A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

REGARDING COOPERATIVE LEARNING TRAINING AND COOPERATIVE

LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM

by

Susan Rubino Robinson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Susan Robinson. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EXPERIENCED TEACHER PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COOPERATIVE LEARNING TRAINING AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM. (under the direction of Dr. Jeff Savage) School of Education, Liberty University, September 2012.

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to explore the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and its implementation in the classroom. Twelve total participants, nine teachers and three administrators, volunteered for this six-week study at a private, K3 – 12 school in Broward County, Florida. The study's purpose was guided by the following questions: (1) What do experienced teachers perceive about cooperative learning training as it relates to their classroom teaching? (2) What do experienced teachers perceive regarding cooperative learning use as it relates to their classroom teaching? (3) What are the impacts of cooperative learning training and implementation on experienced teachers? (4) What challenges do experienced teachers face when implementing cooperative learning structures in their classrooms? The participants in this study took part in multiple cooperative learning training sessions and were then observed for six weeks using the strategies taught during training. Following the observation period, I interviewed the participants to document their perceptions about cooperative learning training and its use in their classrooms. Data analysis revealed that study participants perceived the training sessions and actual implementation of cooperative learning to be overall positive experiences. They also revealed that challenges existed with implementing cooperative learning. These implications are explored and further recommendations for administrators and school systems are discussed along with suggestions for further investigation.

Descriptors: Teacher Perceptions, Cooperative Learning, Instructional Strategies, Teacher Efficacy, Differentiated Instruction, Phenomenology

DEDICATION

It is with deep love and gratitude that I dedicate this dissertation to my extremely gifted, beautiful, and talented daughter, Kyrie, who has provided me with more love, support, patience, encouragement, advice, and kindness than I could have ever known possible. There were many, many times that I would have given up on this journey had it not been for your belief in me and your strong counsel and support. I owe this all to you my precious daughter.

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In addition to my committee, I would like to thank the late Dr. Jill Jones for sparking my curiosity concerning qualitative research. Had it not been for her passion and expertise on the subject, I am not sure I would have chosen this direction. She will always be remembered for the outstanding educator she was.

Along the way, there were several others who I would like to thank for their love, counsel, guidance, and support through this process: Dr. Dan Burrell, Pastor Danne King, Pastor Brian Burkholder, Pastor Jose Santiago, John Reininger, Haydee Fuentes, Gloria Ortiz, Silvia Alvarado, the wonderful faculty and staff of Hollywood Christian School, and my many Liberty University professors.

Finally, I would like to thank the late Dr. Jerry Falwell Sr., who in 1982 began training a young champion for Christ. I wish I had the opportunity to walk across that stage and shake your hand one more time.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Cooperative learning continues to be one of the most researched topics in elementary and secondary education (Chin-Min, 2012; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Slavin, 2009). In fact, Johnson and Johnson (2009) remind their readers that more than 1,200 studies have been conducted highlighting cooperative learning's effectiveness as an instructional technique in a variety of elementary and secondary subject areas, with different students, and across various cultures (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002; Gillies & Boyle, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Law, 2011; Magnesio & Davis, 2010; Slavin, 2009). Even though some individual research studies have revealed contradictory evidence about the gains to be achieved with cooperative learning, and although no teaching technique is a panacea (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002), the overall weight of research evidence with cooperative learning as a best practice in teaching and learning is undeniable. In fact, "the success of cooperative learning is unusual. Many instructional practices have been recommended during the past 60 years" with the vast majority of them never being adopted or being dropped over time as fads (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 365). Cooperative learning, though, has been widely adopted as "one of the dominant instructional practices through the world" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 365), to include in higher education classrooms and in professional training seminars. However, as Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) point out, a gap often exists between what researchers know and what practitioners do, especially what practitioners feel comfortable doing or what they do well based on research evidence. Nowhere does this appear to be more clearly demonstrated than with cooperative learning (Sharan, 2010). Although it enjoys near paradigmatic status in education methods textbooks and although it has a strong empirical foundation (Slavin, 2009), cooperative learning nonetheless continues to be misused and

under-utilized by teachers (Sharan, 2010; Thanh, 2011). As Sharan (2010) explained,

"translating the promise of CL [cooperative learning] into practice is more complicated

than believed at first and does not always guarantee that its desired goals are achieved"

(p. 300). Slavin (2009) has also highlighted the pitfalls and dangers of using cooperative

learning without fully understanding its requirements as a teaching technique. He has

been a strong advocate of training teachers in the proper fundamentals of cooperative

learning (highlighting the importance of roles, goals, and accountability) and of

distinguishing cooperative learning from group work. Moreover, as Sharan (2010) and

others (Igel & Urquhart, 2012; Emmer & Gerwels; Thanh, 2011) have pointed out,

considerable variation exists in the success of cooperative learning depending on, among

other things, cultural and institutional impediments, training and professional

development, and teacher perceptions. For teachers and other educational professionals,

then, the question has become not whether cooperative learning works but instead why do

teachers continue to eschew its use, and how can it be implemented in ways that produce

desirable and intended results (Sharan, 2010; Slavin, 2009)? To answer these questions,

the current phenomenological qualitative case study investigated experienced teachers'

perceptions of cooperative learning training and the implementation of cooperative

learning instructional strategies in their own classrooms.

Background and Significance

Achievement test scores have traditionally been used to evaluate the quality of

teaching and learning in the K-12 classroom (Slavin, 2009). Making sure students

receive the best education possible is purported to be why educational professionals,

policy makers, parents, and many others are interested in how students perform

academically, and test scores serve as a proxy measure for this success (Hanushek, 2005).

To achieve the goal of academic success in the classroom, various instructional methods and strategies have been promoted as effective in the educational process. One such method is cooperative learning. Teachers have used cooperative learning instructional strategies in classrooms throughout the United States as they incorporate practices involving groups of students in collaborative work. Cooperative learning's usefulness in the classroom to achieve meaningful educational outcomes is well established (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Slavin, 1980; Slavin, 2006). The research indicates that cooperative learning is an effective instructional strategy supported by a wealth of empirical studies highlighting its effectiveness (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000).

What has not been widely studied, however, is the gap between research and practice: why cooperative learning is not used more often in the classroom (Kagan, 1999, 2009; Randall, 1999), given its elevated status and strong research support. Kagan (1999) suggests that "issues dealing with difficult clients, the student who refuses to work with others, the rejected student, the hostile student, and the shy student all affect the process" (Seventeen Cons section, para. 1). These issues, as well as teacher reluctance toward trying a new teaching method which some consider an "educational fad" (Randall, 1999, p. 29), may deter some from exploring the educational benefits of its use in their own classrooms.

The environment created by "high stakes testing" is another reason given for the mismatch between cooperative learning's demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom and how often it is used (NCLB, 2004). To address student learning, accountability within a school is measured and reported within districts. In the public school system, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provides for such accountability with its comprehensive

proposals to improve schools in the United States. This federal education law proposes to close the achievement gap and has high aims to provide for 100% student proficiency by 2014 as indicated through various testing (NCLB, 2004). Researchers and practitioners within education indicate that great pressure has been put on schools in the United States to perform and receive high marks on these standardized tests (Guilfoyle, 2006; Slavin, 2006). In most accredited private and charter schools, testing is also a priority with yearly standardized test scores, which must be submitted to accrediting boards. The measurement of these scores is published locally and nationally for further accountability. Because of the accountability demands, these tests carry consequences for the schools and districts that do not meet standards. Schools that fail to show proficiency face significant and wide ranging consequences. For example, if a public school is considered deficient with poor test scores for five consecutive years, the school risks being restructured or being taken over by the state (Guilfoyle, 2006). In the private and charter school system, a school risks losing accreditation status and possibly their private funding.

Money further complicates the aforementioned testing environment. Faculty, staff, and administration in school systems within the state of Florida, for example, are compensated yearly based on FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) scores. This reward system is designed to promote pedagogical excellence. Bonus systems reward schools for increasing the number of children meeting standards on the state curriculum test as well as the number of children exceeding the standard. These bonus systems are based on test scores in all subjects and attendance and enrollment in more difficult high school courses (Ghezzi, 2006). Because of this monetary value connected with the test, along with proposed merit pay, pressure within the teaching community is

exacerbated (Ghezzi, 2006).

   With the strong pressure to achieve and produce passing scores, many schools are faced with a difficult dilemma of what some in education call "teaching to the test" (Bond, 2008; Jerald, 2006; Popham, 2001). Many public as well as private and charter schools are yielding to the institutional pressures presented:

   Teaching to the test is as unavoidable as a force of nature, as inevitable as gravity. And the choice between good instructional practice and good test scores is really no choice at all, since those who opt not to bow to the pressure will reap harsh consequences under tough accountability systems. (Jerald, 2006, p. 1)

The environment created by No Child Left Behind and high stakes testing are cited as influential factors in teachers' decisions in what teaching methods and strategies they use in the classroom. According to Guilfoyle (2006), "Under NCLB, teachers feel great pressure to focus their energies solely on preparing students to excel on standardized tests" (p. 9). This is also supported by Castleberry (2007) and Firestone, Monfils, and Schorr (2004).

