

Improving Positive Attitudes Through Cooperative Learning

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Abstract- The study examined the practice of cooperative learning and working in groups have improved attitudes towards group work, communication, interpersonal skills and achievement of students. Objectives of the study are to develop positive attitude towards Social studies, to enhance the teamwork of students and achieve better productivity and to develop self-management skills. To achieve the objectives of the study the Grade 5A class has been selected and thirty-five students have participated in the study. Random sample have been used to select the respondents and both primary and secondary data collection methods have used. Data collection techniques were questionnaire and interviews for students and observations and reflective report of the teacher researcher. Study found that working in groups also can change the attitude of the students. The study revealed that there is a slight increase in attitude towards Social Studies after group work. Further the students appreciated working with one another on solving problems. Particularly when the students were in groups they feel more confident to do the work. Study revealed that cooperative learning helps to develop self-management skills since when the student gains more confident they will be able to manage themselves better.

Keywords – Cooperative learning, Social studies, Positive attitude

I. INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning in other words working in groups have improved attitudes towards group work, communication, interpersonal skills and achievement of students. Working in groups also can change the attitude of the students. There are students in the classroom they have different abilities. Teacher has to identify the individual cases and their merits and different abilities of the students. Students can learn from their peers. Therefore, peer learning is very important. Cooperative learning is a skill that students should learn because it helps throughout their lives. Cooperative learning helps to develop team working, communication skills, interpersonal skills and social skills. All the students can be benefited through working cooperatively towards the same goal with peers since they learn from each other. Therefore, working cooperatively can solve many problems. According to Oxford American Dictionary, cooperative learning can be defined as a small group of students who are working together on a common learning task. Each student plays an important role of helping one another achieve this common goal. (Cited in Johnson, 2009).

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cooperative learning closely links with activity based learning facilitated through group work and pair work. The most significant feature of the cooperative learning is the opportunity created for students to share their ideas and strategies with their peers. Teacher plays the role of facilitator and creates an atmosphere that where all students like to share their ideas, views and strategies with the peers. According to Johnson (2009) the interaction within cooperative groups support students feel confident in their own capabilities. Students can come up with different strategies to same problem. The cooperative communication between students also can be very beneficial for other subjects and co-curricular activities where the ideas of students are prevalent. If the students who can work with others cooperatively and willingly share their ideas they will be a productive member of the society for today and tomorrow.

Prior to the intervention the teacher researcher conducted five social studies lessons in grade Five A class utilizing the cooperative learning approach in which activities were executed through pair and group work. The observations made by the researcher proved that students lacked practice in maximizing learning through pair work and group work. Their group work is not up to standard. The majority was reluctant on cooperative working and thus need for the intervention was justified.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Cooperative learning is the instructional practice of placing students into small groups and having them work together towards a common goal. Each group member learns new material and helps other group members to learn important information. Cooperative learning enhances the positive attitudes towards the subject matter and not only the subject matter but also can create and develop more positive attitudes towards teachers, principal and school as a whole. Also, a teacher creates positive attitudes towards their students and develops the student's oral communication and social skills. Further students learn to use team approach for problem solving and this gives responsibility for learning. Cooperative learning promotes innovation in teaching and classroom techniques and creates an environment of active, involved, exploratory learning and stimulates critical thinking and helps students to clarify ideas through discussion and debate. Further cooperative learning meant to enhance self-management skills. Students are taught how to criticize ideas of their peers, not people. Cooperative

learning sets high expectations for students and teachers because students are empowered with taking their own decisions about group work and teachers have trust on students and their work. Additionally, this leads to develop leadership skills of students. At the end cooperative learning will be a life skill for students.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How will students’ attitudes toward Social Studies change after cooperatively learning and working in small groups?
2. How will the students perform better in Social studies when working groups and pairs?
3. Will the students improve their self-management skills?

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To develop positive attitude towards Social studies.
2. To enhance the teamwork of students and achieve better productivity.
3. To develop self-management skills.

