as enrich co-operative learning and its modules in several ways through mostly in pre-collegiate settings. Today, co-operative learning is experimented in different parts of the world.

Therefore, co-operative learning, as the name suggests, stands for a learning process or learning strategy in which students are provided with opportunities to learn by themselves in a group in a co-operative way. It is one of the recommended teaching-learning techniques in which students achieve learning goals by helping each other in a social setting. It has been used as an instructional method and as a learning tool at various levels of education as well as in various subject areas.

Co-operative learning is defined as any classroom learning situation in which students of all levels of performance, work together in structured groups towards shared or common learning goals. As a collaborative venture, co-operative learning is an act of learning together. It is a way of facilitating and equipping students to learn through team-building, critical thinking, win-for-all dynamics ushered in by the role of the teacher as a facilitator who at the same time monitors, intervenes and evaluates group as well as individual performances. In such circumstances, students are motivated to pursue learning in groups of varying sizes

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negotiating, planning and evaluating together. Instead of working as individuals in unfair competition with every other individual in the classroom, students are given the responsibility of creating a learning community where all the students participate in meaningful ways such as learning from one another, peer pair assessment, team-processing, etc. In short, when students are motivated to act as resources for each other, learning becomes an enjoyable experience.

Co-operative learning may best be defined as “a set of highly structured, psychologically and sociologically based techniques” by Oxford⁽¹⁵⁾ (1997) which mingle the cognitive as well as affective aspects of learning. It accentuates contribution and active engagement of all of the participants in the learning process, both of which are humanistic concerns. In co-operative learning as a humanistic learner-centered approach to education, intellectually selected heterogeneous teams of 3 to 6 members are motivated to work together on well-designed learning tasks for the purpose of achieving their shared learning goals under conditions that meet the following criteria:

1) instructor as a fellow facilitator expert, 2) interaction soliciting tasks, 3) well-designed grouping, 4) scheduled face-to-face interaction, 5) continuity of group interaction, 6) interpersonal and collaborative skills, 7) positive interdependence, 8) individual responsibility, 9) equal participation, 10) simultaneous interaction, and 11) reflection or group processing.

A learning exercise only qualifies as a modern co-operative learning to the extent that these pivotal features are present appropriately, if not equally (i.e. if for example, individual accountability, in a co-operative learning situation, appears to be sub-ordinated to positive interdependence, it cannot be considered as a modern co-operative learning, albeit it may be deemed as a group work). Thus, co-operative learning is more than a mere getting together. It exists when students feel a need for co-operation and enthusiastically work together to attain their communal learning goals which they could never do otherwise.

There is a crucial difference between simply putting students in groups to learn and structuring co-operation amongst them. Co-operative learning is not having students sit side by side at the same table to talk with one another as they do their individual assignments. Co-operative learning is not assigning a report to a group of students in which one student does all the work and the others put their names. Co-operative learning is not having students do a task individually and then having the ones who finish first, help the slower students. Co-operative learning is much more than students discussing material with other students or

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sharing material amongst students, although each of these is important in co-operative learning.

Co-operative learning is known by a variety of names in literature. Chief amongst which are: group learning, team learning, participative learning, peer-assisted learning, peer-assisted instruction, small-group instruction, problem-based learning, active learning and sometimes collaborative learning.

Co-operative learning is working together to accomplish shared goals. It is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and others learning. Class members are organized into small groups for receiving instructions from the teacher. They work through assignments until all the members understand successfully and complete it.

Co-operative learning is based on a variety of theories in anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, psychology and a few other social sciences. In the field of language, it values the interactive view of language, which is known as a developed combination of structural and functional views of language. It considers the knowledge of appropriate use of language and the ability to structure the discourse interactions. Like any other approach, as Richards and Rodgers⁽¹⁷⁾ (2001) argued, it possesses its own theory of language and theory of learning. In its theory of language, co-operative learning sees language as a tool for social relations. Students are provided with authentic contexts for negotiation of meaning through using the language. And in its theory of learning, it is based on the theoretical works of developmental psychologists like Jean Piaget⁽¹⁶⁾ (1966), John Dewey⁽⁵⁾ (1966) and especially Lev Semenovitch Vygotsky⁽²³⁾ (1978), all of which accentuate the central role of social interaction in learning which promotes collaboration and eventually independent problem solving.