   Even though cooperative learning is widely viewed as an effective method of teaching and has a solid empirical foundation, teachers may not use it as frequently because of the challenges faced. Kagan (2009) has described some of the issues such as time consumption, lesson preparation, noise levels in the classroom, individual grading, student absenteeism, difficult students, and gifted and special education student needs. These factors, along with the release of the teacher's control of the classroom (McManus, 2002), may cause unwanted stress on the part of the teacher. This stress may also present itself as teachers feel unsure of exactly how to implement specific cooperative learning

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structures (Walters, 2000).

Educators understand and accept the necessity of meeting standards or showing the value of education. In their proper perspectives, testing and accountability are a necessary measurement for public, charter, and private school systems. These benchmarks provide evaluation data for all involved in the educational process (Slavin, 2006) and point to the well supported claim that effective instruction is related to student achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Lessons with clear goals and objectives delivered in a productive way direct the student to an instructional target:

> In defiance of what every educator has learned, there is a glaring absence of the most basic elements of an effective lesson: an essential, clearly defined learning objective followed by careful modeling or a clear sequence of steps, punctuated by efforts during the lesson to see how well students are paying attention or learning the material. This accounts for an alarming gap between what we know and what we do. (Schmoker, 2006, p. 16)

This successful relationship between instructional strategy and clear objectives is evaluated by achievement testing. The repeated clarification that students are engaged in the learning process ensures that the goals and objectives are met.

Placing emphasis on instruction in the school environment can both improve learning and increase test scores. As Castleberry explains (2007), "True instruction begins with matching student learning needs and styles with the outcomes of standards-based instruction" (p. 19). Odden and Wallace's (2003) work in this area has led them to believe that "Improved classroom instruction is the prime factor to produce student achievement gains" (p. 64). Using an assortment of instructional methods and strategies within the classroom has long been recognized as a best practice for helping students

achieve the necessary objectives. In the post NCLB era, using a variety of instructional

strategies remains one of the most widely accepted ways to help achieve adequate yearly

progress under NCLB (Haystead & Marzano, 2009).

In fact, some educational professionals describe the high stakes testing issue as

one of curriculum alignment and boldly claim that teachers should teach to the test

(Gardner, 2008). According to Gardner, if tests are aligned with educational objectives,

and teachers create activities based on those objectives, then teaching to the test is exactly

what teachers should do. For those, like Gardner, who conceive of the issue as one of

curriculum alignment, "Teaching to the test means teaching the body of skills and

knowledge represented by the test, not teaching the exact test items" (as cited in Gall,

Gall, & Borg, 2010, p. 28).

Regardless of the philosophical differences in teaching to the test versus

curriculum assignment, improving quality instruction in the classroom requires engaged

teachers who feel empowered in the classroom and teacher training in various

pedagogical methods (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Quality in-service

programs that train teachers in current instructional strategies and administrative

accountability play a vital role in the instructional effectiveness of a school (Slavin,

2006). Providing learning opportunities for teachers to explore new instructional

strategies allows for experimentation in multiple formats for lessons. These lessons in

turn may be evaluated for student engagement and improved test scores (Marzano, 2007;

Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Schmoker, 2006).

Allowing teacher feedback following in-service instructional sessions also gives

a voice to the teacher in the classroom. In-service and pre-service instruction is often

geared toward what administrators deem necessary for effective pedagogy. Gullickson

(1986) notes, "Both what is taught in these training sessions and what is needed by the teachers are vital if training is to fit the needs of the teacher" (p. 348). Providing opportunities for teachers to give feedback following in-service allows them to connect what is taught to what is actually learned. Times of reflection and evaluation also offer teachers a time to talk, share, and reflect on what was shared in the trainings and may provoke further insight and evaluation.

With emphasis placed on effective instructional strategies, the role of the teacher is of critical importance. In a study conducted at Minot State University in North, Dakota, Burke, Ellis, Lomire and McCormack (2003) found significant positive correlations between the average rating for instructional quality and the grades received by students. The courses in which the average grades were the highest were also those in which teachers received the highest ratings. Although this does not mean that instructional quality caused the higher grades, the findings do highlight the importance of instructional quality in student engagement and the importance of student and teacher relations.

In the renowned education report by Coleman conducted in 1966 and cited by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001), findings showed that "an individual teacher can have a powerful effect on her student even if the school doesn't" (p. 2). This coincides with the concept that Quaglia, Fox, and Corso (2010) proposed: "Our survey results imply that building relationships with students helps increase their effort, which is consistent with research showing that the relationships students have with teachers is one of the best predictors of hard work and engagement in school" (p. 2). In short, the teacher-student relationship is a strong factor in student achievement.

This relationship factor between a teacher and his or her students may also relate

to how a teacher feels or a teacher's self efficacy. According to Dellinger, Bobbett, Oliver and Ellett (2008) "The construct of teacher efficacy has been around for more than a quarter century . . ." (p. 763). This belief that a teacher has about their abilities in the classroom is part of how the teacher evaluates themselves. Judge and Bono (2001) relate this self efficacy as "one's estimate of one's fundamental ability to cope, perform, and be successful . . ." (p. 80).

As a feeling or belief of empowerment of the teacher in the classroom may lead to improvement of scores, teacher efficacy also relates to instruction and improvement in the educational process. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) define teacher efficacy as "teachers' beliefs about their capability to impact students' motivation and achievement" (p. 2). Therefore, what the teacher believes and the attitude of the teacher may affect the instructional process as well. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) believe that as test scores hold teachers accountable for educational endeavors, a teacher's self efficacy beliefs hold key elements to this connection. Therefore, the attitudes and beliefs of the classroom teacher were taken into consideration for this study.

<div align="center">**Problem Statement and Purpose**</div>

The relationship building necessary for strong student achievement indicates that effective teachers do more than just impart content knowledge to their students; they also teach students how to learn in a socially interdependent environment – the classroom. The success of cooperative learning in influencing increased student achievement has its roots in the social interdependence theories used to frame this dissertation: Bandura's social learning theory (1986), Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978), and the more recent teacher efficacy theory (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). The

research is clear, however, that cooperative learning's success depends in large part on proper implementation; done incorrectly, cooperative learning can result in static student achievement, chaotic classroom behavior, and teacher and student frustration (Sharan, 2010; Thanh, 2011). The problem investigated in this study was informed by the following guiding concern: If cooperative learning is such a successful teaching strategy, what barriers do teachers encounter that may prevent them from implementing it in the classroom? The primary purpose of this study, consequently, was to use phenomenological research to "construct a rich meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 135) with respect to experienced teachers' perceptions concerning cooperative learning (and the training they received), their possible successful experiences, challenges, and frustrations in implementing cooperative learning, and the specific techniques used to implement this teaching method in the classroom. Studying teachers in their natural environment while seeking to understand their perspectives on training and use of a "new" instructional strategy were the objectives of this study.

Research Questions

This research study was guided by the following questions:

1. What do experienced teachers perceive about cooperative learning training as it relates to their classroom teaching?

2. What do experienced teachers perceive regarding cooperative learning use as it relates to their classroom teaching?

3. What are the impacts of cooperative learning training and implementation on experienced teachers?

4. What challenges do experienced teachers face when implementing

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cooperative learning structures in their classrooms?

Research Plan

The research involved a qualitative phenomenological design that employed a purposeful sample of experienced teachers. The research was conducted in an established, accredited educational setting and involved normal educational practices which fell under the exempted category of research in relation to The American Educational Research Association's guidelines. Data were collected via interviews and observations. All documents and research data were kept in a locked storage drawer and on my computer with a secure password. The committee members and I were the only persons who had access to the raw data during the study.

Limitations

The main limitation to this study was that, as the researcher, I serve as Head of School at the site where the study was conducted. Because of my status and leadership position, the potential existed for the participants to respond in a socially accepted manner that they felt was expected of them in a work environment. However, participation in the study was voluntary, and the nature of the research did not impact the employment or relationship between the faculty members in the study and me. Before the study began, informational meetings were held to discuss the study and answer any questions that the participants had. Documents were provided to ensure participants that their jobs were not at any risk due to their possible participation or non-participation in the study. Confidentiality and storage of all information was also clearly discussed. Moreover, the longstanding professional relationship I have developed with the study participants has established a level of trust that minimizes any risk of abuse of power or lack of authentic participation by the participants. Another limitation to this study, as

with all qualitative research, is generalizability. Individual readers should take caution in generalizing the results of this phenomenological inquiry; they will have to determine if the results of this study apply to their professional situations. However, qualitative research generates important insights into complex, multifaceted problems, so this study may also lead to further research and a call for stronger instructional methods within the classroom and further teacher training to improve teacher efficacy and engagement of both student and teacher.

