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Teamwork: A Strategy for the Future

Collaborate, Coordinate and Cooperate

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"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."

-Anonymous

While browsing through the evening newspaper, the numerous articles detailing the violence, corruption, and problems facing society. Can we expect the problems to be solved? Hopefully. With a comprehensive and willing effort by citizens, good leadership, and viable ideas, many problems can be resolved in time; however, problems as complex as identifying and developing effective solutions to environmental concerns (e.g., acid rain) or providing effective health care delivery systems to all citizens require that creative and knowledgeable individuals "put their heads together" and coordinate their efforts. Leaders or specialists from sociology, physiology, psychology, education, astronomy, computer technology, chemistry, biology, microbiology, government policy, and/or economics must be called upon to collaborate on issues that are too "big" to approach from anything other than a shared problem-solving, interdisciplinary perspective. Effective teams (e.g., competitive sports teams, investigative teams, disaster relief teams, creative teams in the entertainment field) are highly visible to the public and serve as examples that underscore the advantages of successfully combining individual efforts through cooperation. In theory, working together to solve problems, or create a new product, working as a specialized team (e.g., medical or sports teams), or just working toward a common goal with the help, encouragement, and support of others is appealing. By having several individuals contribute their expertise to a "pool" of information, good ideas can be generated, decisions can be based on substantial input, and

even the most perplexing problems can be solved, being a member of a team can be rewarding and fun. Or not!

Attempts at productive teamwork are not always successful. Most of us have worked on at least one or two team projects that resulted in a frustrating experience. We know from those experiences that if the operating dynamic within the group is not conducive to the task, accomplishing the team's objectives may become significantly more difficult and unrealistic. Team efforts can be hampered by obstacles such as unfocused group goals, individual priorities overshadowing group priorities, ineffective leadership, lack of commitment by team members, inequity of responsibilities, lack of individual competence, problems with communication or coordination of activities, and personality conflicts.

Business leaders have reported similar negative experiences. Much of the restructuring that has occurred in business and industry within the past decade has been based on the premise that outcomes are better if people within the same organization work together rather than compete with one another (either as individuals or as units within the organization). A nationwide survey of business, labor-union, and education staff revealed that 90% of the people who were released from their jobs were not fired for reasons related to their technical ability or knowledge of the job. More often than not, the reasons for dismissing individuals included poor job attitudes and interpersonal relationships.

Business leaders are asking for employees who have good relationship skills and who can

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function as members of teams. As a result, educators have been trying to find ways to teach students how to cooperate. In contrast with the previous educational paradigm where students were encouraged to compete against one another, today's educators are recognizing the benefits of instructional situations in which students work together in cooperative arrangements.

Along with the movement to teach cooperation, a parallel movement towards "inclusion" of all students in the regular education classroom is occurring. Educational goals focus not only on meeting the diverse academic needs of all students but also on social integration and peer acceptance of students with exceptionalities in mainstream classes. Discussions regarding "gender equity" in the classroom have also focused attention on promoting equal participation and involvement of both girls and boys in the academic environment.



Restructuring the classroom by providing effective cooperative group learning experiences has been seen as a vehicle for achieving these goals. Decisions to use cooperative learning structures have been driven by research that has demonstrated that these structures can have positive effects on academic achievement, race relations, acceptance of students with handicaps, self-esteem and social relationships.

A common pitfall in restructuring the classroom has been the assumption that cooperation and effective teamwork will automatically occur when they are valued by a leader (e.g., a principal, a teacher, etc.). Such assumptions are out of touch with the realities associated with teaching students to

work together in a meaningful way. Over the last five years, researchers at the Center for Research on Learning have been observing groups of students working together on assignments in mainstream elementary classes. These observations have revealed that numerous situations occur in which one student (most frequently a student with learning disabilities or some other exceptionality) is treated quite differently than other members of the group. Often these students are ignored, with other students positioning themselves in such a way as to exclude them from the group activity. The students with learning disabilities tend to participate less often than other students. When they do participate, they tend to ask questions related to keeping up with the group, how to spell words, and/or how to find the right page rather than offering useful ideas to the group. They seem to be less committed to the work and less enthusiastically engaged. When peers help the student, the help most often is on the same type of superficial level (e.g., spelling a word). In some situations these students are put down, called names, ridiculed, and told to "shut up." Their opinions and ideas are disregarded, and they are targets of complaints to the teacher and among other group members more frequently than other students.

