



'Thoughts on High Achievers and Differentiation in Cooperative Learning'

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“Do gifted and talented students benefit from cooperative learning?”

The answer is **YES!**

- Whether G&T students are in special programs for the Gifted or in regular classrooms, they benefit in a variety of ways from spending time in **well-structured** cooperative learning activities.
- If the mission of schools includes providing **all** students opportunities to hone higher-level thinking skills, and prepare students for a multi-cultural, interdependent world, we **must** provide cooperative learning for the gifted.
- Gifted children can work well in cooperative groups. There is a lot to learn both academically and socially. It is important to keep in mind that each child is **unique** including gifted students. There may be times when a gifted child needs a different curriculum, different setting or different project. I believe we can do both - make them a part of a cooperative classroom AND differentiate. A healthy mix of Cooperative and Competitive teaching methods will help to ensure that they are prepared for all of life's situations.
- Improved social skills, leadership, problem-solving, paraphrasing, conflict-resolution, praising and helping others. Gifted students like all students need these learning opportunities.
- G&T students often have the potential to be leaders, their success in this is not based on academic ability but on the ability to work with others, they, too, need to learn the skills of working cooperatively with others. These are the skills which will only be perfected by sitting in teams with children who look and think differently than he/she does. It is this ability which is a defining characteristic in the making of great leaders.
- Parents of high achieving students want children to gain high positions which involve leadership, if students don't have opportunities to work with others, where will he/she obtain these necessary skills?
- Technology of the future will require greater **interdependence**. As G&T students work in interdependent Cooperative Teams they are preparing for the workplaces of the future.
- If CL is used in the classroom, high achievement is met with peer approval rather than peer rejection.
- Some of the highest ability students in a traditional classroom choose to hide their abilities rather than become an outcast.
- Ask teachers of G&T in what area their students are having the most difficulty; generally they talk about social relations and social acceptance. (more apparent at KS3)
- In a class of all gifted students the lowest student in the class may feel inadequate. If that same student **at least some of the time** worked in a heterogeneous group he/she would have a greater probability of a healthy, reality-based self-concept.
- Higher Level Thinking Skills. One of the main roads to higher level thinking is interaction with points of view different from one's own. CL offers the G&T student a greater variety of challenge from teammates.

- **Teaching itself is a great teacher.** There is no evidence that time spent tutoring others is of detriment to learning. The opposite is true. High performing students access higher order thinking skills by tutoring others. Research shows that you have a retention rate of about 5% of subject matter that you learn whilst being 'lectured' as compared to 90% of content you actually teach yourself. We as teachers know that simple questions from students make us look at our subject freshly.
- Research demonstrates that CL leads to a host of positive outcomes including increased self-esteem. These are as important to G&T students as they are to any other learner.
- Importantly students are often given differentiated roles so that students of different ability levels have relatively equal status within their groups.
- In the traditional classroom the teacher hopes for homogeneity. The greater the difference in ability levels of the students, the more difficult the job of the teacher. In contrast, cooperative learning is based on the assumption of heterogeneity. Heterogeneity in interaction produces learning: "Four heads are better than one" and "None of us are as smart as all of us."



When you think about the benefits of CL:

Positive Interdependence: Kids supporting and pulling for each other, realising we need to do our part and also rely on others. **Equal Participation:** Kids learning to take turns, patiently wait, etc. **Individual Accountability-** the importance of being held accountable, doing your part to benefit the whole. Plus - all the numerous interpersonal and social skills that are developed - encouraging, praising, coaching, listening, etc.....Plus, all the character virtues that are developed and enhanced - respect, cooperation, kindness, effort, honesty, etc.... PLUS - all of these are so brain compatible creating an environment of safety that enhances learning. How in the world could we rationalise that this isn't good for **all** kids?? Beats me!

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