Definition of Key Terms

Cooperative learning, according to Slavin (1980) "refers to classroom techniques in which students work on learning activities in small groups and receive rewards or recognition based on their group's performance" (p. 315). Simply stated by Johnson and Johnson (1999), "Cooperative learning exists when students work together to accomplish shared learning goals" (p. 1).

Teacher Efficacy is a construct (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) which "is concerned with judgments about how well one can organize and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stressful elements" (Bandura & Schunk, 1981, p. 587).

Instructional strategies may be defined as "methods that are used in the lesson to ensure that the sequence of delivery of instruction helps students learn" (Teaching Resources for Florida ESE, 2000, p. 1).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). The law works in

conjunction with the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (ESEA) and is "built on four common sense pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 1).

Assessment "is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes" (Popham, 2008, p. 5).

Experienced teacher, for the purpose of this study, is defined as a teacher who has taught in a school setting for five or more years. The three administrators also met the year qualification of experience in the classroom before becoming an administrator. At present, there is no universally recognized definition for experienced teachers.

Summary

No one instructional strategy can guarantee effectiveness in every classroom situation. However, where research has identified effective practices, most professionals agree that educators should apply those practices and assess their effectiveness on student learning in their classrooms. Although cooperative learning has strong empirical support as a successful teaching technique, research has indicated that teachers still struggle to implement it effectively in the classroom and may resist its use as a way to improve their professional practice. Exploring these phenomena from the teachers' point of view was the overall objective of this study.

In the following chapter, a thorough review of the literature is explicated along with the theoretical framework, followed by a methodology chapter which includes the questions addressed by this study. Next, a chapter of the findings from the study will be presented and its subsequent discussion of the findings, to include implications and

conclusions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two will explore the theoretical framework and include two main theories prevalent throughout the research. The first and most prominent theory is known as social learning theory, and the second is socio-cultural theory. Also explored in this chapter will be the review of literature regarding teacher efficacy, cooperative learning, teacher in-services, and experienced teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

The main conceptual theory that is woven throughout the research in cooperative learning is Bandura's (1986) social learning theory. The social learning theory, which closely resembles the social cognitive theory, and sometimes now referred to as social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), was developed by Albert Bandura in his studies on adolescent aggression. Bandura was significantly influenced by the behavioral learning theories at the time, and many of his studies involved observational learning (as cited in Ormond, 1999). This is where Bandura termed the popular concept of "reciprocal determinism". Reciprocal determinism indicates that "a person's behavior can be conditioned by the environment through operant conditioning, but a person's behavior can also have an impact on the environment" (Salkind & Rasmussen, 2008, p. 842).

Social learning focuses on the premise that individuals learn by observing others. These observations may be real, as presented on the news, or created as presented through television, movies, and other media sources (Bandura, 1986). These influences that are modeled to the individual have an impact on that individual's personality and may cause changes in thought and behavior. Either way, the individual's learning is

altered based on the observational modeling (Slavin, 2006). The general principles of social learning are that "(a) People can learn by observing the behavior of others and the outcomes of those behaviors; (b) learning can occur without a change in behavior; and (c) cognition plays a role in learning" (Ormrod, 1999, p. 1).

Another important concept within the tradition of social learning is modeling (Bandura, 1986). People and the environment reinforce modeling. Individuals pay attention to the model, they retain the information, they replicate the behavior, and they are motivated toward change, much like in the case of a "physical education teacher demonstrating jumping jacks, and students imitate" (Slavin, 2006, p.154). This makes modeling a very powerful tool in social learning theory.

Sociocultural Theory

The second theory commonly used as a conceptual lens through which to explain cooperative learning is the sociocultural theory developed by L. S. Vygotsky (1978) in his observations of children. Vygotsky strove to "understand how human's social and mental activity is organized through culturally constructive artifacts" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 1). In developing the framework for his theory, Vygotsky (1978) focused on a higher set of mental abilities and proposed four genetic domains within these higher functions: *phylogenetic* domain, *sociocultural* domain, the *ontogenetic* domain, and the *microgenetic* domain (Lantolf, 2000, p. 3). As it relates to cooperative learning, the sociocultural learning theory focuses on the ontogenetic domain since this involves the exploration of memory and thinking (Lantolf, 2000, p. 3).

Vygotsky (1978) focused on self-talk and language as well. He coined the term 'scaffolding' to illustrate learning in a step-by-step process and the term 'reciprocal teaching,' which allows for teaching and learning to take place between students and

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teachers. In reciprocal learning, all members benefit from the experience. This mutual

benefit has been cited as one of the main reasons why sociocultural theory is viewed as a

conceptual framework for cooperative learning as students work in groups, learning from

each other in a reciprocal way (Lantolf, 2000).

Another major concept of Vygotsky (1978) was the zone of proximal

development. He developed this term in such a way that it has come to mean the ability

to learn and achieve when acting completely alone versus what can be accomplished

when acting with support from someone else and or cultural artifacts (Lantolf, 2000, p.

17).

In the sociocultural theory, individuals' interactions with each other and their

environment do contribute to the learning process (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaborative

learning in the social environment can be an exciting process because individuals

collaborate on instructional material to develop optimum learning. In addressing the

zone of proximal development, the scaffolding process in which students learn on their

own and with the help of others is paramount to cooperative learning (Slavin, 2006).

This peer related learning allows for cultural collaboration through differentiated means.

Students become engaged in tasks at a greater level when working together and the

combined outcome can be a socially beneficial experience for all. "Because peers are

usually operating within each others' zones of proximal development, they provide

models for each other of slightly more advanced thinking" (Slavin, 2006, p. 45).

Related Literature

Effective Instruction

An important component in instruction and student learning is ensuring that

teachers focus on processes and procedures that facilitate effective learning from

varied instructional strategies (Lowman, 1995; Schunk, 2004; Slavin, 2009). This instructional priority in the learning process is to make certain that each learner has maximum opportunity to benefit from high quality experiences (Haystead & Marzano, 2009). These high quality learning experiences promote the potential for greater learning and achievement test scores. These higher achievement test scores may reciprocally promote a stronger sense of teacher efficacy (Evans, 2009).

Research has indicated that achievement test scores are a measurement of accountability and teachers are linked to academic achievement, specifically in relation to teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). This academic achievement is obtained by an assortment of instructional strategies effectively implemented by the teacher. One of the goals of effective instruction would include the use of different strategies in the classroom to help students achieve mastery in the most effective way while maximizing student engagement (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Schmoker, 2006).

The traditional lecture format is one of the most popular instructional methods still used today, and it has been shown to be effective (Slavin, 2009; Yerigan, 2008), especially when several well defined concepts need to be mastered in a short period of time (Gunter, Estes, & Schwab, 2003). Others claim that the lecture is less effective when the goal is for conceptual understanding or "when exploration, discovery, and open-ended objectives are the objects of instruction" (Slavin, 2009, p. 199). Although research has shown this kind of significant conceptual change to be achievable with direct instruction (Klahr & Nigam, 2004), others believe more collaborative, social constructionist teaching methods to be superior (George, 2005; Tomlinson, 2003). One of the most difficult aspects of this kind of comparative superiority with instructional

methods is the difficulty of conducting outcomes differences research. As Cohen and

Brawer (2003) explain: "Information on the effects of instruction is always hard to obtain

because of the number of variables that must be controlled in any study: the entering

abilities of the students, the criterion tests and instructional procedures used, and the level

of the course or learning unit, to name only a few" (p. 189). The difficulties inherent

within research that seeks to discover irrefutable outcomes differences was highlighted

by Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork (2008) in their comprehensive review of the

learning styles empirical literature. Pashler et al. found no empirical support for the

standard of what they called the "meshing hypothesis" (p. 105), which was basically

research designs that employed experimental methodologies (e.g., pre-test, post-test

control group designs) to show that students with a particular style learn better than other

students when a teaching style matched (meshed with) their particular learning style.

Although empirical research using experimental designs to support clear outcomes

differences is notoriously difficult in education, correlation and descriptive research has

been conducted to show support for teaching and learning conducted from a social

constructionist orientation. Farkes (2003), for example, conducted a study in which he

examined the effects of teaching through traditional lecturing methods versus specific

learning-style instructional methods on seventh grade students' achievement. Specific

learning style instructional methods were conceptualized and operationally defined as

instruction which was directed to each of the student's learning styles. The learning style

was accommodated by instructional methods which were implemented on each of the

three learning style levels. Farkes found a positive correlation between the learning-style

method and increased student achievement: "Findings suggested that the average student

whose learning style was accommodated could achieve at the seventy-seventh percentile

of the distribution of the control-group students" (Farkes, 2003, p. 44).

Jerald (2006) notes that one instructional strategy may not serve all students' learning styles. "Thoughtful teachers employ a variety of strategies to ensure that students develop basic skills and can apply those skills to complex tasks grounded in real-world challenges" (p. 4). These multiple instructional strategies allow all learners the opportunity to develop equally within the classroom environment. Teaching to a multicultural classroom population brings instructional challenges. Finding the right instructional strategies that engage the student learner in the process may encourage more effective learning.