Co-operative learning, according to Slavin⁽²⁰⁾ (1991), values two major theoretical bases for learning – ‘motivational’ and ‘cognitive’. With respect to the former, co-operative learning persists in the significance of incentives as motivators for further co-operation so as to both facilitate and deepen learning. Therefore, it appreciates the creation of a context in which group members can attain their personal goals only through group attainment. Consequently, students are likely to encourage members of the group to do whatever helps the group succeed. Co-operative learning emphasizes on the effects of working together. Mutual negotiation for meaning amongst students dispenses them the opportunities to

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elaborate their own understanding of the material. It is believed that these sort of activities lead to such learning that is never comparable with that of our conventional approaches. The reason may lie beyond the fact that these type of situations result in higher level of understanding and reasoning, the development of critical thinking and increase in accuracy of long-term retention.

Learning is chiefly associated within the classroom and is often competitive. The lesson content and delivery are considered to be the most important. The students master knowledge through drill and practice (such as note learning). Content needs to be learned in context of Theroux⁽²¹⁾ (2002), Johnson and Johnson⁽¹⁰⁾ (1991). The most common seating arrangement used by the traditionalists is in rows.

Co-operative efforts results in participants striving for mutual benefit so that all group members gain from each other's efforts (your success benefits me and my success benefits you). Everyone succeeds when group succeeds. Recognizing that all group members share a common fate (we all sink or swim together here), knowing that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's colleagues (we cannot do it without you), feeling proud and jointly celebrating when a group member is recognized for achievement (we all congratulate you on your accomplishment).

Co-operative learning advocates co-operative and group learning in place of the competitive and individualistic approach prevalent in our educational system by re-defining the roles of the teacher and the learner in a particular teaching-learning process. It is a method of teaching in which the teacher provides the various tasks based on the content selected for the study which were planned and designed in a definite sequence to attain objectives of the lesson for the group of four to six pupils of the same age and achievement level. Communication of the group goal and tasks structure, monitoring of group work and testing of individual learning were done by the teacher. The sequence of moves followed is Communication of the Group Goal (C.G.G.), Communication of the Tasks Structure (C.T.S.), Pupil-Pupil Interaction (P.P.I.), Monitoring and Intervention by the Teacher (M.I.T.), Testing of Individual Learning (T.I.L) (Vijaya Kumari⁽²²⁾, 2014). Thus, co-operative learning is a teaching strategy involving pupil's participation in small learning groups in which pupils learn through intra-group and inter-group interactions.

In the adoption of co-operative learning as a teaching strategy, teacher may try a number of typical co-operative learning set-ups. A few of co-operative learning set-ups are:

A unit in a subject may be broken down into certain meaningful sub-units. These sub-units may then be assigned to the different teams (each having five to eight students) of a class or grade for co-operative learning. The team members may collect relevant information and go through learning experiences, activities etc. to acquire the required knowledge, understanding and insight into the assigned sub-unit in a co-operative way, mutually helping and complementing one another's efforts for doing so. After some time (this duration may be fixed in advance), the members of the different teams may sit together to discuss their learning outcomes with respect to the sub-units assigned to them. In fact, they may teach one another the content material or learning experiences acquired by them in their respective sub-units. After grasping the knowledge and understanding of the whole unit, the students may again be asked to work in their respective groups/teams for gaining more insight and understanding of the unit through co-operative efforts and then, share the outcomes of their striving with all the students of the class.

Students of a class in any subject grade may be asked to work on a group project, which they may select. It may provide them with extra opportunities for co-operative learning as well as working in the group. Such group projects or investigation may be highly structured to emphasize higher order of thinking, analyzing and evaluating skills. They may also provide a proper platform for the demonstration of practical and working abilities on the part of students while working co-operatively in a group.

