



## **IAI ACADEMIC CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS**

**Education and Social Sciences Conference  
Business and Economics Conference**

**Barcelona University, Spain  
18 June 2019**

## IAI Academic Conference Proceedings

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Briselska 1/16

Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

ISSN 2671-3179

October, 2019

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### Abstract

Learning a second or a foreign language is not an easy task. It takes a lot of time and determination to master the language in order to be able to use it successfully in communication or for any other purposes. In order to teach a foreign language successfully, teachers need to consider various factors involved in language learning and to be familiar with the various methods and approaches that can be applied in language teaching and learning. If we look at foreign language teaching practices through the last two centuries, we will see that different periods were characterized by different methods and approaches to language learning and teaching with the aim of finding the best ways of learning a language. Even though many of these methods have been criticized because of the focus on one aspect and a neglect of another, each of these methods and approaches have something positive that we cannot ignore. The aim of this paper is to present the characteristics and benefits of Cooperative Language Learning which belongs to the communicative approaches to language learning.

**Key words:** language acquisition, methods and approaches, cooperative language learning.

### Introduction

Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) is an interactive approach to language learning which is part of the instructional approach known as Collaborative learning. The goal of this approach is to create a learning environment in which the students work together in small groups to achieve a common goal. According to Olsen & Kagan (1992, p. 8), “cooperative learning is group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others”.

The main feature of Cooperative Learning is the team work. Vermette (1998) points out that “a cooperative classroom team is a relatively permanent, heterogeneously mixed, small group of students who have been assembled to complete an activity, produce a series of projects or products and/or who have been asked to individually master a body of knowledge. The spirit within the team has to be one of positive interdependence, that is, a feeling that success for any one is tied directly to the success of other”.

Johnson et al. (1984, p. 7) argue that the way teachers structure lessons can have an enormous impact not only on achievement, but on the atmosphere in the classroom and the relationship between the learners as well:

In every classroom, teachers may structure lessons so that students are in a win-lose struggle to see who is best. They can also allow students to learn on their own, individually, or they can arrange students in pairs or small groups to help each other master the assigned material. An essential instructional skill that all teachers need is knowing how and when to structure students' learning goals competitively, individualistically, and cooperatively. Each goal structure has its place; an effective teacher will use all three appropriately.

According to the authors, if teachers choose to structure lessons *competitively*, the students will work against each other to achieve a goal, but only few will manage to do it. In such situations there is a negative interdependence because some students can achieve the goals only if the others fail to do so. So, the outcome is beneficial for some students, but detrimental for others. In such competitive atmosphere some students work very hard in order to be better than others, while others do not make enough effort because they feel they have no chance to win. If, on the other hand, the lesson is structured *individualistically*, each student has his/her own individual goals, they work alone at their own pace and their achievement is measured according to a fixed set of standards. In this situation their achievement is not dependent on others, so they ignore the achievement of others. In both situations teachers keep students away from each other. Therefore, the authors propose a third option where teachers structure lessons *cooperatively* so that students work together to achieve shared goals. They work in small groups to learn the assigned material, and because they have a shared goal there is a positive interdependence as the group can achieve its goal only if every member of the group reaches their goals. So, they discuss the material, help each other and encourage one another to work hard. The outcomes are beneficial for all students because they all work together to achieve the desired goals.

Cooperative Learning is not a new idea. Johnson and Johnson (2017, p. 2) remark that the importance of cooperative learning and peer-teaching can be traced back to the educational principles set out by prominent academic figures of the past such as Seneca, Quintillion and Comenius who maintained that students could benefit from learning from each other. Seneca's famous quote "Qui Docet Discet" (When you teach, you learn twice) is an expression of this approach to learning and teaching.

Research on CL started at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and a lot of researchers have tried to investigate the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies, but "the early 20th century U.S. educator John Dewey is usually credited with promoting the idea of building cooperation in learning into regular classrooms on a regular and systematic basis" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 192). The importance of cooperative learning was highlighted in the 1960s and 1970s in the USA as a result of the fight against racial discrimination and the integration of public schools. "Educators were concerned that traditional models of classroom learning were teacher-fronted, fostered competition rather than cooperation, and favoured majority students. They believed that minority students might fall behind higher-achieving students in this kind of learning environment" (ibid.). Thus, according to Johnson et al. (1994, p. 2) the goals of CL were to:

- raise the achievement of all students, including those who are gifted or academically handicapped,
- help the teacher build positive relationships among students,
- give students experiences they need for healthy social, psychological, and cognitive development,
- replace the competitive organizational structure of most classrooms and schools with a team-based, high-performance organizational structure.

