

## **Goal Structures: Learning Together and Alone**

In each classroom, it is possible to find students who prefer

- engaging in win-lose struggle to see who is best in completing the assignment
- working independently to complete the assignment
- working together in small groups, helping the others achieve the task and learn better.

Students' learning goals are structured to promote cooperative, competitive or individualistic efforts. A learning goal is "a desired future state of demonstrating competence or mastery in the subject area being studied" and the goal structure "specifies the ways in which students will interact with each other and the teacher to achieve the goal"(Johnson & Johnson, 1999:3). Each student has a different preference when it comes to the goal structure. Whenever people strive to achieve a goal, they engage in cooperative, competitive or individualistic efforts. In this study, the aim is to highlight the characteristics of each goal structure and to show that in the class dynamics it is possible to find that different groups prefer different goal structures and even the same individual may prefer using the different structures and not employing only one type of social interdependence. Although in the past competitive efforts dominated the classrooms (thanks to the audiolingual method), recent methods (task based, cooperative based learning, competency based teaching, content based instruction, multiple intelligences...) utilize cooperative learning. However, this does not mean that only one goal structure should be employed and the others abandoned. Each goal structure has its place and when they are used appropriately, they form an integrated whole.

### **Cooperative Learning**

A cooperative lesson plan is conducted by making preinstructional decisions (formulating objectives, deciding on the size of groups, choosing a method), explaining the task and cooperative structure (explaining the assignment,

criteria, individual accountability and the expected outcome), monitoring and intervening and evaluating the quality and quantity of student achievement.

Cooperative learning groups are divided into three types :

--Formal cooperative learning groups which lasts from one class period to several weeks and they are used to ensure that students are actively involved in the work.

--Informal cooperative learning groups are ad hoc groups that last from a few minutes to one class period and they are used during teaching to focus students' attention on the material.

--Cooperative base groups are long term, heterogeneous groups with stable relationships.

Not all groups are considered as cooperative groups. As a result of a learning group performance developed by Katzenbach and Smith (1993), there are four types of learning groups: pseudo groups, traditional classroom groups, cooperative learning groups, and high performance cooperative learning groups. A pseudo-learning group meets but does not want to work together. Members often block or interfere with each other's learning communicate and cooperate poorly.

A traditional learning group is a group whose members have accepted that they are to work together but see little benefit from doing so. Interdependence is low. Members do not take responsibility for anyone's learning other than their own. Students are accountable as separate individuals not as members of a team.

A cooperative learning group is more than a sum of its parts. It is a group whose members are committed to the common purpose of maximizing each other's learning. Members believe they sink or swim together. They give assistance to and encouragement to promote each other's success. Both taskwork and teamwork skills are emphasized.

A high performance cooperative learning group is a group that meets all the criteria for being a cooperative learning group and outperforms all reasonable expectations. High positive interdependence is easily seen among its members.

Johnson and Johnson (1997,1999: 74) list the forces hindering group performance as follows:

--Lack of group maturity. Members need time and experience to achieve cooperative learning.

--Uncritically giving one's dominant response. Instead of the dominant person's response, group members should choose the best one.

--Social loafing: Some members tend to work less

--Free riding. When group members realize their efforts are dispensable, they are less likely to exert efforts.

--Motivation losses:When some members work less or free ride, the others are likely to reduce their efforts

--Groupthink: Groups can be overconfident.

--Lack of sufficient heterogeneity: Heterogeneity ensures a wide variety of resources are available for the group's work.

--Lack of teamwork skills.

--Inappropriate group size. The larger the group, the fewer members can participate.

