

USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING EFFECTIVELY WITH MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Cooperative learning can be a very effective learning tool in physical education (as well as most other content areas). As teachers, we utilize it to enhance student leadership, interpersonal skills, and to improve student ability to work with others to accomplish a goal. Of further interest may be students' own perceptions of cooperative learning. What do they feel as they participate in activities that are outside the traditional lecture/discussion/participation format?

To address this question, a survey was given to 104 middle school students to determine their attitudes toward cooperative learning. Students participated in an instructional sequence of cooperatives over a period of five weeks (once lesson per week), then completed a short questionnaire. Students were asked to indicate specific reasons as to why they liked or disliked cooperative learning activities.

Results indicated that a majority of students (68%) liked cooperative activities, 21% enjoyed at least some of the learning activities, and 11% disliked working in cooperative learning groups. Student comments were separated into 4 general categories of responses (fun, working together to get a task done, keeping in shape, different or new content), but there were also interesting gender differences. For examples, girls indicated "working together" as a positive aspect to a greater extent than boys and boys reported on a "competitive" aspect that was not mentioned at all by girls. In disliking cooperative learning activities, they were strong gender differences. Boys disliked cooperatives because they were "stupid" or not sport – related. Girls, however, disliked cooperatives due to a discomfort or dislike of the social aspect or the touching of other people required in some of the cooperative activities.

These results indicate there may be guidelines to consider when using cooperative learning. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the strategies teachers can use to ensure that cooperative activities are effectively utilized, and are beneficial to both boys and girls.