Efficacy

Bandura (1982) used the term "efficacy" as part of his social learning theory and defined it as "concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (p. 122). Efficacy and self-efficacy are highlighted throughout his writings on social learning theory (Bandura, 1982). He states that "self-percepts of efficacy influence thought patterns, actions, and emotional arousal. In causal tests the higher the level of induced self-efficacy, the higher the performance accomplishments" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122). Here, the opposite would hold true as well, the lower the sense of self-efficacy, the lower the performance. Bandura believed that "a capability is only as good as its execution" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122).

In every situation a person enters into there is a thought process that goes along with it. How a person believes, as far as his or her confidence level, emotions, judgments, and attitudes about the situation could alter his or her perception of the situation. The mind has an effect on our behavior as well and can modify our effort on certain tasks (Bandura, 1982). "People's judgments of their capabilities additionally

influence their thought patterns and emotional reactions during anticipatory and actual transactions with the environment" (Bandura, 1982, p. 123).

Bandura's (1982) work on self-efficacy proposed that a person's self-efficacy may affect their job performance. The effort put forth on a task as well as persistence levels is also affected by their level of self-efficacy (p.123). Based on Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) meta-analysis of self-efficacy and work-related performance study "self-efficacy was found to be positively and strongly related to work-related performance" (p. 255). Another finding was, "... it appears that task complexity and situational factors present in work environments tend to weaken the relationship between self-efficacy and performance" (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998, p. 255).

Teacher Efficacy

The topic of teacher efficacy was developed after Bandura's work as it related to the field of teacher education (Armor, Conroy-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly & Zellman, 1976; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). "Teacher efficacy has proven to be powerfully related to many meaningful educational outcomes such as teachers' persistence, enthusiasm, commitment and instructional behavior, as well as student outcomes such as achievement, motivation, and self-efficacy beliefs" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001, p. 783). The term efficacy was connected to the art and science of teaching and is currently used to describe how teachers feel in their role as teachers. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy (2001) went on to state "Teachers' efficacy beliefs also relate to their behavior in the classroom. Efficacy affects the effort they invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration" (p. 783).

Gibson and Dembo (1984) summarized the application of Bandura's work with the construct of teacher efficacy in the following way:

Self-efficacy beliefs would indicate teachers' evaluation of their abilities to bring about positive student change . . . Teachers who believe student learning can be influenced by effective teaching, and who also have confidence in their own teaching abilities, should persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations concerning their ability to influence student learning. (p. 570)

If teachers believe they are capable of performing their role as instructors successfully, they will engage more fully in that role and display a high sense of self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001).

More accurately described as a conceptual framework than a theory with strong empirical support, teacher efficacy can also relate as "teachers' beliefs about their capability to impact students' motivation and achievement" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy 2001, p. 784). Efficacy involves a teacher's attitude and beliefs toward working with students and may directly correlate to a teacher's ability to produce the desired result (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001). Producing desired results in today's NCLB climate often means performance on yearly student achievement testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Achievement test score data are one of the many ways that teachers are evaluated and potentially compensated, leading to outside pressures to attain top scores on these benchmark tests (McMunn Dooley, 2005; Odden & Wallace, 2011). A teacher's attitude and beliefs, as they approach their craft, would possibly be affected by these and other related factors.

Due to this high stakes environment, the teacher's relationship with the students

and his or her responsibility in the classroom encompasses many challenges throughout the instructional day. Imparting content knowledge in a dynamic way to varied personalities and learning styles can be a demanding task (Nielsen, 2008). Furthermore, effective instruction may be difficult for a teacher to measure on a daily basis through feedback from students without the use of basic assessments. Engaging students in the learning process requires creative instructional strategies to draw each student in (Liftig, 2008).

Also present might be a reciprocal effect in teaching which relates to the beliefs and feelings that the teacher has about teaching and toward his or her students. This sentiment toward teaching would be classified as teacher efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Empowering teachers so that they may believe their classroom environment is a thriving learning community leads to strong self-efficacy in their profession (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Eury, Hemeric, and Shellman (2010) explain "a rationale for implementing empowerment structures in school operations is to promote greater achievement through granting authority to those who know content and students well – the teachers" (p. 38). This empowerment allows the teacher to feel in command of his or her classroom, leading to a greater sense of self efficacy (Eury, Hemeric, & Shellman, 2010).

Instructional Strategies

In the process of evaluating instructional strategies informed by social learning and sociocultural theory, a popular and widely held pedagogical philosophy is that instructors should incorporate differentiated instruction (George, 2005; Tomlinson, 2003), which according to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, focuses on whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach (2006). "Teachers are finding it

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increasingly difficult to ignore the diversity of learners who populate their classrooms"

(Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, p.1). Culture, race, language, economics, gender,

experience, motivation to achieve, disability, advanced ability, personal interests,

learning preferences, and presence or absence of an adult support system are just some of

the factors that students bring to school with them (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

Differentiated instruction, as an application of social constructionist philosophies of

teaching, offers a framework for addressing learner variance as a critical component of

instructional planning (Huebner, 2010). Its role in the learning process is to make certain

that each learner has maximum opportunity to benefit from high quality experiences.

Although no empirical research using experimental designs exist to support the claims of

outcome differences (Pashler et al., 2008), Tomlinson and others (see George, 2005)

believe that utilizing different approaches as well as many other varied styles of

instruction greatly enhances the learning environment (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

This intuitively attractive approach to teaching has received anecdotal support as well as

support in terms of qualitative case studies and descriptive research (Tomlinson, 2004).

For those who support this philosophical approach to teaching, effective differentiation

instruction may be described as follows:

1. Is proactive rather than reactive. Teachers plan multiple routes for students to
   succeed rather than adapting one-size-fits-all lesson plans when it becomes
   evident the lessons are not working.

2. Uses small, flexible learning groups for instruction. Teachers plan to meet with
   various groupings of students based on a variety of needs throughout the
   learning modalities.

3. Uses a variety of materials that address the learners' needs, including materials at a range of reading levels and material that address various learning modalities.

4. Uses flexible pacing to address learner variance. In these classrooms, teachers do not assume that a good day is one in which every student begins and ends a task at the same time.

5. Is knowledge-centered. Lessons are based on the teacher's clear understanding of what is essential in the study unit, and the teacher helps each student build his or her own maps of understanding and skill encompassing the essentials.

6. Is learner-centered. Teachers systematically study learner traits to understand what each student brings to the task, what each student needs to succeed with the task, and what the student needs to support his or her success. (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 10)

When coupled with a strong teacher-student relationship, several noteworthy instructional strategies create the elusive successful learning environment sought by all educators and researchers. One of these methods is cooperative learning—which has the most robust research support of any teaching method deemed social constructionist in its principles and guidelines (Slavin, 2009).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has been used on the elementary, secondary and graduate levels with positive results. Slavin (1980) states, "The term refers to classroom techniques in which students work on learning activities in small groups and receive rewards or recognition based on their group's performance" (p. 315). Cooperative learning is not to be confused with traditional group work. It has specific components

with outcome goals, and every member of the group plays a unique role in the group. There is no competition within the group, rather a cohesiveness which forms as the group produces work together. This group cohesiveness is just as important in the learning process as the group shares the load of the work and learns to work together as one. In this way they level the playing field because they are operating as one entity. Motivation builds for all as they succeed or fail together. This motivation strengthens the bonds within the group and among team members regardless of personality and cultural differences (Slavin, 1980).

History. According to Johnson and Johnson (1992) and Slavin (1980), cooperative learning is an old idea in education and may even be traced back to concepts first referred to in the Talmud referenced in Ecclesiastics 4:9-12.

> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The philosophical foundation represented in the Talmudic reference and at the core of cooperative learning is that "in order to learn you must have a learning partner" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173).

From that early point, "in the first century, Quintillion argued that students could benefit from teaching one another" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173). Seneca advocated cooperative learning through statements 'when you teach, you learn twice.' Johann Amos Comenius believed that students would benefit both by teaching and being taught by other students. Following, in the late 1700's Joseph Lancaster and Andrew

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Bell made extensive use of cooperative learning groups in England, and the idea was brought to America when a Lancastrian school was opened in New York City in 1806. "Within the Common School Movement in the United States in the early 1800's there was a strong emphasis on cooperative learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173).

Slavin (1980), stated "laboratory research on the effects of cooperation on performance was already underway in the 1920s". Colonel Francis Parker was revolutionary in his drive to promote the principles of cooperative learning. "His [Colonel Parker's] fame and success rested on his power to create a classroom atmosphere that was truly cooperative and democratic. Parker's advocacy of cooperation among students dominated American cultures through the turn of the century" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173). As a leader in education at that time, "Parker believed that students would fully develop their capacities only if cooperative learning was encouraged and competition and individualistic efforts were eliminated as motives in school tasks" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2010, pp.1-2).