*I prefer group accountability*

*I prefer individual accountability*

*Sharing responsibility for the joint outcome is better*

*I prefer interpersonal interaction*

*Social skills are important in the class as well*

*I love to engage in taskwork and teamwork simultaneously.*

*I prefer to excel the others*

*I love being rewarded in the class*

*Competition is useful.*

*When I am in a competition, I strive more and I learn more*

*I feel hopeless in a competition*

*I prefer working on my own*

*I monitor my time and pace.*

*I do not like interacting with classmates when I am on task*

### **Reducing problem behaviors**

If students do not participate or bring work or materials, the best solution is to prepare jigsaw materials, assign student roles essential for group success, and reward groups if all members achieve up to criterion . If the problem is students talk about everything but the assignment, rewarding students is beneficial or structuring tasks so steady contributions are required for group success is recommendable. If students prefer working alone and ignore the group discussion, it is useful to limit resources in the group (that will make them impossible to work alone ) and to prepare jigsaw materials so that students cannot finish the assignment without other members' information. If the problem is that students refuse to let others participate, again jigsaw resources and reward are necessary to make them cooperate successfully.

Creating cooperative groups is not easy, it takes daily, disciplined application of the basics of cooperative efforts. These basics are tough standards and present a difficult implementation challenge to teachers.

### **Competitive Learning**

There are a lot of definitions of what competition is . Deutch (1962) thinks competition exists when individuals' goal achievements are negatively correlated, each individual perceives that when one person achieves their goal, all others with whom they are competitively linked fail to achieve their goals. Johnson and Johnson's definition is broader than Deutch's : competition exists when participants work against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few can

obtain. Skinner (1968) inserts the importance of reward in definition saying that competition results from a reward given to the person who achieves the highest relative to others. Mc Clintock (1972) includes motive in his definition by pointing out that a competitive motive is a predisposition to act competitively in a situation that allows a choice among cooperative, competitive and individualistic behaviors.

Characteristics of competition involves

- negative goal interdependence
- perceived scarcity (what is wanted is scarce)
- more than one party and one winner
- forced, salient and obtrusive comparisons among participants
- criteria determining the winner.

As to whether competition is destructive or constructive, there have been many debates (Johnson & Johnson. 1998: 131-134). Starting with Darwin scientists believe that competition is inherent in nature. To survive one must win over rivals. Secondly, competition motivates individuals to do their best. Thirdly, competition builds character, it brings out the best in person. Fourth, most people seek out competition for fun, enjoyment and amusement. Fifth, competition teaches important life values, sportsmanship, playing fair, winning and losing with grace and style. Sixth, competition increases self confidence and self esteem. Last is competition increases future career success.

When it comes to the claims against competition, the first notion, natural selection does not require competition; it occurs without any apparent struggle. Competition motivates most individuals to exert minimal effort. It decreases character; those who perceive they have no chance to win refuse to try. Fourth, competition is stressful and anxiety provoking. Sixth, it teaches dysfunctional values such as bettering others, taking joy in others' mistakes, cheating to win. Seventh, competition decreases self confidence and self esteem.

Individuals should be able to cooperate, compete and work autonomously appropriately. Being able to compete for fun and enjoyment is important. The major teacher role is to keep students focused on learning and not getting sidetracked by arguments or hurt feelings. Processing afterward is vital. Students need to learn how to win with enjoyment and lose with dignity. Students can be defeated but are never losers.

### **Individualistic Learning**

Individualistic learning exists when the achievement of one student is unrelated and independent from the achievement of other students. Students need some skills to function better in an individualistic learning situation such as:

- they recognize they have an individual fate unrelated to the others
- they strive for self benefit
- they have a short term perspective
- they recognize that their identity depends on how their performance compares with the present criteria
- they recognize that their performance is self caused. They feel responsible only to themselves.

Some students prefer to work at their own pace, to take a responsibility with little or no interaction with classmates. Individualistic situations are most appropriate when unitary, nondivisible, simple tasks need to be completed. The basic elements of an individualistic goal structure include students' working on their own toward a set criterion, having their own materials, and space, perceiving the task as relevant and important, tuning out distractions and using the teacher as a resource.

### **Method**

Participants

92 junior teacher trainees joined the questionnaire. They are asked to state their ideas in the semi-structured interview. The table is designed to show the answers of the students.

