

The role of communication in co-operative learning



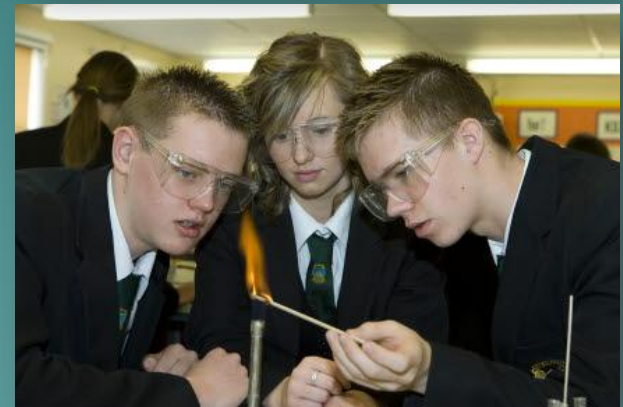
Key issue addressed by the study

- ◆ This study explored:
 - the impact of enhancing teachers' communication skills on pupils' co-operative learning
 - the effects of co-operative learning on pupils' socialisation and learning



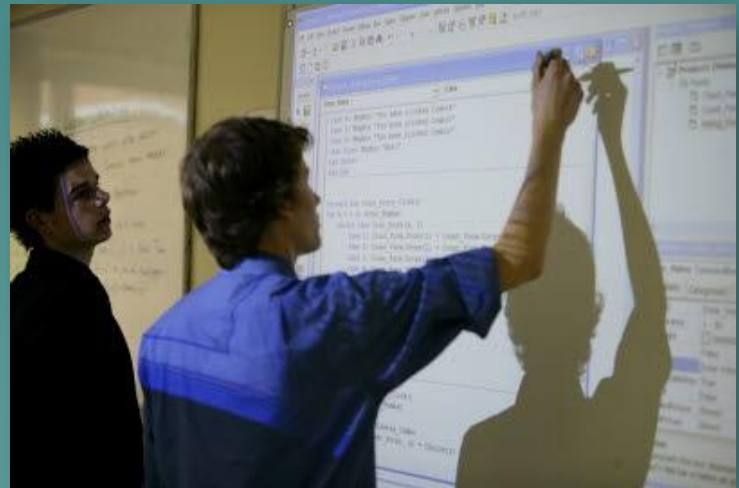
What co-operative learning involves

- ◆ In co-operative learning, pupils:
 - work together in small groups
 - contribute to group discussion
 - challenge each others' reasons and understandings
 - accept responsibility for group decisions



The benefits of co-operative learning for pupils

- ◆ Previous research has shown that benefits for pupils include:
 - academic gains
 - enhanced self-esteem
 - positive social relationships
 - increased motivation to learn
 - use of more sophisticated talk



The benefits of training teachers in communication skills to use with pupils

- ◆ The trained teachers:
 - scaffolded pupils' learning and asked questions nearly twice as frequently as the teachers who hadn't had training
 - were four times less likely to have to discipline their pupils



What the teachers' scaffolding involved

- ◆ Teachers enabled pupils to learn skills and develop understanding beyond what they could achieve alone through:
 - modelling skills
 - demonstrating patterns of thinking and reasoning
 - creating activities that helped pupils use their growing understandings and problem-solving skills

The communication skills the teachers were trained to use

- ◆ Techniques included:
 - probing to expand pupils' thinking
 - e.g. *Why do you think ...?*
 - reflecting meaning
 - e.g. *It sounds as though...?*
 - offering suggestions
 - e.g. *Have you thought about...?*
 - challenging pupils' thinking
 - e.g. *How will you ...?*



Example teacher-pupil dialogue

- ◆ **Teacher:** *So what have you decided the problem is?*
- ◆ **Student 1:** *People riding their bikes in the shopping centre*
- ◆ **Teacher:** *And what is the solution you've got?*
- ◆ **Student 2:** *Ask the police to patrol the shopping centre ... ask the centre management if it's all right to ask the police*
- ◆ **Teacher:** *Why do you think they might not want the police outside the shopping centre?*



Who were the children in the study?

- ◆ 826 children from Year 5-7 (10-12 years old) and 30 teachers
- ◆ 11 primary schools in Brisbane, Australia.



How was the information gathered?

- ◆ All teachers received training in co-operative learning
- ◆ They were split into two groups – one received training in the communication skills, the other did not
- ◆ Teachers were audio-taped
- ◆ Their verbal behaviours were coded as questions, encouragement, discipline and instruction etc

How can teachers use the evidence in this study?

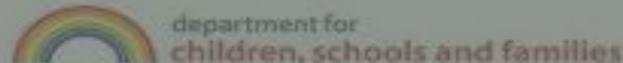
- ◆ The study provided examples of the specific communication skills teachers used to promote dialogue in this model of cooperative learning.
- ◆ *Could you work with a colleague to observe the extent to which you currently probe, reflect, offer suggestions and challenge pupils' thinking? You might want to video a short section of a lesson and analyse it together.*
- ◆ *Could you expand the talk strategies you use with your pupils to enhance talk that is probing, reflecting, meaningful and challenging?*

How can school leaders use the evidence in this study?

- ◆ To what extent is co-operative learning of this kind used by teachers in your school?
- ◆ *Would your colleagues benefit from CPD designed to introduce them to the use of specific communication skills in co-operative learning?*
- ◆ *Could you support teachers in collaborating to experiment with using and adapting the strategies used in this study?*

Follow-up reading

- ◆ Study reference: Gillies, R.M. & Boyle, M. (2005) *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 33(3), pp.243-259
- ◆ Summary available at:
<http://www.gtce.org.uk/tla/rft/achieve1106/achieve1106cs/casestudy4/>



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