Cooperative Learning : A Paradigm Shift in Learning Outcomes

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Abstract

Educational institutions like other all other organisation, require constant monitoring to identify areas for potential improvement. Change may be described as the adoption of an innovation, where the ultimate goal is to improve outcomes through an alteration of practices. Factors that drive change may be internal or external to the environment, innovations may be initiated at any level in the organiational structure and reforms may be systematic or local in nature. Change management is the core activity in realising organizational goals, and this change has undergone in the description of various models that is followed by 'Total Quality Management'. In the educational context, quality is seen as complex issue as education is concerned with human being. So there is a dire need of cooperative learning for better learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Cooperative Learning And Learning Outcomes

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping a person. It should be a motive force due to which a person will pursue knowledge relentlessly in his field. A balanced education, while aiming at total growth, should give full opportunity to the learner to discover and use his fullest potential. It should cater for the following:

• Development of skill, proper habits, attitudes and human values.
• Application of knowledge as and when required with right dose.

Through learning, a person improves his knowledge as well as his approach to life/issues. Learning and improvement are continuous processes. An attempt has been made in this article to cover some points which would enable a person not only to give out his best but also motivate his students to develop themselves and bring laurels to the institution/country.

For achieving success in any mission in the fast-paced life with intense competition, proper education, knowledge in that particular field and management are no doubt essential prerequisites but the factor that will contribute largely to success is overall development of the personality and getting the best out of a team. Being physically fit, mentally alert and spiritually active will lead to overall development of the personality. Managing people is a significant factor that contributes to the overall performance of the team.

The very nature and role of education is being questioned, now more than ever before, and learning outcomes are important tools in clarifying the results of learning for the student, citizen, employer and educator.

Learning outcomes and ‘outcomes-based approaches’ have implications for curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment, as well as quality assurance. They are likely to form an important part of twenty-first century approaches to higher education and the reconsideration of such vital questions as to what, who, how, where and when we teach and assess.
Learning outcomes are concerned with the achievements of the learner rather than the intentions of the teacher (expressed in the aims of a module or course). They can take many forms and can be broad or narrow in nature. There is often some confusion between learning outcomes and aims and objectives. Aims are concerned with teaching and the teacher’s intentions whilst learning outcomes are concerned with learning.

Today, as learning outcomes focus our attention on giving quality education to millions of children in our schools, we find a paradigm shift taking place in the basic process of education-from ‘teaching to learn’ to ‘helping to know’.

Learner centred pedagogies are concerned with student involvement in learning as active participants in construction of knowledge. They are actively engaged in the teaching learning process. They learn when they interact with the community, they are a part of so we will discuss about certain strategies to develop learning outcomes.

Cooperative Learning:

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning.

In cooperative learning groups, students have two responsibilities:

1) To learn the assigned material.
2) To make sure all other members do like wise.

Simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not promote higher achievement and higher level reasoning. In order to be productive, cooperative learning groups must be structured to include the essential elements of:
- Positive interdependence (each member can succeed only if all members succeed).
- Face to face interaction.
- Individual accountability (each member do their fan-share of work)
- Interpersonal and small group skills.
- Group processing (reflecting on how they work and improve).

Contrast of cooperative learning is competitive learning or individualistic learning. They are personally beneficial.

It is a multimode discussion cycle in which students listen to a question or presentation, have time to think individually, talk with each other in pairs and finally share responses with larger group. The teacher signals students to switch from listening to think, to pair, and to share by using clues. The benefits include longer and more elaborate answers, inferences supported by evidence and logical argument, increased student participation and improved achievement. Students individually or in pairs may write or diagram their thoughts. Teachers may cue them to reach consensus, engage in problem solving or assume the role of devil's advocate. The overall effect of these co-ordinated element is a concrete, valid and practical system, made manageable and thereby acceptable to teachers. The steps in using "Think-Pair-Share" tool:

1. Listen - students listen to the question.
2. Think - (wait time I)
3. Pair-
4. Share - (followed by presentation of finding in front of the class) Teacher - (wait time II)

This method can be used effectively in schools as well as in colleges. (Figs. 1 & 2)
It is seen that cooperative learning has emerged as the leading new approach to classroom instruction. Numerous research studies have revealed that students completing cooperative learning group tasks tend to have higher academic test scores, higher self-esteem, greater numbers of positive social skills, fewer stereotypes of individuals of other races or ethnic groups and greater comprehension of the content and skills they are studying (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1993, Slavin 1991, Stahl and Van Sickle 1992).