The following scenario exemplifies the kind of treatment that some students with exceptionalities receive during group work. In one class, three students including a student with learning disabilities were assigned to work together on a vocabulary assignment. The "group" divided the workload in half — the student with learning disabilities was not given any share of the assignment in which to participate. Later, as he listened to the other two members discuss answers, he volunteered

answers over 20 times but was ignored. Several times he contributed answers that were correct, but in some cases, the "group" did not record his answers and the items were graded as missing by the teacher. This student eventually became disruptive during the activity, and the teacher pulled him aside to talk about his inappropriate behavior.

These types of occurrences underscore the importance of understanding the difference between merely "having students work in a group" and "structuring cooperative work." In essence, structuring cooperative work involves teaching students specific interpersonal skills that will enable them to be contributing members of the group as well as to become benefactors of what other group members have to offer. Such instruction needs to be deliberately planned and incorporated into ongoing educational experiences, and the skills related to being an effective team member need to be explicitly modeled and taught.

"A common pitfall in restructuring the classroom has been the assumption that cooperation and effective teamwork will automatically occur when they are valued by a leader (e.g., principal, teacher, etc.)."

The Cooperative Strategies Series is designed to enable teachers to provide such instruction. The series focuses on the skills students need to cooperate and to effectively manage "jobs" with others. Some of these skills are called the SCORE Skills, and different combinations of the SCORE Skills plus other skills are called "cooperative strategies." Each cooperative strategy consists of a series

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of steps that students can use to participate in and cope with the demands of a certain kind of teaming situation. In general, cooperative strategies enable students to organize, coordinate, and effectively complete work; evaluate the work done and the process used to complete a task; be friendly, responsible members of a group; share ideas and knowledge; and solve problems that may occur when working with others. The more advanced teaming strategies enable students to negotiate, compromise, make group decisions, and mediate in situations that may require collaboration or specialization and tutoring.

A full repertoire of cooperative strategies enables students to respond

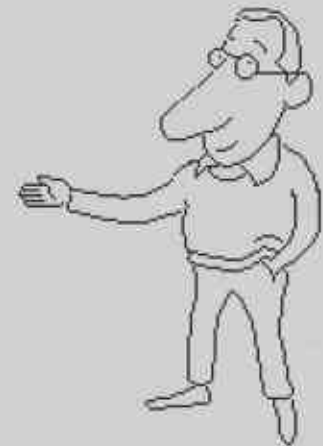
...during the field test, the "atmosphere" of the groups changed perceptibly. Students were supporting each other by offering substantive help, sharing ideas, praising each other's efforts or accomplishments, monitoring their own interactions, and evaluating their success and satisfaction. . . "

to a wide variety of cooperative tasks. For example, a group research assignment in social studies class to do a report on a famous explorer might require the use of a different teaming strategy than would a group English assignment to define and memorize 30 vocabulary words. Similarly, successfully working with a group of experts to determine how to resolve a technical problem with a car engine requires different cooperative strategies than preparing

for a major criminal case with a team of legal professionals. The Cooperative Strategies Series covers several different strategies that students can use in a variety of cooperative situations throughout their



in which students work to facilitate the learning of peers as well as their own. They contribute to a group dynamic that produces outcomes that are superior to what can be created by individuals alone. All students are



lives. Two overriding goals are associated with teaching the cooperative strategies contained in the Cooperative Strategies Series: (a) to improve the students' effectiveness as members of a team in a school setting, and (b) to increase the probability that students will be able to work harmoniously with others in work, leisure, family, and community activities.

One purpose associated with the Series is to teach students how to develop a community within the class

encouraged to assume responsibility in two key areas: (a) to strive to achieve personal growth because the success of those around an individual is, in part, dependent upon that individual growing and progressing to the maximum extent possible; and (b) to strive to help other team members grow and develop. When teams are truly successful, not only do they produce extraordinary results, but the individual members grow more rapidly than if everyone were working alone.