The principles of Cooperative Learning have been applied in language teaching as part of the communicative approaches to language learning and teaching. It is a learner-centered approach which promotes interactive communication in the classroom and enables students to work collaboratively, and as a result they learn more efficiently and feel more positive about their learning experiences. The goals of CLL in language teaching are the following:

- to provide opportunities for naturalistic second language acquisition through the use of interactive pair and group activities,
- to provide teachers with a methodology to enable them to achieve this goal and one that can be applied in a variety of curriculum settings,

- to enable focused attention to particular lexical items, language structures, and communicative functions through the use of interactive tasks,
- to provide opportunities for learners to develop successful learning communication strategies,
- to enhance learner motivation and reduce learner stress and to create a positive affective classroom climate.

(Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 193)

### Principles and procedures

Group work is used in many language teaching methods. However, using group work does not mean that students are working cooperatively according to the principles of the cooperative instructional approach. CLL refers to a group work which is structured and organized in such a way that the members of the group help, support and encourage each other to achieve a mutual goal. Johnson et al. (1984, p. 14) explain:

Cooperation is not having students sit side-by-side at the same table to talk with each other as they do their individual assignments. Cooperation is not having students do a task with instructions that those who finish first are to help the slower students. Cooperation is not assigning a report to a group of students wherein one student does all the work and the others put their names on the product, as well. Cooperation is much more than being physically near other students, discussing material with other students, helping other students or sharing material among students, although each of these is important in cooperative learning.

Johnson et al. (1984, p. 16) list the following differences between typical learning groups and cooperative learning groups (Table 1):

Table 1. The difference between cooperative and traditional learning groups

Cooperative Learning Groups	Traditional Learning Groups
Positive interdependence	No interdependence
Individual accountability	No individual accountability
Heterogeneous	Homogenous
Shared Leadership	One appointed leader
Shared responsibility for each other	Responsibility only for self
Task and maintenance emphasized	Only task emphasized
Social skills directly taught	Social skills assumed and ignored
Teacher observes and intervenes	Teacher ignores group functioning
Groups process their effectiveness	No group processing

Slavin (1984) has conducted several studies in order to compare cooperative learning and traditional instructional methods, and has concluded that cooperative learning has the following positive effects:

1. *Motivational effect*: in several studies students in cooperative learning groups felt more strongly than students in other learning programs that their groupmates wanted them to come to school every day and work hard in class. Students in cooperative learning groups were more likely to attribute success to hard work and ability than to luck.
2. *Cognitive development effect*: collaboration promotes cognitive growth because students model for each other more advanced ways of thinking than any would demonstrate individually.
3. *Cognitive elaboration effect*: new information that is elaborated (restructured and related to existing knowledge) is more easily retrieved from memory. A particularly effective means of elaboration is explaining something to someone else.

Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 193) point out that “Cooperative Language Learning is founded on some basic premises about the interactive/cooperative nature of language and language learning and builds on these premises in several ways”. These premises are the following:

1. Communication is generally considered to be the primary purpose of language.
2. Most talk/speech is organized as conversation.
3. Conversation operates according to a certain agreed upon set of cooperative rules or "maxims".
4. One learns how these cooperative maxims are realized in one's native language through casual, everyday conversational interaction.
5. One learns how the maxims are realized in a second language through participation in cooperatively structured interactional activities.

(Richards and Rodgers, 2001, pp. 193-194)

The general goal of Cooperative Language Learning is to foster cooperation and to develop communicative competence and critical thinking skills through socially structured interaction activities. The proponents of CLL base their assumptions on the work of the development psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, who stress the central role of social interaction in learning. An important dimension of CL is that it fosters cooperation rather than competition among the students in class (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 4).

Since Cooperative Language Learning activities can be used for learning and practicing language forms and functions, as well as for developing the four skills, it supports structural, functional and interactional models of language and does not use any specific syllabus. “What defines Cooperative Language Learning is the systematic and carefully planned use of group-based procedures in teaching as an alternative teacher-fronted teaching” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 196). Thus, Cooperative Language Learning activities can be used in any language program, in any context and with all levels. Any lesson can be restructured so that students can work cooperatively.

