Cooperative classrooms lead to better friendships, higher achievement in young adolescents

March 27 2008

Students competing for resources in the classroom while discounting each others' success are less likely to earn top grades than students who work together toward goals and share their success, according to an analysis of 80 years of research.

Competitive environments can disrupt children's ability to form social relationships, which in turn may hurt their academic potential, according to researchers at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Cary J. Roseth, PhD, David W. Johnson, PhD, and Roger T. Johnson, PhD, reviewed the last eight decades of research on how social relationships affect individual behavior and achievement. Their findings are published in the current issue of *Psychological Bulletin*, published by the American Psychological Association.

The researchers examined 148 studies that compared the effects of cooperative, competitive and individualistic goals on early achievement and peer relationships among 12- to 15-year-olds. The studies included more than 17,000 adolescents from 11 countries and used four multinational samples. No one was excluded from the analysis because of gender, nationality, or academic or physical ability.

According to the studies, adolescents in classrooms that supported cooperative learning – studying together to complete a project or prepare for an exam – got along better with their peers, were more accurate on

academic tests and achieved higher scores on problem-solving, reasoning and critical thinking tasks compared to adolescents who were in classrooms geared toward competitive learning – studying alone knowing that success would mean only one winner and plenty of losers.

Cooperative learning encouraged students to work together toward a goal by helping each other on tasks, sharing resources and information and trusting each others' actions. This led to shared rewards.

Students in classrooms that supported individual learning studied alone or with very little interaction and were evaluated by a set of criteria that didn't involve any comparison with others. Such an atmosphere did not affect friendships but the students had poorer academic outcomes than students in classrooms where teamwork was the norm.

Students who were in classrooms that focused on reaching goals in a competitive fashion, such as obstructing others' efforts, hiding resources and information and acting distrustful, had less social interaction, poorer friendships and lower achievement scores, according to the review. No differences were found between students who were in either competitive or individualistic environments on achievement measures or peer relationships.

The findings suggest that when teachers structured their classrooms more cooperatively, students felt more support and connection with their peers, had better success on academic tests and tasks, and sustained higher levels of achievement because of the better peer relations, said Roseth, the lead author.

"We know how crucial it is to keep young adolescents engaged in school and see this as an important finding for middle school educators," said Roseth. "When teachers set up their classrooms in a cooperative way, both social and academic goals are met simultaneously. Students can

interact, which is naturally what they want to do at this age, while also working on assignments together."

This may also hold true for the adult worker whose organization supports cooperative interactions, Roseth said. "Some research has shown that high performing teams that cared about each other or had individuals who felt they had a good friend among them in business and industry succeeded in being more productive and effective."

Source: American Psychological Association

Citation: Cooperative classrooms lead to better friendships, higher achievement in young adolescents (2008, March 27) retrieved 24 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-03-cooperative-classrooms-friendships-higher-young.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.