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Examples of short assignments in which the Teamwork Strategy could be applied include the following: defining a list of terms for science; looking up similar types of information about several different states; having three or four students plan and host a class party; or correcting the punctuation and spelling in 20 sentences.

When students are successfully using the Teamwork Strategy in relatively uncomplicated and short cooperative assignments, more sophisticated projects might be assigned. Such projects may involve using the Teamwork Strategy over a period of several days, with a class presentation as the final group product. For example, students might be asked to compile a portfolio of poems, stories, factual summaries, or pictures related to their home state in the 1800s. Each group might decide what type of items to include in their portfolios and assign tasks depending upon the individual strengths of each of the team members (e.g., the individual who enjoys poetry could find and submit relevant poems; the individual who loves to draw might create illustrations for the portfolio). Once individual assignments are complete, time would be spent in subsequent sessions reviewing, correcting, and making suggestions on how to improve individual products, compiling the portfolio, and discussing and evaluating how the group worked together.

During the field test of the instructional procedures for the SCORE Skills and Teamwork Strategy, students in grades four, five, and six worked in small groups on a variety of teacher-developed daily assignments in language, math, social studies, art, and science. All of the three-person groups were able to demonstrate mastery of the Teamwork Strategy by using 100% of the TEAMS Steps and the SCORE Skills on at least one in-class assignment. The same groups were

S T R A T E G R A M 4

The SCORE Skills and the Teamwork Strategy

The SCORE Skills: Social Skills for Cooperative Groups (Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1993) is the lead manual for the Series and provides the foundation for students to work together in the classroom as co-workers or as teammates in a pleasant, cooperative, and effective manner. The first letters of the names of the skills spell the acronym "SCORE," which is used throughout the instruction in the Cooperative Strategies Series to help students remember the skills and to use them. The skills include: **S**hare Ideas, **C**ompliment Others, **O**ffer Help or **E**ncouragement, **R**ecommend **C**hanges Nicely, and **E**xercise Self-Control. The skills are easy to use and are not limited to group interactions. Rather, with practice, they can be used to establish and maintain good relationships with others in everyday situations.

The Teamwork Strategy (Vernon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1993) provides a framework for organizing and completing tasks in

small work groups. The strategy is a "divide and conquer" approach to a large task or project that cannot be completed by one person in the time allotted. By applying the strategy, students analyze an assignment and divide it into specific tasks, equitably assign those tasks to individuals (or volunteer for tasks) within the group, complete the individual tasks at a high level of quality and in a timely manner, offer and request help to complete the individual jobs, ask for and give feedback to other group members, assemble the individual jobs into one product (or presentation), and evaluate the process used to complete the project and assess the interpersonal skills of group members. "TEAMS" is the acronym used to help students remember each step of the Teamwork Strategy: **T**alk about tasks, **E**xecute your job(s), **A**sk and share, **M**ake it great, and **S**urvey your TEAM'S SCORE. Within each of the steps, students use one or more of the SCORE Skills.

For ordering information for the SCORE Skills or the Teamwork Strategy

Contact: Edge Enterprises

P.O. Box 1304

Lawrence, Kansas 66044

given an activity after school and were not prompted to use the SCORE Skills or the Teamwork Strategy. On the average, they used about 75% of the steps and skills. The relatively low posttest average was primarily the result of some groups choosing not to use the Teamwork strategy for one of the tasks (See Figure on page 5).

Other results were less quantifiable. For example, during the field test, the "atmosphere" of the