Johnson and Johnson (2017) suggest three types of cooperative learning groups which may be used to teach specific content (formal cooperative learning groups), to ensure active cognitive processing of information during direct teaching (informal cooperative learning groups), and to provide students with long-term support and assistance for academic progress (cooperative base groups).

However, assigning students to groups and giving them a task to do is not enough. The success of cooperative learning depends on the specific methods used to organize group work. In order for the groups to work effectively, students should be made aware that each member of the group should participate actively by suggesting ideas, asking questions, giving feedback, that they should respect each other, listen carefully to other group members and trust that each member will be contributing to the group work in order to achieve the mutual goal. Johnson and Johnson (1999) identify five criteria that delineate true cooperative learning groups. They specify the decisive factors for cooperative learning as positive interdependence, individual accountability, engaging interaction, group processing, and development of small- group interpersonal skills. Olsen and Kagan (1992) share the same themes and propose the following key elements of successful group-based learning in CL:

1. *Positive interdependence.* Positive interdependence means that there is a spirit of mutual support within the group. Students are aware that the efforts of each group member benefit the individual as well as the group as a whole so that the products of the group work are both personal and group success.
2. *Group formation.* Group formation is an important factor in creating positive interdependence. The groups usually consist of two to six members depending on the task, the goals of the lesson, the age of learners, as well as the diversity in the class related to ethnicity, sex, ability and so on. This is the reason why teacher-selected groups are preferable to random or student-



selected groups, because the teacher can ensure that the groups are heterogeneous and of the right size for the given task. Once the groups are formed, students should be assigned roles so that each member of the group knows what his obligations are and what role he/she has to play in the group.

3. *Individual accountability.* Individual accountability means that each member must contribute to the group as a whole and that each member is accountable for helping the group achieve the goal.
4. *Social skills.* Teachers should help students develop social skills naturally or by explicit instruction in order to ensure successful interaction, such as leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, conflict-management skills and so on.
5. *Structuring and structures.* Structuring and structures refer to the learning structures or activities used in the classroom, such as Think-Pair-Share, Solve-Pair-Share, Numbered Heads, etc.

Spencer Kagan (1994) has developed six categories of cooperative structures. These structures provide a content-free organizational method for promoting interaction among students in learning environments. They describe the social organization among individuals by providing a series of steps or elements that characterize the patterns of interaction. The cooperative structures are categorized by their principle purpose and are labelled as class building, teambuilding, communication skills, thinking skills, information sharing, and mastery. Different structures are practical and helpful for meeting diverse objectives. Many structures cross category lines.

The roles of learners and teachers in CL are different from teacher-fronted lessons. They are members of a group who must work collaboratively on tasks with other group members, they are directors of their own learning, they are tutors, checkers, recorders, information sharers. Teachers have a lot of roles, such as creating a highly structured and well-organized learning environment, setting goals, planning and structuring tasks, establishing the physical arrangement of the classroom, assigning students to groups and roles, selecting materials and time, providing questions to challenge thinking, preparing students for the tasks, assisting students with the learning tasks, giving few commands, imposing less disciplinary control.

The choice of content and materials is also important, because if the content is not interesting and challenging students will lose interest and the cooperative learning will not be successful. The materials that are used for other types of lessons can be used for cooperative learning as well. As students work in groups, all the groups may have the same set of materials, each group might have a different set of materials, or each member of the group may need to have a copy of the text or the other materials used. Materials can be borrowed from other disciplines or developed by the teacher. But the last option is the most difficult as it takes a lot of time and effort to prepare materials that would be interesting and at an appropriate level for the students.

The basic steps involved in successful implementation of cooperative learning activities are the following:

1. The content to be taught is identified, and criteria for mastery are determined by the teacher.
2. The most useful cooperative learning technique is identified, and the group size is determined by the teacher.
3. Students are assigned to groups.
4. The classroom is arranged to facilitate group interaction.
5. Group processes are taught or reviewed as needed to assure that the groups run smoothly.
6. The teacher develops expectations for group learning and makes sure students understand the purpose of the learning that will take place. A time line for activities is made clear to students.
7. The teacher presents initial material as appropriate, using whatever techniques she or he chooses.