In the years following, John Dewey also "promoted the use of cooperative learning groups as part of his famous project method in instruction" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173). Dewey promoted this method of learning and instruction "to stress the social and emotional aspects of learning and prepare students for problem solving and democratic living" (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2010, p. 2). This method continued for many years as Dewey's theories flourished in education. According to Gutek (2005), "In applying Dewey's general theory of community to schooling, the group should be envisioned as possessing immense educational potential. Collaborative group problem solving, planning, and implementation reduces the isolation of the individual from others and through mutual activities produces an enriched social intelligence" (p. 346).

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Throughout the years that followed, a turn toward more of an individualistic learning style emerged which became prevalent during the 1960's (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). The use of cooperative learning methods gave way to a more competitive instructional focus. Then, during the late 1970's and throughout the 1980's cooperative learning took a large step to the forefront in education due to the work of several leaders in the cooperative learning research field. Robert Slavin (1980) published a meta-analysis on cooperative leaning through his work funded by the National Institute of Education. In it, Slavin refers to cooperative learning being used as early as the 1920's (Slavin, 1980). The brothers, David and Roger Johnson, begin to publish work on cooperative learning theory in the late 1970's, and colleges began to teach cooperative learning as an instructional method (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Also, Spencer Kagan in his work at UCLA began writing, instructing, and formulating cooperative learning structures (Kagan, 2003).

Slavin was working at Johns Hopkins in the early 1970's designing cooperative learning strategies with groups at the university (Slavin, 2003). During his research Slavin "found that cooperative learning in which you simply have kids sitting together, helping each other out, working on projects without a great deal of structure was ineffective for improving student achievement" (Slavin, 2003, para. 4). At that time cooperative learning, although a well adopted method, (Slavin, 2003), was unsuccessful in its goals. The shift in research focus altered to "a study of the conditions under which cooperative learning was effective and see that those conditions were replicated" (Slavin, 2003, para. 7). Noted by Stahl (2005), "since the early 1980's, researcher Bob Slavin has provided solid evidence that what truly separates cooperative learning from traditional and noncooperative activities is much more than the use of a group structure or group-

based model of teaching." (Stahl, 2005, p. 5). Through his research, Slavin published multiple works on cooperative learning and is still active in the field of education today.

During the 1960's, David Johnson (1992) became a graduate student of Morton Deutsch at Columbia University. Deutsch previously was a graduate student of Kurt Lewin who was developing a theory based on the Gestalt School of Psychology. In this theory "groups were dynamic wholes in which the interdependence among members could vary" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 173). Lewin and Deutsch worked together, and Deutsch went on to formulate his own version of cooperation and competition (Johnson & Johnson, 1992). In his theory, termed the social interdependence theory, Deutsch "noted that interdependence can be positive (cooperation), negative (competition), or nonexistent (individualistic efforts)" (as cited in Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, p. 28).

The impact of the teaching from Deutsch, as well as conversations between David Johnson and his brother Roger Johnson concerning Deutsch's theory, led the brothers to begin developing their own version of the "Lewin/Deutsch theory." Their work proposed that "if students' learning goals are structured cooperatively, then students will help, assist, encourage, and support each other's efforts to achieve. This interaction pattern in turn results in greater learning, more positive relationships between students, and increased psychological well being" (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 174). Then, after many hours of discussion and formulation, "in 1966 David Johnson began training teachers at the University of Minnesota in how to use small groups for instructional purposes" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 67).

The brothers joined forces at the University of Minnesota when Roger Johnson began teaching in 1969, and the collaborative effort in the movement of cooperative

learning began. The two brothers went on to formulate the Cooperative Learning Center

at the University of Minnesota which focused on four main areas:

1. Summarizing and extending the theory on cooperation and competition.

2. Reviewing the existing research in order to validate or disconfirm the theory

and establish what is known and unknown.

3. Conducting a long-term program of research to validate and extend the theory

and to identify (a) the conditions under which cooperative, competitive, and

individualistic efforts are effective and (b) the basic elements that make

cooperation work.

4. Operationalizing the validated theory into a set of procedures in classes,

schools, school districts, colleges, and training programs. (Johnson & Johnson,

1999, p. 67)

In the 1980's, David and Roger Johnson went on to publish a formulation of the

social interdependence theory. The basic premise being

. . . the way social interdependence is structured determines how individuals

interact, which in turn determines outcomes. Positive interdependence

(cooperation) results in promotive interaction as individuals encourage and

facilitate each other's efforts to learn. Negative interdependence (competition)

results in oppositional interaction as individual discourage and obstruct each

other's efforts to achieve. (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, pp. 29-30)

These aspects of the social interdependence theory are woven throughout cooperative

learning methods.

From the previous theory, the Johnson brothers went on to construct the

controversy theory, "which posits that when students are confronted with opposing points

of view, uncertainty or conceptual conflict results, which creates a reconceptualization and an information search, which in turn results in a more refined and thoughtful conclusion" (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, p. 30). This theory, when woven into cooperative learning, allows

> . . . students to organize what is known into a position; advocate that position to an opposing view; reverse perspectives so that the issue is seen from both points of view simultaneously; and to then create a synthesis to which all sides can agree. (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, p. 30)

This type of collaborative effort and synthesis would engage the student more deeply in the learning process according to Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1998).

Also in the 1980's, Spencer Kagan (2003) was developing his use of cooperative learning structures in a user-friendly classroom format. Kagan was a graduate student at UCLA while working under the direction of Dr. Millard Madsen. The research team there developed games working with children in the area of cooperation and competition. These games were easily reproducible. Kagan's desire was to develop strategies which could be used multiple times in the classroom with ease over different curriculums. The names given to the strategies were purposeful for ease in remembering (Kagan, 2003), and Kagan approached the strategies like rules in a game.

Kagan was elected as the first president of the California Association for Cooperation in Education (CACIE). For Kagan "cooperative learning was simply working together to learn together" (Kagan, 2003, The Road to Acceptance: Bumpy section, para. 2). In his work with CACIE his definition of cooperative learning expanded as he discovered that there were many definitions of cooperative learning. Kagan also learned that many educators were not using cooperative learning methods due

to the time involved in planning lessons with the strategies. He emphasized a modified version of the cooperative learning strategies called structures which could be easily incorporated in any part of a lesson (Kagan, 2003).

Cooperative learning structures. As the structures developed, Kagan continued to expand and modify each one. To date there are more than 160 (Kagan, 2003). Structures were developed in the classrooms, workshops, and through basic research, and some developed spontaneously through his work with students and teachers. Selected structures include: Numbered Heads, RoundRobin, Think Pair Share, Circle the Sage, and Stir the Class (Kagan, 1989). Each structure involves students in a group learning situation. Kagan (1989) describes structures as "involving a series of steps, with proscribed behavior at each step" (p. 12). They may be "combined to form 'multistructural' lessons in which each structure provides a learning experience upon which subsequent structures expand, leading toward predetermined academic, cognitive, and social objectives" (Kagan, 1989, p. 12). Kagan's approach is "content plus structure equals activity. The teacher puts the content of the lesson into the structure to create an activity. To deliver the content a structure is used and which structure is used determines not only how well the content will be retained, but also other outcomes" (Kagan, 2003, Redefining Activities and Lessons section, para. 1). In this way the structures may be modified and adapted to any and all learning environments with any curriculum. The ease of approach to these structures has made Kagan's structures very popular throughout the world (Kagan, 2001).

Johnson & Johnson (2005) summed up the three main interrelated categories of cooperative learning:

1. Effort exerted to achieve (higher achievement and greater productivity, more frequent use of higher-level reasoning, more frequent generation of new ideas and solutions, greater intrinsic and achievement motivation, greater long-term retention, more on-task behavior, and greater transfer of what is learned within one situation to another)

2. Quality of relationships among participants (greater interpersonal attraction, liking, cohesion, valuing of heterogeneity, and social support)

3. Psychological adjustment (greater psychological health, social competencies, self-esteem, self-efficacy, shared identity, and ability to cope with stress and adversity). (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 120)

Johnson and Johnson (1999) affirmed that cooperative learning can be generally classified as a grouping strategy with five defining elements:

- Positive interdependence (a sense of "sink or swim" together).

- Face-to-face promotive interaction (helping each other learn, applauding success and efforts).

- Individual and group accountability (each of us has to contribute to the group in order to achieve the goal).

- Interpersonal and small group skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision-making, and conflict resolution).

- Group processing (reflecting on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better). (p. 85-86)

Cooperative learning instructional methods are numerous and can be modified for use in most classroom environments and across most content areas. There are several main methods of cooperative learning such as Learning Together (LT), Academic

Controversy (AC), Student-Team-Achievement-Divisions (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT), Group Investigation (GI), Jigsaw, Teams-Assisted-Individualization (TAI), and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). From this group, modifications and branch off versions from these are used as well. The four main methods that are predominantly used are Teams-Games-Tournaments, Student-Team-Achievement-Divisions, Jigsaw, and Small-Group Teaching (Slavin, 1980, p. 319). Jigsaw is one of the most widely used cooperative learning methods (Pozzi, 2010, p. 68), although many of the methods are used as similar tasks that are adapted to specific learning situations. The basic constructs of the theory and the nature of the methods ensure a long future for cooperative learning. Slavin (1990) states that

> . . . cooperative learning is here to stay due to the vast research base, the nature of the method makes it unlikely to be forced, cooperative learning appears to be becoming a standard element of preservice education, and the fact that cooperative learning makes life more pleasant for teachers as well as students. (para. 7)

The reciprocal effect of a positive outcome for both student and teacher works well as reinforcement of the use of the method in varying instructional settings.