In another co-operative learning set-up, students with varying academic abilities may be assigned to four to five member teams for studying what has been initially taught by the teacher and to help each other to seek his or her highest level of achievement. After such co-operative efforts, all the students of the class are individually tested. After this, the different teams of the class may be awarded certificates or other recognition on the basis of the extent to which all the team members have progressed over their past records.

In another co-operative learning setup, a particular topic or unit of the subject is assigned to five or six groups or teams of a class. Each group or team may have a small number of students of varying interests and abilities. In the respective teams, each team member is responsible for learning a specific part of sub-unit of a topic. He himself strives hard to learn the assigned sub-part in close collaboration with his or her counterparts in the other team. In fact, they work closely in a co-operative spirit for acquiring necessary knowledge, experience and application related to that very sub-topic. Then, all the members

of the team sit together for discussing the fruits of their striving and acquire a complete picture of the knowledge as well as understanding of the sub-topics or sub-units related to a particular topic. They may go for its deep understanding and advanced study by repeating their co-operative exercise in the process of learning.

- Achievement
- Improves inter-group relations
- Aids in successful mainstreaming of handicapped students
- Develops self-esteem
- Promotes the liking among students for class, school and learning

At present, educators of different societies are evaluating different teaching-learning techniques. Many educators of modern age have recognized co-operative learning, a beneficial teaching-learning technique for different subjects. Thus, it is an approach to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experience.

Prior to World War II, social theorists such as Allport⁽¹⁾ (2002), Watson⁽²⁴⁾ (1996) began establishing co-operative theory after finding that group work was more effective and efficient in quality and quantity. Overall productivity was more when compared to working alone.

Rose and Smyth⁽¹⁸⁾ (1995) described successful co-operative learning tasks as intellectually demanding, creative, open-ended and higher order thinking tasks.

May and Doob⁽¹³⁾ (1997) found that people who co-operate and work together to achieve shared goals are more successful in attaining outcomes than those who strive independently to complete the same goals.

Artz⁽³⁾ (1990) defined co-operative learning as a small group of learners working together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task or accomplish a common goal.

John Dewey⁽⁵⁾ (1966) believed that it was more important that students develop knowledge and social skills that could be used outside the class room and in the democratic society. The theory portrayed students as active recipients of knowledge rather than passive receivers of information (e.g. teacher talking and students listening).

R.T. Johnson⁽¹¹⁾ (1996) published the elements essential for effective group learning, achievement and higher order social, personal and cognitive skills. These elements are:

1. Positive interdependence
2. Individual accountability
3. Face to face interaction
4. Appropriate use of social skills
5. Group processing

From amongst various principles and different approaches that govern as well as guide the techniques and practices of co-operative learning, Olsen and Kagan⁽¹⁴⁾ (1992), however, put forth “positive interdependence, accountability, team formation and social skills” as the key elements of co-operative learning. Positive interdependence is vital to foster group cohesion, which is conducive to attainment of learning goals. In co-operative learning, formal structures are designed to encourage social behaviors viz. active listening, co-operation and respect for others. Co-operative learning takes into account heterogeneous grouping that includes a number of variables such as sex, ethnicity, culture and diversity. It fosters face-to-face interaction, group autonomy, equal participation, collaborative skills and co-operation as values through approaches and strategies like Jigsaw as developed by Aronson⁽²⁾ (1978).

Co-operative learning has many methods viz. Jigsaw I and II, Structured Controversy, Group Investigation, Learning Together, Co-operative Integrated Reading Composition and Competitive-Team-Based-Learning which further includes Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions, Teams-Games-Tournament, etc. Some of the more popular and significant methods of co-operative learning are as follows.