**Table 1 Students' preferences reagrding learning together or alone**

Items	No	Yes	sometimes
Preferring group accountability	46	40	6
Preferring individual accountability	16	66	8
Sharing responsibility	22	64	8
Interpersonal interaction	22	66	4
Social skills	12	68	2
Taskwork and teamwork	40	46	4
Excelling the others	26	58	8
Being rewarded	24	62	6
Competition	24	60	8
Striving more in a competition	22	68	2
Feeling hopeless in a competition	76	8	8
Working by oneself	18	64	10
Monitoring time	22	64	6
Dislike for interactions	26	62	4

## **Findings**

40 out of 92 students prefer working collaboratively although cooperative efforts result 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.) ; recognize that all group members share a common fate. (We all sink or swim together here.) ; know that one's performance is mutually caused by oneself and one's team members. (We can not do it without you.) ;feel proud and jointly celebrate when a group member is recognized for achievement (We all congratulate you on your accomplishment!) (Johnson & Johnson , 1996; 1993, 1994). It is interesting that 66 out of 92 students wish to share the responsibility but only 40 wish to study with their friends, which might indicate that students do not trust each other. 58 out of 92 students wish to excel the others. Their drive is so high and they think that group work might hinder their learning progress and achievement levels.

Even though they say that teachers ask them to do group work 64 out of 92 prefer working by themselves, which posits the questions of who does the group work, whether everybody or groups do the work and how the group work is structured. It is not clear whether teachers tailor cooperative learning lessons to meet the unique instructional circumstances and needs of the curricula, subject areas, and students, that is why students stil prefer individually. Just because the assessment is held through individual pen and paper tests , students need to work on their own to pass the exams. Group work or projects do not constitute a significant percentage of the midterm or final exams.

Rewarding as a group is not an element in coopertaive learning. Interestingly , 62 out of 92 students love being rewarded. They say they feel better and their confidence increases when they are rewarded.

62 out of 92 students say they dislike interactions with their group friends as they say that they can progress faster when they work on their own and they encounter frictions or conflicts, which contradicts the results obtained in the cooperative learning researches. The diverse and positive outcomes that simultaneously result

from cooperative efforts have sparked numerous research studies on cooperative learning focused on preventing and treating a wide variety of social problems such as diversity (racism, sexism, inclusion of handicapped), antisocial behavior (delinquency, drug abuse, bullying, violence, incivility), lack of prosocial values and egocentrism, alienation and loneliness, psychological pathology, low self-esteem, and many more (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Johnson, & Magnuson, 1995; Keeler & Anson, 1995; Slavin & Karweit, 1985). For preventing and alleviating many of the social problems related to children, it is stated by the researchers above that adolescents, and young adults, cooperative learning is the instructional method of choice, however, the participants in this study say the opposite.

Another striking result is seen in the competition drive of the students. 68 out of 92 say they strive hardest to achieve better, to get higher grades and 8 of them say they feel hopeless. So they are not desperate and they do not feel anxious and they are not overwhelmed with negative emotions. They are pleased with what they do and get. In order to effect a change, students need to be dissatisfied so that they can change their habits. Under these circumstances, students think they are pleased with what they have.

### **Conclusions**

As is seen, in the classroom it is possible to find all sorts of students who prefer cooperative groups, those who love competing with each other and some others who prefer to work on their own. Teachers have to choose a goal structure or a combination of goal structures for each lesson they teach.

On a macrolevel, instructional situations involve two complementary and interdependent roles: teacher and student. Depending upon the goals, aims, and topic to be taught, teachers may wish to teach certain lessons cooperatively and others competitive. On the microlevel cooperative learning is the most complex to implement and it has the most powerful impact on instructional outcomes. It provides a context for the other two goal structures. Competition cannot exist

without underlying cooperation concerning rules and procedures. Individualistic activities can be effectively used as part of the division of labor in which students master certain knowledge and skills that will be used in cooperative activities. When these three goal structures are used appropriately and in an integrated way, the combination may be more powerful than any of them.

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