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Cooperative Learning: An Instructional Strategy that Benefits Historically Underserved Students

Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy that provides benefits for historically underserved (HU) students.

HU students have cultural tendencies that can present challenges in schools which cooperative learning activities can offset. Parents of HU students facilitate learning structures for their children that pose a contradiction to lecture style learning structures. Delgado-Gaitan (1987) reported that Mexican American parents allow children to decide how to carry out a task. Blacks are accustomed to sharing information on an equal basis with adults rather than the adult teaching them which results in Black students having difficulty accepting teachers as the primary source of knowledge (Gay & Abrahams, 1972).

Cooperative learning provides students the opportunity to decide how to carry out a task as well sharing information on an equal basis with classmates and the teacher. Cooperative learning requirements parallel the cultural learning strategies used by HU students. In school, HU students become passive informational recipients while in their culture they are involved in a learning experience that is give and take, and in one situation, they may be the learner and in another situation, they are the teacher (Gay & Abrahams, 1972). During a successful cooperative learning activity students are

required to receive as well as deliver knowledge to their classmates.

Interaction is a prerequisite for cooperative learning which provide benefits for HU students. Hispanics value people and relationships over task accomplishment (Morales-Jones, 1998) and Blacks prefer to work in groups (Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997) and socially interactive environments (Cureton, 1978; Slavin, 1983). Black students do well when the teacher incorporates a socialization learning model (Morgan, 1981) and “will work together to benefit the group” (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p. 134). Black students work and function better in cooperative, informal, and loosely structured environments where teachers and students work together to achieve a common goal (Gilbert & Gay, 1985). Cooperative learning provides students with a learning model that has an interaction focus which benefits HU students.

In conclusion, cooperative learning activities provide HU students with a learning process that is similar to their cultural learning process. When teachers use learning processes that are compatible to children’s culture, the result in increased student achievement and decreased student disciplinary infractions. When using cooperative learning activities remember to:

- Develop a rubric that is consistent with the

expectations for completion of the activity.

- Make sure students know what their individual roles are
- Monitor each group to ensure that students remain on-task
- Celebrate the completion of the activity with all students

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