8. The teacher monitors student interaction in the groups, and provides assistance and clarification as needed. The teacher reviews group skills and facilitates problem-solving when necessary.
9. Student outcomes are evaluated. Students must individually demonstrate mastery of important skills or concepts of the learning. Evaluation is based on observations of student performance or oral responses to questions; paper and pencil need not be used.
10. Groups are rewarded for success. Verbal praise by the teacher, or recognition in the class newsletter or on the bulletin board can be used to reward high-achieving groups.  
(Foyle and Lyman, 1990)

### **Types of cooperative learning activities**

There are many different forms of cooperative learning and numerous descriptions of activity types. The leading researchers of cooperative learning include Robert Slavin, Roger and David Johnson and Spencer Kagan, who have slightly different approaches. Some of the most widely used approaches include the following: The Group Investigation Method (Sharan and Sharan), Jigsaw (Aronson), Learning together (Johnson and Johnson), Student Team Learning (Slavin), and the Structural Approach (Kagan):

#### *The Group Investigative Method*

This method starts from the premise that knowledge develops as a result of collective effort. The groups choose a topic, discuss the ways in which they will carry out their investigations, conduct in-depth investigations and report back to the entire class. Studies of this method suggest that student achievement is enhanced when emphasis is on the active search for information which is discovered, examined, discussed, interpreted, and summarized by students (Sharan and Sharan, 1992).

#### *Learning Together Method*

The most important aspect of this method is the existence of a group goal and sharing opinions, resources, division of labour and the group reward. It emphasizes the importance of team-building activities and discussions about how well the members of the group are working together (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). This method emphasizes (1) training students to be good group members and (2) continuous evaluation of group functioning by the group members (Slavin, 1985, p. 8).

#### *Jigsaw*

In this method students are assigned to work on different sections of the material. The members of each team receive different pieces of information. Then members of different teams who have received the same information meet in topic groups to discuss their material. Finally, students return to their original teams and take turns teaching their teammates about their material. Studies suggest that jigsaw is especially effective in social studies and other subjects where learning from text is important (Slavin, 1991).

#### *The Structural Approach*

The structural approach was developed by Kagan who has developed more than 100 learning structures to be used in cooperative learning. Various structures encourage different types of cooperation and can serve different functions such as subject-matter review, concept development, or cooperative work on projects. Lessons may incorporate single structures or be multi-structured so that students have varied learning experiences. Some of the most widely used structures are: Three-Step Interviews, Think-Pair-Share, Line-ups, Numbered Heads, Roundtable, etc. (Olsen and Kagan, 1992).

#### *Student Team Learning*

Slavin has developed a content-bound approach using specific learning structures. Two Student Team Learning methods which are applicable to various subjects and grade levels are Student-Teams-Achievement-Divisions (STAD) and Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT). STAD incorporates

the use of teacher presentations, team preparation, individual quizzes, improvement scores, and team recognition and reward. TGT is similar but, instead of quizzes, uses academic tournaments in which students compete with members of other teams. The findings of experimental studies indicate that team reward and individual accountability are essential elements for attaining basic skill achievement (Slavin, 1990).

As there are a lot of approaches to cooperative learning, there are numerous learning structures that can be used in cooperative learning. Some of these activities are the following: Elbow Buddies, Think - Pair – Share, Solve – Pair – Share, Stand and Deliver, Learning (Clock) Buddies, Stir the Class, Numbered Heads together, Round Robin/Roundtable, Peer Tutoring, Inside-Outside Circles, Carrousel Brainstorming; Carrousel Reports, Line-Ups, Paired Verbal Fluency, Three Step Interview, Learning (Thinking) Logs, Know-Want to Know-Learned (KWL) (McCloskey, 2014).

### **Advantages and disadvantages**

Johnson et al. (1984) conducted a meta-analysis of 122 studies on cooperative learning between 1924 and 1981. The results show “that cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences. These results hold for all age levels, for all subject areas, and for tasks involving concept attainment, verbal problem solving, categorization, spatial problem solving, retention and memory, motor performance, and guessing-judging-predicting” (p. 20). In order to find out why cooperative learning is more effective, they conducted an extensive research program and identified the following factors:

1. The type of learning task assigned does not seem to matter a great deal. Currently, there is no type of learning task on which cooperative efforts are less effective than are competitive or individualistic efforts. On most tasks (and especially the more important learning tasks, such as concept attainment, verbal problem solving, categorization, spatial problem solving, retention and memory, motor learning, guessing-judging-predicting), cooperative efforts are usually more effective in promoting achievement.
2. The discussion process in cooperative learning groups promotes the discovery and development of higher quality cognitive strategies for learning than does the individual reasoning found in competitive and individualistic learning situations.
3. Involved participation in cooperative learning groups inevitably produces conflicts among the ideas, opinions, conclusions, theories, and information of members. When managed skilfully, such controversies promote increased motivation to achieve, higher achievement and retention of the learned material, and greater depth of understanding.
4. The discussion among students within cooperative learning situations promotes more frequent oral repetition of information; stating of new information; and explaining; integrating and providing rationales. Such oral rehearsal of information is necessary for the storage of information into the memory; it promotes long-term retention of the information; and it generally increases achievement.
5. Within cooperative learning groups, there tend to be considerable peer regulation, feedback, support, and encouragement of learning. Such peer academic support is unavailable in competitive and individualistic learning situations.
6. The exchange of ideas among students from high, medium, and low achievement levels, handicapped or not, and different ethnic backgrounds enriches their learning experiences. Cooperative learning groups seem to be nourished by heterogeneity among group members as students accommodate themselves to each other's perspectives.
7. The liking students develop for each other when they work collaboratively tends to increase their motivation to learn and to encourage each other to achieve. The motivation to learn in order to fulfil one's responsibilities to one's peers is not a part of individualistic and competitive learning situations.

The authors discuss the numerous benefits that learners gain when they are involved in cooperative learning situations, such as the following:

1. *Critical thinking competencies*. Cooperative learning promotes the use of higher reasoning strategies and greater critical thinking competencies more than do competitive and individualistic learning strategies.
2. *Attitudes Toward Subject Areas*. Cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, promote more positive attitudes toward both the subject area and the instructional experience, as well as more continuing motivation to learn more about the subject area being studied.
3. *Collaborative Competencies*. There is considerable evidence that students working together in cooperative learning groups master collaborative competencies at a higher level than do students studying competitively or individualistically.
4. *Psychological Health*. Cooperativeness is positively related to a number of indices of psychological health, namely: emotional maturity, well-adjusted social relations, strong personal identity, and basic trust in and optimism about people.
5. *Socialization and Development*. Cooperative learning experiences tend to lead to: (1) Promotive interaction. (2) Feelings of psychological acceptance. (3) Accurate perspective-taking. (4) Differentiated, dynamic, and realistic views of collaborators and one's self. (5) Psychological success. (6) Basic self-acceptance and high self-esteem. (7) Liking for other students. (8) Expectations of rewarding, pleasant, and enjoyable future interactions with collaborators.
6. *Liking for Classmates*. Cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive, individualistic, and "traditional" ones, promote considerably more liking among students, regardless of differences in ability level, sex, handicapping conditions, ethnic membership, social class differences, or task orientation.
7. *Promotive vs. Oppositional or No Interaction*. Within cooperative situations students benefit from helping each other learn, while in competitive situations students benefit from obstructing and frustrating each other's learning, and in individualistic situations the success or failure of others is irrelevant. There is, therefore, considerably more helping, encouraging, tutoring, and assisting among students in cooperative than in competitive or individualistic learning situations.
8. *Perceived Peer Support and Acceptance*. Cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, have been found to result in stronger beliefs that one is personally liked, supported, and accepted by other students, and that other students care about how much one learns, and that other students want to help one learn.
9. *Accuracy of Perspective-Taking*. Cooperative learning experiences tend to promote greater cognitive and affective perspective-taking than do competitive or individualistic learning experiences.
10. *Differentiation of Views of Others*. Cooperative learning experiences tend to promote more differentiated, dynamic, and realistic views (and therefore less stereotyped and static views) of other students (including handicapped peers and students from different ethnic groups) than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences.
11. *Self-Esteem*. Cooperative learning experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, promote higher levels of self-esteem.
12. *Expectations Toward Future Interaction*. Cooperative learning experiences tend to promote expectations toward more rewarding and enjoyable future interaction among students.
13. *Relationships with School Personnel*. Students participating in cooperative learning experiences, compared with students participating in competitive and individualistic

learning experiences, like the teacher better and perceive the teacher as being more supportive and accepting academically and personally.