‘Learning Together’ (LT), which was developed by Johnson and Johnson⁽⁹⁾ (1989), is considered as a pure co-operative learning method. Members of a group work together towards attainment of certain shared learning goals. They help each other and become familiar with the topics as well as the issues introduced by the teacher. They gain marks for their group participation and group performance. They are also assessed for their levels of collaboration (co-operative interaction) with other groups in the class. ‘Co-operative Integrated Reading and Composition’ (CIRC) is another co-operative learning method, which was developed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University. It has been designed for improving reading achievement of students especially through writing. In CIRC, lesson elements includes discussing the context of each topic, noting down key vocabularies, reading silently, answering related question in groups, para-phrasing and summarizing the topic. Students earn recognition based on improvement in individual achievements that are

calculated as a team-score. In 'Teams-Games-Tournament' (TGT), developed by Slavin⁽²⁰⁾(1991), teams take part in tournaments in which students compete with members of other teams having similar ability. In Student-Teams-Achievement-Division (STAD) of Slavin⁽¹⁹⁾ (1978), the members of the teams help each other master the objects introduced by the teacher. STAD is a neutral co-operative learning method in the sense that it possesses no inter-group relationship - neither co-operation nor competition. Teams earn certificates if they achieve above a designated standard. And in 'Competitive-Team-Based-Learning' (CTBL), developed by Hosseini⁽⁶⁾ (2000), the teachers present the lesson and heterogeneous teams of three or four members work on the introduced tasks to prove their superiority over other teams. In class activities, team members have no way but to try to be sure that each member has mastered the assigned material because the teacher would randomly call upon a student to answer for the team. Although in this method, team members take the finals individually as in CIRC, STAD and TGT and take quizzes co-operatively. The philosophy beyond allowing students to take quizzes co-operatively is to subject them to more opportunities for transference of skills and strategies in a meta-cognitive way through listening to their teammates who are in actual fact thinking aloud. Teams are evaluated not only on their member's improvements over their own past performances (as it is in CIRC & STAD) and over their same-level opponents in other teams (as in TGT) but they are also recognized based on the extent to which they outsmart other teams. Special rewards would also be awarded both to best teams with the highest averages and to the most challenging individuals. This kind of grading system is used as an incentive to harness competition for further co-operation amongst team members. To lower affective filter of participants, teams that achieve above a designated standard would, however, pass the course by Kagan⁽¹²⁾ (1992).

Although, tests are taken individually, students are encouraged to work together to improve the overall performance of the group. Co-operative learning method is a technique developed by Johnson and Holubec⁽⁸⁾ (1986). The most important properties of these techniques are excellence of the group goal, sharing the material, division of labour and group reward. When this technique is applied, following options must be given place:

1. Determining the instructional objectives.
2. Deciding the group size.
3. Dividing the students into group.
4. Arranging the class.

5. Planning education material to provide dependence.
6. Giving the roles to the group members in order to provide dependence.
7. Explaining the academic work.
8. Individual evaluation.
9. Providing co-operation among groups.
10. Determining the required behaviour for success.
11. Guiding the student's behaviour.
12. Having students come together for being able to teach co-operation.
13. Finishing the lessons.

Co-operative learning seems as a powerful tool to motivate learning. Academia has no way but to move with the constant flux in the context of on-going globalization. The development of educational methodologies has to be geared towards communicative competency as students need to develop their language proficiency for participating in the global communication process. This calls for urgent and pragmatic overhauling of syllabi and textbooks revision in our educational system. Moreover, according to Hosseini⁽⁷⁾ (2006), student-centered rather than teacher-centered learning activities as classroom strategies are increasingly being focused upon in modern education.

Thus, an incorporation of co-operative learning strategies in the syllabi is crucial by virtue of the greater benefits. We are likely to reap in course of time through these strategies. Co-operative learning can also be appreciated in the sense that it though implicitly, prioritizes the idea that team-work is the very demand of tomorrow's citizenry. What matters, however, is that our classes, in point of fact, should be microcosms of the macrocosm – a fraction of the real world. The selected strategies in addition to local economic, political, historical and cultural factors ought to take into account and reflect the realities of this complicated dynamic robust world.

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