

What Educators Need to Know About Gifted Students and Cooperative Learning

Del Siegle - Editor

Working cooperatively with others is one valuable goal of schooling. Developing one's personal identity and intellectual independence is another. Schools...must keep both goals in mind.
– Ann Robinson

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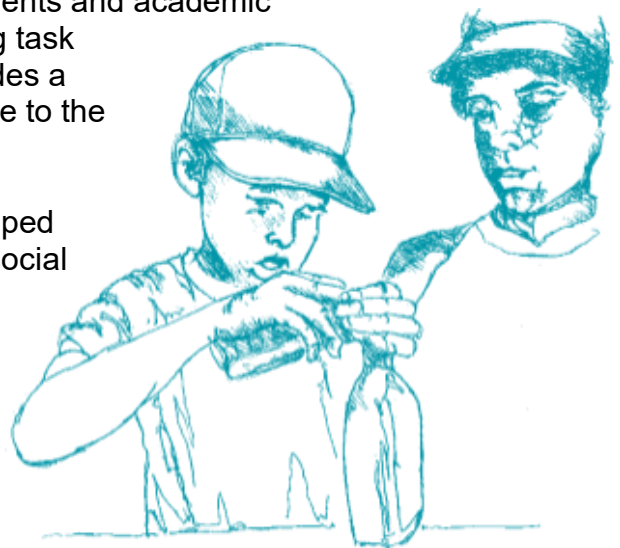
Implications for the Classroom

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy which should not be used as a replacement for programs for high ability students. While few would disagree that all students need opportunities to learn to work cooperatively with others, educators should not confuse their desire to promote collaboration among students with their desire for students to achieve academically. Cooperative groups are not appropriate for all learning tasks and situations, and some cooperative learning models are more appropriate than others for academically advanced students.

Group Composition

The strength of cooperative learning rests with the type of learning task in which students are involved. Students with a variety of talents and academic abilities can be grouped together when the learning task requires a variety of skills. This arrangement provides a setting in which each student can actively contribute to the final product.

Students of average and lower ability who are grouped with higher ability students may experience lower social self-esteem when the group task is limited to the academic skills students bring to the group. If the group task does not afford each member of the group an opportunity to contribute, then educators should limit the range of student abilities within the group so that each student is more likely to be involved.



Content and Pacing

A substantial body of research over the past thirty years indicates that access to advanced materials produces consistent, positive achievement gains for academically talented students. Cooperative learning models which limit curricular content and control pacing should not be used with academically talented students. The group task must be structured so that academically talented students are working with challenging content material involving skills, processes, or products.

Grading

Most academically talented students do not find group work objectionable, but they do object to compensatory group work forced on them when other team members are poorly motivated. Many academically talented students set very high standards for themselves and for others. Completing a group product which does not meet these internally imposed standards may be exceedingly worrisome to such students. While some would argue that compromise is being learned when group products are being graded, compromising one's standards of excellence hardly contributes to positive attitudes regarding cooperation. If group products are to be used with academically talented students, they should be organized in a manner which allows for a student's individual contribution to be recognized.

Research Facts

- Cooperative learning is not a replacement for programs for gifted students.
- Having gifted students in a cooperative group neither helps nor hinders other group members' academic performance.
- In general, most students' academic self-concept increases in cooperative learning groups.
- When gifted students interact with other students in a cooperative group, it appears that the other students experience a significant decrease in social self-concept.
- Average ability children have more negative perceptions of each other when they are grouped with gifted students in cooperative groups. They view each other as less smart, less helpful, and less likely to be leaders than when they are grouped with other average ability students.
- A variety of cooperative learning models have been developed and some are more appropriate for gifted students than others.

References

- Kenny, D. A., Archambault, F. X., Jr., & Hallmark, B. W. (1994). *The effects of group composition on gifted and non-gifted elementary students in cooperative learning groups* (Research Monograph 94108). Storrs: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.
- Robinson, A. (1991). *Cooperative learning and the academically talented student* (RBDM9106). Storrs: The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut.

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