However, that does not mean that competitive and individualistic learning experiences should be excluded. Kagan and Kagan (2009) say that “if we were advocating exclusive use of cooperative learning, we would leave students very ill prepared. Students need to know how to work independently, and they need to know how to compete... We don’t advocate cooperative learning as the only way to teach. We feel cooperative learning should be a big part of the instructional diet, not the whole diet” (p. 18). The authors state that it is important to include cooperative learning experiences not only because of the higher achievements of students involved in cooperative learning, but also because it prepares students for the real world. Team work and the ability to communicate and work well with others is one of the most highly valued skills by employers, so by training students to study together we also help them develop skills they will need in their future careers.

McGroarty (1989) gives the following advantages for students who use cooperative learning strategies:

1. In second language classrooms, cooperative learning as exemplified in small group work provides frequent opportunity for natural second language practice and negotiation of meaning through talk.
2. In bilingual classrooms, cooperative learning can help students draw on primary language resources as they develop second language skills.
3. In both ESL and bilingual settings, cooperative learning offers additional ways to incorporate content areas into language instruction.
4. Cooperative learning tasks require a variety of group activities and materials to support instruction; this whole array of changes in traditional classroom technology creates a favourable context for language development.
5. Cooperative learning models require redefinition of the role of the teacher in ways that allow language teachers to expand general pedagogical skills and emphasize meaning as well as form in communication.
6. Cooperative learning approaches encourage students to take an active role in acquisition of knowledge and language skills and encourage themselves and each other as they work on problems of mutual interest.

Regarding disadvantages, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 201) argue that while the proponents of cooperative learning claim that it is suitable for learners of all ages and proficiency levels, intermediate and advanced learners may have more benefits from this approach than lower proficiency learners. Another disadvantage is that it may be difficult for teachers to adapt to the new roles that this method requires.

## **Conclusion**

Cooperative Language Learning is an instructional approach that uses pair and group work as a main way of learning. Working in groups fosters cooperation and interaction among the students, developing social skills, gaining a deeper knowledge of the subject matter and becoming more proficient in language and communication. As students work together to reach a common goal, they develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning as well as for the learning of the members of the group. Cooperative learning groups are both an academic and a personal support system (Johnson and Johnson, 2002). By helping, supporting and encouraging each other to achieve the group goal, students become committed to their personal success, the individual success of the group members and the success of the group as a whole.



Studies on CLL have demonstrated that students using cooperative learning strategies achieve higher academic scores, have higher self-esteem and develop more positive social and interaction skills. Because cooperative learning activities can be incorporated in any approach and any language program, it is very likely that CLL strategies and activities will continue to be used in the future.

Johnson et al. (1984) argue that overusing competitive and individualistic instructional methods do not prepare students adequately for their future work and home lives. Therefore, they suggest that life in schools should be structured in ways that are: (1) congruent with the future lives of our students, and (2) congruent with research on instructional methods (p. 16).

Slavin (2008) also stresses the importance of research and evidence-based reforms in education in order to prevent students and teachers from ineffective innovations. He describes a thirty-year programme of research at John Hopkins University where the initial focus was on cooperative learning. The research showed that “cooperative learning increases student achievement if it incorporates two key elements: Group goals and individual accountability. That is, groups are rewarded based on the individual learning of all group members, not on a single group product. In groups organized in this way, it is in group members’ interests to teach each other, assess each other’s learning and ask for help from each other, and these are the behaviors that lead to learning gains” (p. 152).

Stevens and Slavin (1995) report on a 2-year study of the cooperative elementary school model which used cooperation as an overarching philosophy to change school and classroom organization and instructional processes. The model included not only cooperative learning among students, but also cooperative planning by teachers and parent involvement. After two years, all students, including academically handicapped students, had significantly higher achievement in many school subjects than did their peers in traditional schools. Moreover, there were better social relations and handicapped students were more accepted socially by their nonhandicapped peers. Finally, gifted students had significantly higher achievement than their peers in enrichment programs without cooperative learning.

In addition to higher achievement, one of the most important benefit of cooperation learning is that it prepares students to become successful members of the society. As Slavin states, “human society is composed of overlapping cooperative groups: families, neighbourhoods, work groups, political parties, clubs, teams” (p. 5). Because cooperation is an essential ingredient of every successful human endeavour, the role of education is to emphasize cooperative activities in order to adequately prepare young people to become responsible and successful adults.

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