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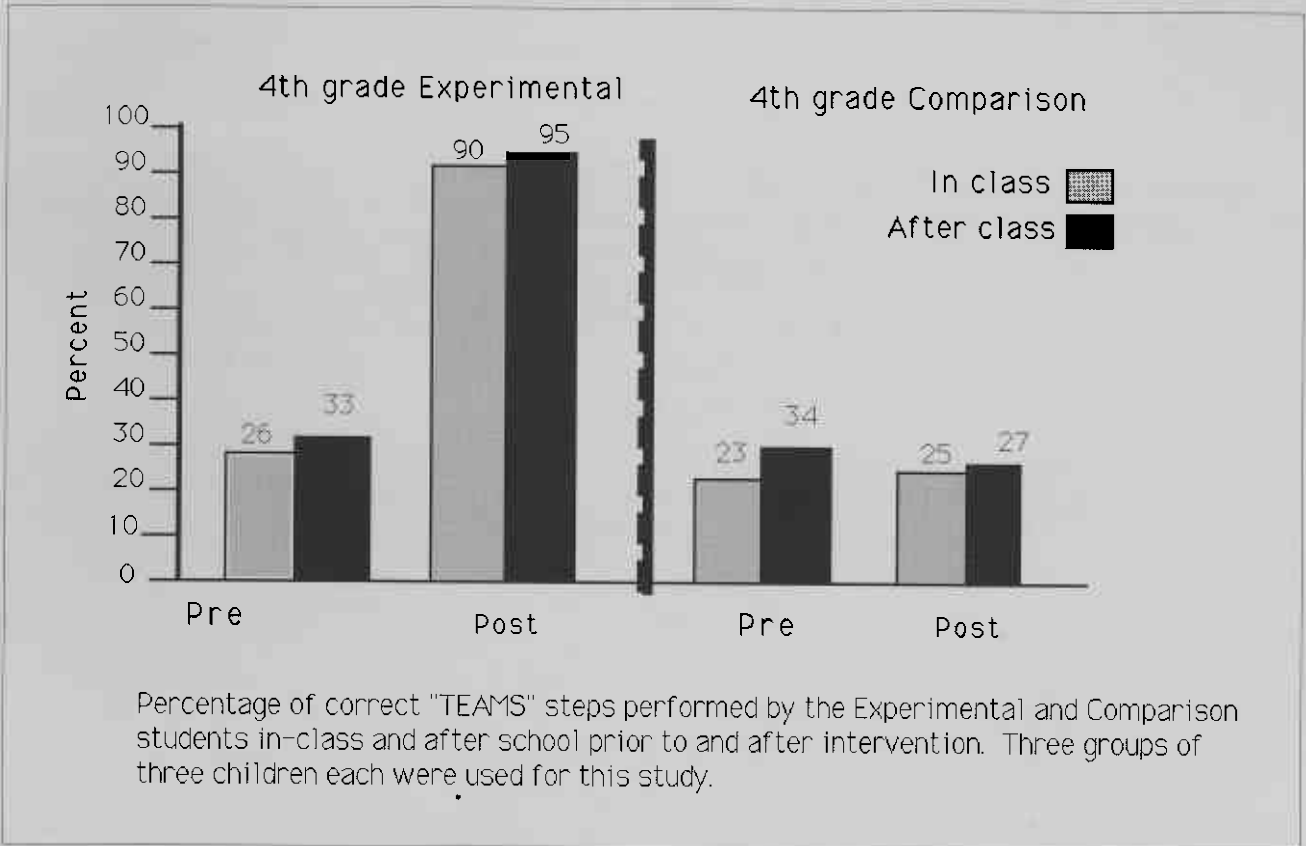
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groups changed perceptibly. Students were supporting each other by offering substantive help, sharing ideas, praising each other's efforts or accomplishments, monitoring their own interactions, and evaluating their success and satisfaction with the quality of the group product as well as the quality of the social skills they used throughout the assignment. Students were no longer being left out or teased, opinions and ideas from everyone received equal attention, and there were few disruptions. Quite often they even had fun.

In fact, the programs were endorsed by students involved in the experimental classes. They indicated that they liked the programs and stated that the Teamwork Strategy and SCORE Skills should be taught to all fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. Students completed a consumer satisfaction measure at the end of the year related to the goals, procedures, and outcomes of the Teamwork and SCORE instructional programs. Explanations by students for their ratings of different questions about the SCORE and Teamwork programs included: "I think they helped a lot of people in our class, even me," "I can get along with others more," "It helped me with being nicer to kids," "We got done with work faster," "Now I don't yell or say something mean when I correct someone," "It works," "I used to be afraid to lead (the group), but now I like

it," and "I wasn't a good team member at first, but after learning the SCORE skills I became a better team member." When asked what they liked most about the programs, answers included: "That I got to know how to work as a team," "I like how we found out that other kids who couldn't work together can now work together," "You got more choices about doing things," "(The programs) changed me. I feel really proud of myself...", "I like people not making fun of me," "I really liked the skills because now I can help other people in a nicer way. I can also help my cousin because she doesn't really have nice manners."