VI. METHODOLOGY

This study is a small-scale action research conducted with sample of thirty-five students from grade Five A. Random sample have been used to select the respondents of the study specifically when answered the questions. To collect data both primary and secondary data collection methods have been used. Data collection techniques are questionnaire and interviews for students and observations and reflective report of the teacher researcher. Firstly, students were asked to complete a work based project questionnaire. On second day teacher has appointed group leaders and assigned the groups. Thirty-five students were divided in to five groups and each group consists of seven members. Beginning of each day short introduction has given to students on how to do their activities. At the end in order to find out the answers students have worked together and conducted the presentation. Three different activities were given to students within seven days of the study. Activities have chosen from three different texts from the grade five Social Studies text book.

Subject area and lessons for activities

TABLE 1
SUBJECT AREA AND LESSONS FOR ACTIVITIES

Subject area	Lesson	Method
Social Studies	The Sinharaja Forest	Some question cards have given to the students. As a group, students found out the answers by working together. Finally, students presented based on their activity questions.
Social Studies	Grasslands of Sri Lanka	The students have to read their text book and find out more information on lesson by researching.
Social Studies	Sigiriya or Lion Rock	Final Activity on third day was Cooperation Cards and which distributed among students. After reading the question on cooperation card students presented their answers to the whole class.

Above table 1 presented the subject area and lessons for activities.

VII. ASSESSMENT

There were 50 points possible for each assessment. Some criteria are participation, leadership, and communication skills. Same group reward system was used as was used for the teacher-formed groups and as well as student form groups. During the last two days of the project, six students were randomly selected to answer a specific set of interview questions. Subsequently the completions of the project students were requested to complete a post-project survey. The surveys and interview responses were used to assess how students’ attitudes changed during the cooperative group learning process. A teacher journal also was used as another form of data collection. At the end of the day the teacher researcher made the journal entries on the learning teaching process. During project period, the researcher also commented on what she noticed about the students’ attitudes related to group work.

First activity was on lesson Sinharaja forest. The teacher has planned the activity based on Sinharaja forest. Students have given fifteen minutes to prepare for their activity which was role play about Sinharaja forest and how we protect the forest. The groups came up with creative role plays. Second activity was based on lesson Grasslands. Activity questions were chosen from the text book. Students have engaged in the activity and answered the questions. Third activity was based on the lesson Sigiriya or Lion Rock with cooperation cards which were learning through fun and very good experience for students. There were some problems related to each cooperation card and students were given fifteen minutes to prepare and come up with their solution.

VIII. IMPLEMENTATION

Daily a short introduction was given to the students about the topic of the day, and then students worked communally to solve the problems that they were assigned. On the first day of the research project, students were asked to complete a pre- project questionnaire. Questionnaires were given to students and instructed them how to fill the questionnaire. On the second day, the students were placed in groups assigned by the teacher and the first activity was based on Sinharaja forest. On third day the activity was based on lesson Grasslands. Fourth and fifth days students were taken extended time to do the activities since it was new to them. Therefore, two days were allocated for Cooperation cards activity since the teacher has given students to prepare fifteen minutes and students have to come up with the solutions. And afterwards the students have taken some time for their 10 minutes presentation. Therefore, one day was not enough for this activity. During the last two days that is 6th and 7th day of the project, interviews were conducted to obtain some information from the students and after completion of the project students were asked to complete a post-project survey respectively.

IX. FINDINGS

During this study previous day’s problems were discussed with the students at the beginning of each day. Then a short introduction was given to the students about the new activity. The majority of the class time was used for cooperative group work. Three activities were based on text book and students worked together on a specific set of questions from the textbook (Sinharaja Forest, Grasslands of Sri Lanka, Sigiriya or Lion Rock). Students had freedom to work in the groups and answer the questions. Generally, this type of atmosphere worked well when all students experienced some type of success at the beginning of the activity though the students’ behavior and classroom control should be monitored closely. Many students are involved in several cocurricular activities, which led them to miss the class. This instigated some problems specifically with regards to formation of groups if more than one member of a certain group would happen to be absent the same day. In such situation it was very difficult to do the group projects. Some of the students commented that during the interviews that it was helpful when their group members would help them when they were absent. On the other hand, this made it easier for the teacher researcher to see the progress of cooperative learning because the students were able to help one another.