Empirical support. Research on cooperative learning has developed throughout the last 100 years: "More than 550 experimental and 100 correlational studies have been conducted by a wide variety of researchers in different decades with diverse participants, in different subject areas, and in different settings" (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 120). Cooperative learning has been effectively used by many teachers in many classrooms throughout this time span (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998). A positive outcome for

cooperative learning use crosses all curriculums and age levels. Slavin (2006) states "Evidence favoring cooperative learning methods that use group goals and individual accountability is strong" (p. 311). Research done throughout the world confirms the positive effect of cooperative learning instructional strategies. "A 1995 review identified 64 studies of at least 2 weeks duration that evaluated these programs. These studies involved grade levels 2 through 12 and a wide variety of academic subjects. Fifty of these studies found significant positive effects" (Slavin, 2006, p. 311).

Some of the of the most common learning outcomes related to cooperative learning are "academic achievement, race relations, mutual concern among students, student liking of school, self-esteem, time on-task, ability to take the perspective of another person, and various measures of cooperation and competitiveness" (Slavin, 1980, p. 323). In the area of academic achievement, however, the positive outcomes "seemed to depend on the particular techniques, settings, measures, experimental designs, or other characteristics" (p. 333). All of these outcomes are beneficial; moreover, student achievement is the primary focus as the stakes for learning assessment are the highest. It is also important to note that student self-esteem levels were raised during cooperative learning instructional time. The rise in student self-esteem seems to encourage the student to become more engaged in the learning process.

Varying methods of cooperative learning produce positive results. Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne (2000) reported that "an extensive search found 164 studies investigating eight cooperative learning methods. The studies yielded 194 independent effect sizes representing academic achievement. All eight cooperative learning methods had a significant positive impact on student achievement" (para. 1).

Another study by Hancock (2004) at the University of North Carolina in

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Charlotte, found that cooperative learning groups performed significantly higher than did control groups in 29 classrooms. This study involved graduate students during a semester course which was investigating the effects of peer orientation on achievement and motivation. The students were exposed to cooperative learning practices that involved "face-to-face promotive interaction, positive interdependence, individual accountability enforced by group members, collaborative skills, and group processing" (p. 159). Students were also observed to value the cooperative learning process more than they valued the learning. The relationships between students were enhanced as well as the relationship with the teacher. Engagement of both the instructor and the learner was achieved and the students who worked in groups appeared to be more motivated than the students who worked alone (Hancock, 2004).

Also, Peterson and Miller (2004) described a study with 113 undergraduate education majors who worked in cooperative learning groups while learning content material for a project in a psychology class. Different instructors used the same syllabus and the students were placed in groups of five to seven students each. The cooperative learning structure Jigsaw was used to allow for the face-to face-interaction. The student's experiences and perceptions during this study were measured while in the cooperative learning group and again in large group instruction. In their study, Peterson and Miller (2004) found that the overall quality of experience was greater during cooperative learning; benefits occurred specifically for thinking on task, student engagement, perception of tasks importance, and optimal levels of challenge and skill. The researchers discovered that students were more engaged during cooperative learning and perceived that their learning task during cooperative learning was more important than during large-group instruction. The implication for teachers is that

carefully designed and monitored cooperative learning tasks that help students achieve future goals can also help students engage more actively in their learning experiences (Peterson & Miller, 2004).

Research on cooperative learning shows that "In general, then, organizing students in cooperative learning groups has a powerful effect on learning, regardless of whether groups compete with on another" (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001, p. 87). This collaborative rather than competitive by product may promote social growth as well as academic gains among all constituents, therefore producing a positive outcome for both teacher and student.

Professional Development & In-Service Training

The role of the teacher in cooperative learning plays a significant part in Slavin's (1984) conceptualization of this teaching strategy. The techniques of cooperative learning, according to Slavin, are specific and easy to learn, and he enthusiastically explains that most willing educators can adapt any lesson to the methods with minimal outside preparation and virtually no added cost (Slavin, 1984, p. 338). Sharan (2010) and Thanh (2011), however, describe challenges and frustrations that teachers experience when trying to implement cooperative learning. Thanh conducted a study with 40 students and teachers in Vietnamese classrooms using questionnaires and follow-up qualitative interviews after teachers used different cooperative learning strategies. Thanh found that cultural and institutional barriers as well as unclear roles and goals were cited as significant obstacles to successful cooperative learning implementation. Sharan's comprehensive review of research discovered the same cultural and institutional challenges as Thanh, but also found class size, classroom dynamics, and inadequate teacher training, preparation, and reflection

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to be significant barriers to successful cooperative learning implementation.

> The benefit of CL [cooperative learning] as a driver of educational reform is often followed by a frustrating reality: once the formal training program ends, CL is often abandoned, or at best, practice is significantly reduced. Although all change projects are plagued by this development, factors that are specific to CL and to teachers' attitudes and preparation for CL play a part and may help to explain the gap between the promise of CL and its implementation. (Sharan, 2010, p. 303)

Faculty in-service sessions provide an opportunity to impart various new and engaging instructional strategies. Teachers within school systems are encouraged to fully implement various and effective teaching strategies to boost student achievement and engagement. Many times, however, the strategies promoted are not utilized (Rand, 2006). In a study of 250 elementary and secondary schools in Florida and Texas conducted by Rand (2006), a Santa Monica, California based research institute, researchers found that no teacher had adopted all of the changes outlined in the improvement plans devised by academic experts. The schools were most likely to implement suggested curriculum but were less likely to adopt the recommended teaching practice. Finding teaching methods that teachers will utilize to engage students, while also raising standardized test scores and encouraging teacher efficacy is the challenge (Rand, 2006).

 Schools use teacher training programs to improve the quality of instruction, sharpen pedagogical skills, and advance student test scores. According to Clark (1999) "The common wisdom holds that the nation's schools are failing . . . It is true that if we want better schools, we need better teachers" (p. 164). Staying current in instructional

methods and multiple assessment formats requires continuing education. Opfer and Pedder (2011) observed "the importance of improving schools, increasing teacher quality, and improving the quality of student learning has led to a concentrated concern with professional development of teachers as one important way of achieving these goals" (p. 376). These teacher training or in-service programs take place in multiple formats during the school year such as on early release days, teacher workdays or during the regular school day or over summer break. Shidler (2009) found "instructing teachers in a content area, while facilitating and supporting new practices, enables teachers to move theory into practice" (p. 459). These teacher trainings can be a supplement to student teaching throughout a teacher's career and allow college based instruction to formulate into classroom experiences.

Professional development opportunities are offered school-wide and may be required for all teachers. "Nearly every teacher participates in some form of learning every year" (Hill, 2009, p. 470). However, Hill goes on to state, "Most teachers engage in only the minimum professional learning required by their state or district each year" (2009, p. 470). This could mean as little as one day or less within a school year. Some state requirements for teacher recertification involve a certain number of in-service hours within a specific time period. These in-service points convert to continuing education units which ultimately convert to the equivalent of college credits (Florida Department of Education, 2011).

Yuen-Kwan (1998) discussed the usefulness and sustainability of teacher training opportunities, suggesting that *implementing* the content after the training "is particularly pertinent to the case of in-service teacher education which aims to effect changes in the participants' teaching on return to school. The nature of such courses predominantly

aims towards application and implementation in the teacher's school environment" (p. 65). Teacher training that is applicable to the teacher and his or her classroom environment has a greater chance of being implemented upon return to the classroom (Yuen-Kwan, 1998). Ghaith & Yaghi (1997) add "Teachers' willingness to implement new instructional practices is a key factor influencing educational improvement" (p. 451).

Yuen-Kwan (1998) described several factors which may lead to the sustainability of these teacher training events upon return to school:

1. The aspects of the course contents that were perceived by teachers to be useful were those that had direct relevance to the teachers' work on return to school.

2. School-based work seems to be an indispensible component of any teacher-education course that aims to sustain professional development after the course.

3. The teaching ideas that teachers are most likely to implement on their return to school are from those aspects of course work that lend themselves easily to continuation after the course, to further improvement, to adaptation after the course, to catering to students' needs and to helping teachers put theory into practice. (p.69)

Given these factors, teacher training is best utilized when it involves materials and information that is applicable and implementable within the classroom environment.

