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Research Question

How does cooperative learning increase the social skills of both students who lack these skills (eg. high risk students, introverts) and empathy in their peers who do not (eg. extraverts) to build a sense of belonging in the classroom for all students.

Purpose

Interpersonal relationships and social skills are an important aspect of human development and mental health but many children lack these skills which could have serious implications through adulthood if not addressed. In this research, cooperative learning methods are explored to see its efficacy in improving social skills and interpersonal relationships for both students who lack these skills as well as increasing empathy in students who thrive in social academic settings.

Literature Review

Mental health issues are a rising concern in both adults and children across America. Epigenetic research shows that healthy interpersonal

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relationships and social environment for children are an integral part of healthy brain development that not only becomes the foundation for learning but also for mental health into adulthood. Whereas a lack of such relationships and healthy social environments can be detrimental. “The brains of children and adolescents who experience persistent adversity respond by strengthening circuits that promote aggressive and anxious tendencies at the expense of circuits for cognition, reasoning, and memory. The hormonal signaling molecules responsible for these shifts in neural development are toxic in large amounts, making individuals more likely to develop health problems, including mental health disorders such as addiction, anxiety, and depression, and physical health problems, such as heart disease, obesity, and cancer (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, Krone, & Aspen Institute, 2018).”

This research study examines how cooperative learning can develop social skills (empathy, respect, communication, conflict resolution skills etc.) for all students in the classroom including introverts, high-risk students, anti-social students and students who are marginalized ethnic minorities etc. and those who socially thrive. “A major strength of cooperative learning programs is that they do consider the conditions that are optimal for prejudice reduction—in particular, interdependence (Pfeifer, Brown, Juvonen, 2007).”

Annotated Bibliography

Cooperative Learning and Interpersonal Relationships

Pfeifer, J. H., Brown, C. S., Juvonen, J., & Society for Research in Child Development. (2007). Prejudice Reduction in Schools: Teaching Tolerance in Schools--Lessons Learned since Brown v. Board of Education about the Development and Reduction of Children's Prejudice. Social Policy Report. Volume 21, Number 2. *Society for Research in Child Development*.

This journal article compares different methods to reduce racial prejudice in school aged children. Children are prone to prejudices because of poor conservation skills, multiple classification skills, and lack of social cognitive skills. The three methods that were studied are multicultural curricula, cooperative learning and anti-bias social/cognitive skills training. Cooperative learning was tested by comparing one group of heterogenous students to another group that were taught in the traditional method of individual learning. The results were assessed by the students' cross-racial friendship nominations after the group activity. Students who engaged in cooperative learning chose friendships with other races whereas students who studied individually chose friendships among their own races.

Immordino-Yang, M. H., Darling-Hammond, L., Krone, C., & Aspen Institute, N. C. on S. E. & A. D. (NCSEAD). (2018). The Brain Basis for Integrated

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Social, Emotional, and Academic Development: How Emotions and Social Relationships Drive Learning. In *Aspen Institute*. Aspen Institute.

This brief explains the science behind epigenetics and how social experiences are an integral part of healthy brain development which is the basis of learning. Meanwhile, chronic stress and excessive loneliness is toxic to brain development but can be protected by supportive parenting, relationships, community and school programs. Because a young person's social, emotional and academic development are intertwined, it emphasizes the importance of teachers to promote the growth and development of the "whole child."

Pate-Clevenger, R., Dusing, J., Houck, P., & Zuber, J. (2008). Improvement of Off-Task Behavior of Elementary and High School Students through the Use of Cooperative Learning Strategies [Online Submission]. In *Online Submission*.

This research studies the effects of implementing cooperative learning in classrooms to reduce students' off-task behaviors and found that the results were positive. Off-task behavior was defined as "anytime a student was not working on classroom activities, demonstrated a lack of self-control, exhibited rude behavior, was poorly motivated, or any other social behavior that negatively impacted academic performance in the classroom." 85% of students who were surveyed after the implementation agreed that the cooperative learning method helped them focus on the task at hand.

Eskay, M., Onu, V. C., Obiyo, N., & Obidoa, M. (2012). Use of Peer Tutoring, Cooperative Learning, and Collaborative Learning: Implications for Reducing Anti-Social Behavior of Schooling Adolescents. *Online Submission*, 932–945

This study shows the positive effects of cooperative learning when applied to students' who exhibit anti-social behaviors. Students with anti-social behaviors are those who are hostile towards others and isolated rather than engaging with others in positive ways. Their academic performance as a result are usually poor which effects their low self-esteem. After the cooperative learning methods were implemented with students' who had anti-social behaviors, results showed their anti-social tendencies had decreased, their academic test scores were higher as well as their self-esteem.

Pham, H. P. Q. (2017). Group Dynamics: Building a Sense of Belonging in the EFL Classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 55(1), 14–21.

This study explores various cooperative group activities that help EFL students feel integrated by fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance from their peers. Study has shown that rejection and anxiety are counter-productive to learning and therefore, these activities that help students get to know one another are very important as a foundation to learning.

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Williams, L. (1995). *Increasing Student Interpersonal Relationships*.

Cooperative learning methods were implemented to a target group of fourth grade students who needed social skills development. The target group of students had challenging conditions such as poverty, poor school attendance and high mobility rate. Both interpersonal skills were measured through a survey both before and after the program. Results showed significant improvement in interpersonal skills such as an increase in empathy and respect for others and decrease in disruptive behaviors.

Caparos, J., Cetera, C., Ogden, L., & Rossett, K. (2002). *Improving Students' Social Skills and Achievement through Cooperative Learning*.

This study was conducted to evaluate a program designed to increase appropriate social skill and academic achievement. In this study, teachers observed that many students were engaging in off-task behavior stemming from lack of social skills. The intervention consisted of problem-solving tasks incorporating cooperative learning. Caparos, Cetera, Ogden, Rossett (2002) noted post intervention data indicated academic growth, awareness of appropriate social skills, and a stronger sense of belonging.

Forman, S. R. (2018). What Works? Teaching African American Students in Urban Schools [ProQuest LLC]. In *ProQuest LLC*.

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This is a study conducted to understand the reason for the academic achievement gap between African American students to their white counterparts. Forman (2018) suggest that when teachers move away from traditional methods of teaching and move toward teaching practices that take into consideration the individual student with msuch as cooperative learning, motivation and academic achievement increased.

LaCarrubba, A. (1993). *A Comparative Study of the Academic Achievement of Primary Students When Learning Science through the Directed Reading Activity or Cooperative Learning Approach.*

This study was conducted to see whether different learning methods would have an impact on student learning in the subject of Science. Two groups of students were each taught the same unit of Science in Cooperative Learning method and Directed Reading Activity Approach. LaCarruba (1993) noted there were no significant differences in the results.

Fetissoff, K., Kry, J., & Skilling, A. (2008). Improving Social Skills In Elementary Students Through Classroom Meetings. In *Online Submission*. Online Submission.

In this study, school aged children are given classroom activities to develop social skills. The topic

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that were covered were respect, responsibility, empathy, cooperation etc.

Assessment was

made through surveys given to parents, teachers and students. The

researchers found that these

activities did not increase the students' social skills long term.

References

- Pfeifer, J. H., Brown, C. S., Juvonen, J., & Society for Research in Child Development. (2007). Prejudice Reduction in Schools: Teaching Tolerance in Schools--Lessons Learned since Brown v. Board of Education about the Development and Reduction of Children's Prejudice. Social Policy Report. Volume 21, Number 2. *Society for Research in Child Development*.
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