First research question was how will students’ attitudes toward Social studies change after cooperatively learning and working in small groups? Attitude can play a very important role for the success of many students. If a student believes that he or she can be successful, then many times he or she will be successful. After this study, the teacher researcher claimed that there was a slight increase in attitude toward Social Studies after group work. The students adored working with one another on answering and explaining problems. The category of group formation was varied among the students. Some students liked the teacher formed groups and others like their own groups though mostly students like their own groups better since they can work

with their friends. However, the teacher has to intervene because if the students always wanted to form their own groups then they did not have opportunity work with everyone in the class and on the other hand when always friends working together class can be noisy. Therefore, to control or manage the class teacher intervention is important. All the students agreed that it is important to have group members who are willing to help. The two most common responses to the question on the post-project survey that said, “when working in groups, I wish I could work with a person who is” “clever or positive” and “supportive”. When compared to pre-project survey, post-project survey indicated a slight increase in results since the changes in attitudes occurred. When asked the question, “When I think of Social Studies, I think nervous, calm or both”, 57% (twenty students) choose calm, 14% stated they were nervous and 29% stated they felt both on the pre-project survey (Figure 1). When asked to rate the question “I have more confidence to try problems when I work in a group,” 86% (thirty students) agreed with the statement (Figure 2). It indicates that students are not nervous anymore; especially when they are in groups they feel more confident to do the work. On the other hand, students agreed with the above statement denotes that this leads to achieve the third objective (to develop self-management skills) of the project too because if the student gain more confident they will be able to manage themselves better.

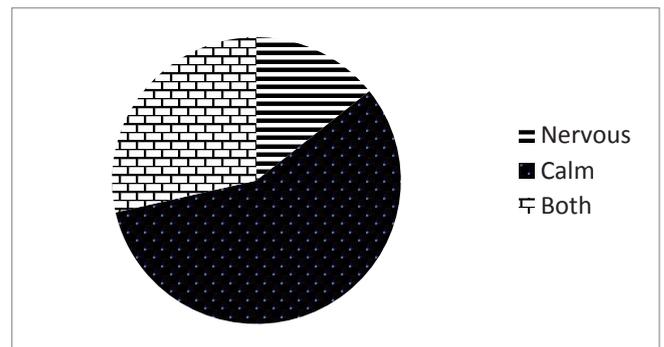


Fig.1 When I think of Social studies

Nervous	Calm	Both
14%(5)	57%(20)	29%(10)

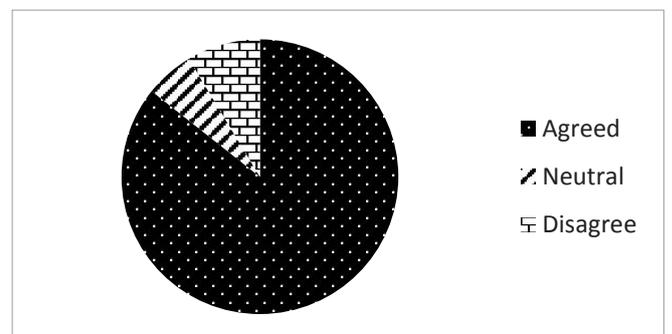


Fig 2. “I have more confidence to try problems when I work in a group.”

Agreed	Neutral	Disagree
86% (30)	6% (2)	8% (3)

Ten students interviewed with the help of another assistant teacher. During the interviews out of ten, seven students mentioned that they noticed changes in other students during group work. For example, previously not very keen students were encouraged due to group work. The students all agreed that they understood better and did not get confused. Six of the ten students interviewed said that they felt that working in groups has prepared them better than working alone. Results from the students' pre-project survey showed that the statement "working alone on assignments" (Figure 3) stated nearly 63% of the students (twenty-two students out of thirty-five) said the best way compared to the post-project survey of 83% of the students (twenty-nine students) agreed and felt that "working in a group helps them to understand the concepts better" (Figure 4). Compared to pre- project questionnaire and post project statements it indicates those students' attitudes towards working in teams have improved rather than working alone.

