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Study Of Cooperative Learning In The Classroom? - Strategies, Benefits & Definition

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Abstract : Cooperative learning is a technique that allows students to learn from each other and gain important interpersonal skills. Learn more about the benefits, strategies, and techniques involved in cooperative learning.

Cooperative Learning Definition

Have you ever participated in a group project or on a committee to achieve some task? If so, you probably shared some knowledge with others in the group, and you may have learned something from others, as well. This is the essence of a cooperative learning group in a classroom.

Key Words : Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is an organized and structured way to use small groups to enhance student learning and interdependence. Students are given a task, better known as an assignment, and they work together to accomplish this task. Each individual has responsibilities and is held accountable for aiding in the completion of the assignment; therefore, success is dependent on the work of everyone in the group.

In addition to learning from each other, students also learn how to work as part of a team and have others depend on them.

Benefits in the Classroom

There are many benefits that can result from using cooperative learning strategies. Here are benefits you might notice after implementing cooperative learning tasks in your classroom:

- Cooperative learning is fun, so students enjoy it and are more motivated.
- Cooperative learning is interactive, so students are engaged, active participants in the learning.
- Cooperative learning allows discussion and critical thinking, so students learn more and remember what they've learned for a longer period of time.
- Cooperative learning requires students to learn to work together, which is an important skill for their futures.

How to Group Students

Cooperative learning takes some time to get used to for both the instructor and students. It may take several tries and the willingness to make adjustments before you are comfortable with this approach to teaching and learning. Let's explore a few techniques for organizing groups.

Cooperative groups are generally comprised of a mix of students based on ability level. Additionally, diverse groups are created based on the skill level of the students. For example,

groups may be comprised of four to five students, which include two or three average students, one below average student, and one student who is above average.

In most cases, students should not form their own groups or have the option of changing groups. Once groups have been assigned, you may want to set your classroom up with desks grouped in sets of four or five. Groups should change approximately every two months.

If possible, students should only work together with the same students once a year, but class size is a factor. To ease assignment tasks, students can be numbered one, two, three, and four and keep the same number for all assignments, or numbers can be drawn before each assignment. A simple number system can lessen confusion and help determine student roles for any given task.

Developing Assignments

Now that we've explored how to group students, let's discuss strategies for developing assignments. For a class discussion assignment that uses cooperative learning, you may try the think-pair-share approach. With this approach, students are posed a question or problem that needs to be evaluated. First, the instructor gives time for students to think about the question and write down a couple ideas or their thoughts on the topic. Next, students are asked to turn to their group members in order to share and discuss the initial thoughts they had on the question. Last might be a whole class discussion or reflection.

For a specific group lab assignment that uses cooperative learning, tasks can be assigned by student number in which each member becomes an 'expert' in their assigned task. This use of cooperative learning is often referred to as the jigsaw approach. For example, in the lab assignment, you would assign a number to each step in the process. For example, student one might prepare/gather the supplies. Student two might add chemical one to the Petri dish. Student three adds chemical two to the Petri dish. Student four stirs the chemicals.

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