But even with its increasing popularity, a large majority of the group tasks that teachers use, even teachers who claim to be using "Cooperative Learning" continue to be cooperative group tasks - not cooperative learning group tasks. For e.g. nearly all "jigsaw" activities are not cooperative learning jigsaw activities. Merely because students work in small groups does not mean that they are cooperating to ensure their own learning and the learning of all others in their groups. (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1993). This emphasis on academic learning success for each individual and all members of the group is one feature that separates cooperative learning groups from other group tasks (Slavin 1990).

For cooperative learning a number of essential elements or requirements must be met:

**A clear set of specific student learning outcome objectives**

A proper planning by describing precisely what students are expected to learn and be able to do on their own well beyond the end of the group task and curriculum unit.

**All students in the group "buy into" the targeted outcome**

Everyone in the group needs to master the common set of information or skills.

**Clear and complete set of task - completion directions or instructions**

Teachers have to state directions or instructions that describe in clear, precise terms exactly what students are to do, in what order, with what materials and when appropriate, what students are to generate as evidence of their mastery of targeted content and skills. These directions are given to students before they engage in their group learning efforts.

**Heterogenous Groups**

Teachers should organize the three, four or five members groups so that students are mixed as heterogeneously as possible, first according to academic abilities, and then on the basis of ethnic backgrounds, race and gender. Students should not be allowed to form their groups based on friendship and cliques.

**Equal opportunity or success**

Every student must believe that he or she has an equal chance of learning the content and abilities and earning the group rewards for academic.

**Positive Interdependence**

Teachers must structure learning tasks so that students come to believe that their access to rewards is as a member of an academic team wherein all members receive a reward or no member does.

**Face to face Interaction**

Students need to arrange themselves so that they are positioned and postured to face each other for direct eye - to- eye contact and face to face academic conversation.

**Positive social interaction behaviours and attitudes**

Students should engage in such interactive abilities as leadership, trust building, conflict management, constructive criticism, encouragement compromise, clarifying etc.
Teachers may need to describe the expected social interaction behaviour and attitudes of students and to assign particular students specific roles to ensure that they consciously work on these behaviours in their groups.

Access to must learn information

Teachers must structure the tasks so that students have access to and comprehend the specific information that they must learn.

Opportunities to complete required information processing task

Each student must complete a number of internal information processing tasks aligned with target objectives, such as comprehending, translating, making connections, assigning meanings, etc.

Provide sufficient time

Each student and group as a whole should be provided the amount of time needed to learn the targeted information and abilities to the extent expected. Without sufficient time spending, the academic benefits to co-operative learning will be limited.

Individual accountability

All students can achieve higher academic success individually than were they to study alone. So when they are in cooperative groups accountability increases and reaches to the targeted academic content and abilities.

Public recognition and rewards for group academic success

Only members of groups who meet or surpass high levels of academic achievement receive ample awards within formal public settings.

Post group reflection

Students spend time after the group tasks have been completed to systematically reflect upon how they worked together as a team in such areas as:

- How they achieved their group goals,
- How they helped each other comprehend the content, resources, and
- How they used positive behaviour and attitudes to enable each individual and the entire group as a group to be successful and the strategies needed to do better next time to make groups even more successful.

Conclusion

In summary, cooperative learning promotes increased student achievement, improved attitude and enhanced interpersonal relationship.

The emphasis moves from the content (what staff teach) to outcome (what a student will be able to do). The adoption of a learning outcomes approach focuses activity on the learner and away from the teacher. It promotes the idea of the teacher as a facilitator or manager of the learning process and recognises that much learning takes place outside the classroom without a teacher present. It further involves the idea that students should be actively involved in the planning and management of their own learning and take more responsibility for this as the student progressively develops as an independent learner. It is important to note that student-centred learning necessitates the use of learning outcomes as the only logical approach.

References