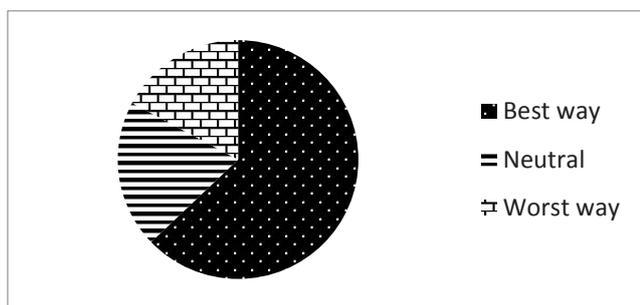


Fig. 3 "Working alone on assignments"

Best way	Neutral	Worst way
63% (22)	20% (7)	17% (6)

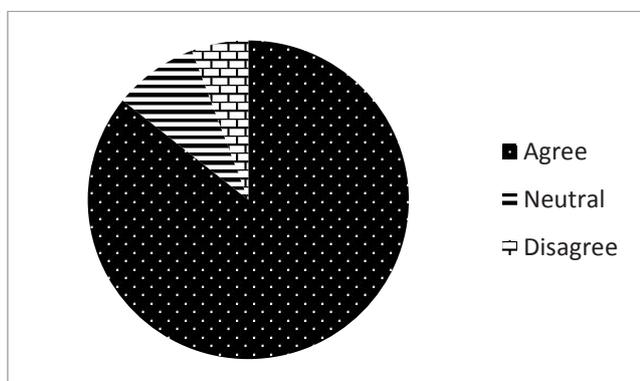


Fig 4. "Working in a group helps them to understand the concepts better".

Agree	Neutral	Disagree
83% (29)	11% (4)	6% (2)

Second research question was how will the students perform better in Social studies when working groups and pairs. As this study progressed, the teacher researcher noticed that students were trying to work with their peers before teacher intervened. The teacher always has been too quick to intervene when she realized that students are struggling rather than allow them some time to process and think about a possible solution. This study permitted teacher researcher to be more of an observer and later understood that when students work together many creative effects can occur. When the students are given sufficient time to discuss with

their peers in general they asked more questions.

Further the teacher researcher noticed that the longer the groups were together, the better the students seemed to be working with one another. Initially some of the students in teacher-formed groups were not very cooperative with their peers. These students were not pleased or relaxed working with the other peers in the group. Later the students gradually realized that each member of their group does have a different or unique ability that could help them to perform better and achieve their goals. When students formed their groups, it appeared to be relaxed and easier for students to work together. The researcher believed that this is because they were in a group with their friends who they usually associate with during other time of the day. The teacher researcher noticed, however, that it was easier for the students to become distracted and sometimes not stay on task since they wanted to socialize while they work. Then again according to the post survey question 71% (25 students) students too have agreed the statement "I thought working in groups too noisy during the class". Therefore, teacher has to supervise and monitor the groups closely.

When this study proceeded to fifth day with the end of third activity the teacher researcher has realized and obtained answer for the third question, that is, did students improve their self-management skills? According to the teacher researcher's observation, when compared to first day the students' self-management skills seems to be increased in a positive manner because they were able to take the responsibility and less noise in the class. With given activities when students' get-together with their groups they were very keen of the project. The instructions should be cleared. Otherwise students can be restless. Students were more confident as well as in group that leads for their self-management. For instance, post survey question "I have more confidence to try problems when I work in a group" 86% students agreed with the statement. Further the 74% students (26 students) agreed with the statement "When I work in small group, ideas and opinions are treated with respect". These responses were the evidence that showed students' self-management skills have improved. They learnt to respect their peers and learnt to manage themselves for good effects.

X. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicated that an improvement in students' attitudes towards group work in Social studies, activity based learning, socialization and communication similar to Gillies and Boyle (2009) and Walmsley and Muniz (2003). These studies also found an increase in students' attitudes after working in cooperative learning groups. Gillies and Boyle (2009) suggested well documented pedagogical approach to teaching in classrooms promotes academic achievement and socialization. The teacher researcher experienced with the cooperative learning in the classroom convinced that this learning can have a positive effect on students' achievement and attitudes towards Social studies. When students working together classrooms can be noisy therefore to manage the classroom teacher intervention is vital. Further Gillies and Boyle (2009) supported the researcher's view suggested that during the group activities students socializing and not doing group activities.

However, as a whole, benefits of the cooperative learning exceed since the group work is more productive and this finally leads to positive attitudes towards subject related activities (Social studies in this study) and its achievement, improving team work, self-management skills, interpersonal skills and communication.

XI. REFERENCES

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