Opfer and Pedder (2011) found "collaborative professional development produced changes in teacher practice, attitudes, belief, and student achievement" (p. 385). This new focus in teacher training programs, over the past two decades, to accommodate

certain learning factors has been more frequently occurring. Hill's (2009) study found the following:

> Advocates of continuing teacher education have promoted school-based learning opportunities, such as coaching and lesson study; new topics, in the form of increased focus on subject matter content and, more recently, the analysis of assessment and related data; and new delivery mechanisms, including content transmitted only online. (p. 470)

With content sustainability and implementation in the classroom the focus, program practicality, is the desired goal.

Cooperative Learning and Teacher In-Service

In relating in-service training and cooperative learning, multiple studies have been conducted (Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevin, 2004; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith 1998; Jolliffe, 2007; Mentz, van der Walt, & Goosen, 2008; Ross, 1994; Shachar & Shmuelevitz, 1997; Stahl 2005) indicating a positive correlation between the training content, teacher efficacy, and student achievement linked to the use of cooperative learning implemented in the classrooms. These trainings and implementations in cooperative learning have had positive effects across curriculum, age levels, tasks, and cultures (Johnson & Johnson, 1992, p. 175).

Linking the training of cooperative learning to teacher efficacy, Ross (1994) specifically found, "the use of in-service knowledge, contributed to changes in teacher efficacy" (p. 389-390). Teacher training and usage of cooperative learning methods indicated that "teachers who employed cooperative learning in their classrooms expressed significantly greater degree of efficacy in promoting the learning of slow students compared to teachers who continued to employ traditional instruction and did not

implement cooperative learning in their classroom" (Shachar & Shmuelevitz, 1997, pp. 64-65).

Cooperative learning could also be a strategy in which to conduct teacher trainings. The training may be about certain content; however, it is imparted in a cooperative learning format. Thus, teaching both cooperative learning and the professional development concept at the same time. Ghaith and Yaghi (1997) chose the cooperative learning strategy Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD) as the preferred form of in-service instruction. This training for middle and high school teachers who were considered "experienced" as having at least five or more years of experience, resulted in several findings. "Experience was correlated with teachers' willingness to implement instructional practices . . . and teachers with a high sense of personal teaching efficacy are more likely to implement instructional innovations" (pp. 456-457).

Another similar study used the cooperative learning strategy of pair sharing to teach a computer programming in-service to teachers. In this example two studies were conducted, one in 2005 and one in 2006. The difference between the two studies was the incorporation of cooperative leaning methods used to teach the content of the in-service. Mentz, van der Walt, and Goosen (2008) state "our research formed a diverse set of evidence that led us to conclude that pair programming into which certain principles of cooperative learning had been incorporated could serve as an effective teaching-learning strategy for mastering computer programming" (p. 259). The 2006 group in which the cooperative learning was incorporated in the training outperformed the 2005 group (Mentz, van der Walt, & Goosen, 2008, p. 247).

Experienced Teachers

   The research on experienced teachers that includes a specific definition of *experienced* varies greatly across the literature (Berliner, 2002; Field & Macintyre Latta, 2001; Gatbonton, 1999; Rodriguez & McKay, 2010; Salkind & Rasmussen, 2008). In Rodriguez and McKay's (2010) work with experienced teachers, the authors conclude that "Most commonly, studies identify experienced teachers as those who have approximately five years or more of classroom experience" (p. 2 and as cited in Gatbonton, 1999; Martin, Yin, & Mayall, 2006; Tsui, 2003). Howard and McColskey (2001) also conceptually define an experienced teacher as "classroom teachers with four or more years of experience" (p. 48).

   In a search on Education Research Complete for scholarly, peer-reviewed academic journal articles in English from 2000 – 2012, 1,339 articles resulted with 800 of which were published in the last five years (from 2007 – 2012). A search of Eric using this same subject did not produce enough unique results to further explore those articles. Moreover, no applicable journal articles were found. When Education Research Complete database was searched for scholarly, peer-reviewed academic journal articles in English from 2000 – 2012 dealing with ***cooperative learning and experienced teachers*** there were 23 results; only two were even tangentially related that dealt with *collaborative* learning for teachers in a professional development environment and another that reported the results of a study conducted in 2002 with elementary students (Emmer & Gerwels, 2002). However, this article did not define or emphasize experienced teachers. The study was more about cooperative learning in elementary classrooms.

Experienced teacher is a construct that has been used in a number of studies, as indicated by the results obtained via databases results. However, many of those articles are related specifically to "experienced teacher" where the researcher has defined, conceptually or operationally, what this construct means. In Howard and McColskey's (2001) study, experienced teachers were studied and defined according to the standards adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education professional teaching standards. Also, Field and Macintyre Latta (2001) explored the topic of what constitutes becoming experienced in teaching? This study examined the "ontological meaning of experience in teacher education" (p. 885). Moreover, experienced/effective teacher's characteristics were described in an article in Education Week Spotlight (2004) where "most studies resort to measure proxies, such as certifications, academic degrees, and years of experience" (para. 6). However, in many of the studies (Gatbonton, 1999; Howard & McColskey, 2001; Martin, Yin, & Mayall, 2006; Rodriguez & McKay, 2010; Tsui, 2003), experienced teacher was not defined or was used to mean "highly qualified" in some way—or made the assumption that the reader knew what "experienced teacher" meant. It is clear, then, from the research, that the construct of experienced teacher is not consistently well defined and does not have a widely accepted "clinical" or operational definition. Furthermore, no research using the aforementioned data bases used experienced teachers to study cooperative learning, especially using a qualitative, phenomenological methodology to assess teacher perceptions concerning the training, use, and implementation of cooperative learning.

Continuing teacher trainings are necessary throughout a professional career for the novice as well as the experienced teacher (Clark, 1999; Cooner & Tochterman, 2004; Kunzman, 2003). One problem, though, as Kunzman (2003) describes it is that "very

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little research exists on the experiences of those who enter formal teacher preparation programs after already having taught in their own classrooms" (p. 241). Cooner & Tochterman (2004) agree: "Most professional development schools emphasize the benefits to preservice teacher preparation, but rarely focus on the professional development opportunities for the practicing, experienced teachers at the site" (p. 184). The STEP (Stanford Teacher Education Program) program followed experienced teachers through a formal teaching program geared toward teachers who already had teaching experience in the classroom. "Most of the participants chose the program for teacher certification, while some to improve skills and content knowledge, and some for reflection and feedback" (Kunzman, 2003, pp. 242-243). The study indicated possible benefits for classroom experience before entering the program as teachers had the opportunity to reflect on past practices and deficiencies. Having the time in the classroom before the training allowed for the experiences to be reevaluated and assimilated into the new knowledge gained.

Kunzman's (2003) findings from this study also showed the following:

Experienced teachers gained a greater awareness of the students in their classes who are struggling academically and how to help them; a broader and more complex understanding of curriculum planning; the importance of collegiality and collaboration in professional life; the value of feedback and structured reflection; and theoretical frameworks of education that enhanced both pedagogy and appreciation for broader educational issues outside the classroom. (p. 241)

In allowing the experienced teacher time for reflection and redirection, multiple learning experiences occurred validating the need for continuing teacher development throughout one's career. Offering various trainings to experienced teachers "allows

reflection on their experiences, the opportunity to learn new and different lessons, and the ability to gain renewed insights into their potential as leaders in school reform" (Cooner & Tochterman, 2004, p. 184). The authors further state, "Professional development schools are not only changing the way preservice teachers are prepared for today's classrooms, they are drastically changing the roles of the experienced teachers who participate in the process" (p. 184). Benefits are gained for all educators whether novice or experienced.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed several key constructs, ideas, theories, and important research outcomes that provide the foundation for the current study on cooperative learning. The review included a discussion of social learning and socio-cultural theories as the theoretical frameworks used to guide this dissertation's inquiry. Both theories address several of the components also used in cooperative learning. Second, I integrated the concept of *efficacy* as it relates to *teacher efficacy* to provide the foundation from which teachers' beliefs about their teaching and the effectiveness of the teaching affect student learning. The description of instructional strategies was given as a way to frame the importance of using cooperative learning. I then went on to explain the history and structures of cooperative learning as well as the empirical research showing strong evidence in support of cooperative learning's effectiveness throughout the last several decades. The role of teacher preparation and continued in-service training identified the importance of ongoing professional learning on the part of the teacher, especially concerning cooperative learning structures and the *experienced teacher*, even though that concept does not yet have a clearly articulated clinical definition.

The literature review also underscored the complexity surrounding cooperative learning. As noted in the preceding review, a gap often exists between the celebrity status of cooperative learning, its promises, and its implementation in the classroom. Cooperative learning's paradigmatic status and the real difficulties that exist in implementing it successfully in the classroom was another theme in the literature review. To address this complexity, I reviewed the work Kagan and his associates have done to make cooperative learning user friendly while also emphasizing the importance of proper training and further research into how teacher's perceive cooperative learning, its training, and its implementation in their classrooms.