The high satisfaction ratings and positive comments by the students are encouraging. If students are satisfied, understand the benefits associated with the programs, and are able to perform the new skills adequately, the probability is increased that they will continue to use them after instruction is completed. Instruction in *The Teamwork Strategy* together with SCORE Skills provide the foundation for students to begin to think in terms of team goals and evaluate their own performance based on team effectiveness. As they assume responsibility to both learn from and teach peers, many more lessons in communication, empathy, understanding, and cooperation can emerge. Additionally, as students come to understand and step

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FOR THE CLASSROOM

PENS HELP SHEET from Eva Mitchener

it to be helpful when she is teaching PENS. The PENS Help Sheet can be copied for classroom use. Thanks to Eva for her contribution!

Eva Mitchener uses the following PENS Help Sheet with her students at R.P. Dawkins Middle School in Spartansburg, South Carolina. Her students have found

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PENS Help Sheet

1. Helping Verbs

<u>C</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>M</u>
could	has	am	do	be	should	was	is	may
can	have	are	did	being	shall	were		might
	had		does	been		will		must
			done			would		

2. Coordinating Conjunctions: These are used with a comma (,) in a compound sentence.

<u>F</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>Y</u>	<u>S</u>
for	and	nor	but	or	yet	so

3. Prepositions: There are no subjects or verbs after these words (subjects and verbs must be at least two words away).

at to in for by with from into

4. AND connects compound subjects and compound verbs in simple sentences. When you see AND in a simple sentence, it will be followed by a subject or verb.

5. Verbs: Look at these endings - *ed, ing, en*.

6. Words the follow *a, an, the* are nouns and not verbs.

7. NOT is not a verb. The verb will be in front of *not* or behind it.

8. LY: Verbs do not end in *ly*.

FOR THE CLASSROOM

Consolidated Steps for Making and Memorizing Lists

from

Ann Valus

Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency - Bettendorf, Iowa

Ann has found that it is helpful to consolidate the cue cards for the mnemonic strategy into one list. This gives an overall view of the strategy and how the cue cards relate to the strategy. Thanks to Ann for sharing her list with everyone. The graphic below may be copied for classroom use.

Steps for Making and Memorizing Lists

Step #1: Look for clues

Word Clues
Other Clues
Importance Clues

Requirements for Headings

Must:

1. summarize
2. be separated from list
3. be short
4. be accurate
5. be limiting

Step #2: Investigate the items

Requirements for Headings

Must:

1. be related to the heading
2. be short
3. be accurate
4. be useful
5. not be repetitive
6. be parallel to other items
7. not make the list too long

Step #3: Select a mnemonic device using "FIRST"

Form a word
Insert a letter(s)
Rearrange the letters
Shape a sentence
Try combinations

Step #4: Transfer the information to a card

Step #5: Self-test

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up to the expectations that go with being an integral member of a team, they will free the teacher to render individual instructional assistance to targeted students within the class.

The Cooperative Strategies Series is based on information and research on effective cooperative learning group structures in the classroom. Each of the manuals in the Cooperative Strategies Series stresses essential components of cooperative learning activities suggested by leaders in the field of cooperative learning. A description of the SCORE Skills and the Teamwork Strategy can be seen on page 4.

Cooperative strategies never become obsolete. Young children can learn easy strategies and continue to build upon them. As they acquire the skills required to work effectively as members of a team, the quality of their schooling experience can be enhanced. The intent of the Cooperative Strategies Series is for students to use the strategies during their school experiences and, through repeated use, to modify them to meet their needs as they progress through the grades and into employment and other settings as adults. Preparing students by teaching them the skills to collaborate, coordinate, and cooperate today is perhaps preparing them to help solve the "big" problems tomorrow. ■

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