The next chapter addresses the methodology of this study and includes the qualitative design and phenomenological approach used in the research. The procedures, setting, research questions, and participants are discussed as well.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This project employed a qualitative phenomenological design which sought to explore the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and use in the classroom. In this chapter, I will describe the research methodology used for this study.

Design

Qualitative Research

According to Graziano and Raulin (2007), research consists of either high or low constraints. "Low-constraint studies seek to identify and understand relationships among variables. The type of relationship that is studied varies from one level of constraint to another" (p. 132). These low-constraint studies also allow for descriptive analysis. The purpose is not to explain the behavior or why the behavior is expressed but rather to document generalizations about the observed events and behavior.

The "lower-constraint research method deals more with disciplines such as education, sociology, management, nursing, communications and psychology" (Graziano & Raulin, 2007, p. 133). In these types of studies the researcher seeks to determine if a relationship exists among variables. If it is determined that there are some contingencies between the variables, a higher-constraint study may be warranted (Graziano & Raulin, p. 132). Lower-constraint research methods fall into the category of qualitative research.

The term "qualitative research was not used in the social sciences until the late 1960's" (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 2). Qualitative research is defined as "An approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes understanding the subject's point of view" (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007, p. 274). Graziano & Raulin (2007) clarify that "The major goal

of qualitative research methods is to describe and analyze functioning in everyday settings, ranging from informal conversations among friends to courtroom proceedings" (p. 133). Furthermore, concerning the qualitative researcher, Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh and Sorensen (2006) explain, "Qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The goal is a holistic picture and depth of understanding, rather than a numeric analysis of data" (p. 31). This qualitative approach was chosen for this study as the nature of the research and analysis of the information reflects the questions identified.

The descriptive data from the point of view of the participant was the goal. Several studies on cooperative learning using a qualitative approach have explored various aspects relating teachers and cooperative learning implementation in the classroom (Ames & Ames, 1984; Ross, 1994; Siegel, 2005). These qualitative studies explored the attitudes, feelings, and motivations of the teachers regarding cooperative learning and documented this from the teacher's point of view. However, what appeared to be missing in the research and what motivated this study was experienced teachers perspectives on cooperative learning with a focus on answering a question I have had myself and have heard others express: "If cooperative learning is so successful, what are the barriers to its implementation? To answer this overarching research question, I chose a phenomenological design and generated four specific research questions.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology has its early roots in Sociology. "The movement of phenomenology is more than a century old and can be dated back to 1900-1901, the years in which the two parts of Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) *Logical Investigations* were published" (Overgaard & Zahavi, 2009, p. 1). During this time, Husserl, who was a

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mathematician, became more of a philosopher who taught his theories throughout

Germany. His schools and teachings had a profound effect on several individuals in the

school of phenomenology such as Heideggar, Levinas, Sartre, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, and

Schutz (Overgaard & Zahavi, 2009, p. 3). Schutz took phenomenology and its approach

toward more of a sociological application. Bogdan and Bilken (2007) define a

phenomenological study as "In sociology, pertaining to research that is concerned with

understanding the point of view of the subjects" (p. 274). "Phenomenological inquiry

uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific

settings" (Hoepfl, 1997, Qualitative Verses Quantitative research Paradigms section,

para. 1).

I chose a phenomenological method for this study because phenomenology

"begins with the assumption that multiple realities are rooted in subjects' perspectives"

(Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 33). This type of study "is designed to

describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of the experience as

perceived by the people who have participated in it" (Ary et al., 2006, p. 461). It is

possible that each of the participants has a different perspective which provides essential

data. The perspective of the participant is their reality of the situation. Each experience

was viewed through the lens of the individual participant. "The element that

distinguishes phenomenology from other qualitative approaches is that the subjective

experience is at the center of inquiry" (Ary et. al., 2006, p. 461).

Phenomenology may appeal to some due to its comprehensiveness. According to

Giorgi (1994), "One way this comprehensiveness can be seen is in the fact that

phenomenology always starts from the perspective of consciousness and allows that

whatever presents itself to consciousness, precisely as it presents itself, is a legitimate

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point of departure for research" (p. 192). This comprehensiveness of the approach "has the potential to integrate qualitative and quantitative concerns in ways that orient research towards uniform criteria of substantive meaningfulness and mathematical rigour" (Fisher & Stenner, 2011, p. 89).

Employing a phenomenological perspective for this study allowed data to flow from the experience and perspective of the individual teacher's lens. All the participants were able to express their own feelings about the experience as they experienced it. Studies such as Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas (2008) and Onwuegbuzie and DaRos-Voseles (2001) utilized the same phenomenological design to allow the participant's perspectives to inform the data analysis in similar ways. In his seminal work on qualitative research, (Patton, 2002) discusses the confusion and difficulties of properly defining and understanding phenomenology. He clarifies by highlighting that, at its core, phenomenology is about how people make sense of their reality and how their perceptions inform their sense-making, "how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104).

Research Questions

The questions that guided this dissertation are as follows:

1. What do experienced teachers perceive about cooperative learning training as it relates to their classroom teaching?

2. What do experienced teachers perceive regarding cooperative learning use as it relates to their classroom teaching?

3. What are the impacts of cooperative learning training and implementation on experienced teachers?

4. What challenges do experienced teachers face when implementing cooperative learning structures in their classrooms?

Participants

The subjects who participated in this study included nine experienced teachers and three experienced administrators in a Broward County, Florida, private school. The school consists of approximately 315 students in grades K-3 through 12 and is located in the heart of Broward County in the city of Hollywood. The age range of the participants was from 22 to 62 years and included eight females and four males. The teachers ranged in ethnicity to include Latin American, African American, and European American participants. The amount of teaching and administrative experience included teachers who had taught between five and 33 years. The minimum years of teaching experience was five, and the average years of experience was sixteen. It is also important to note that one of the administrators dropped out of the study and was not included in the interview section due to health issues.

The term "experienced" was defined as having five or more years of teaching experience (Elliott, Stemler, Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Hoffman, 2011). The participants were eligible for the study because they had at least five years or more experience in the field of education, specifically classroom instruction. The administrators all had previous teaching experience as well. All participants volunteered for the study. An email was sent out to all eligible participants inviting them to an informational meeting where the details of the study were addressed. The teachers were given time to ask questions of the particulars of the study and were given one week to respond. Signed participation and non-participation forms were turned in at the end of the week. Participants were the teachers who met the criteria who chose to volunteer to participate.

Setting

The school chosen for this project was a private Christian School in Broward County, Florida, and is a ministry of the local church. The church encompasses a full range of ministries to include a school system with students in grades 3K-12th grade and has approximately 315 total students. This project's study dealt with the teachers throughout the entire school unit.

The total school population consisted of approximately 315 students and 25 full-time and part-time teachers within this particular school. The student population consists of various racial and ethnic demographic groups, with a large multicultural population to include African Americans, Latin Americans, European Americans, American Indians, and Americans of Caribbean descent. The school is also considered a Title 1 school which allows for extra governmental services provided to the school due to its demographics and socioeconomic status.

This particular site was chosen for the study for several reasons. One was due to the availability of multiple opportunities for in-service instruction on site and the desire from the leadership of the organization for development of the faculty in various instructional methods. Another factor was the long and stable history in the community that the school possessed and the previous historical knowledge that this school was a positive presence in this South Florida region for many years. The last factor involved is the convenience of the site to perform observations of the teachers on multiple occasions.

The target school was started as an outreach of this local church body and has a heritage that spans more than 52 years. The church and school were started by the original pastor in 1960. The pastor's desire was to create a school where children and

young people would be impacted by giving them a quality Christian education with a biblical worldview. The leadership was later passed on to the pastor's son-in-law, and for 20 years, the school saw rapid growth, record enrollment, and several building projects completed. At one point in the history of the school, the enrollment was 1400 students in grades 3K—12th grade. Currently, there are over 1700 graduates from the school throughout its long history. The pastoral leadership and school administration has changed several times since then and the demographics of the area have also altered. Both of these factors along with the instability of the economy have dramatically impacted the enrollment of the school.

Under the current administration, the pastor of the church is the head of the entire system and is president over the school. The school functions as a smaller unit under the church umbrella and is a ministry of the church. The school and its administrators answer to the church and their administrators. The pastor and the pastoral staff have direct input in the school. The school currently functions under the leadership of a Head of School, a Secondary Principal, an Elementary Supervisor, a Preschool Director, a School Counselor, and an Academic Dean. Under the current new school leadership a business plan has been put into place for the future vision of the school to include growth and development of all programs and facilities.

Procedures

Permission to perform the study was obtained from the President of the school and Institutional Review Board approval was received. Teachers and administrators personnel files were evaluated to cite teaching experience, educational credentials and certifications. Letter and consent forms were reproduced and dates chosen.

The teachers were asked to volunteer for the proposed research project and signed

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a written consent form. Administration, faculty, and student families were all briefed and notified as to the specifications of the study, time line, subjects involved, methodology, instructional methods, and procedures. Parents of all students were also mailed a letter from me giving general information concerning the research study that their students' teachers were involved in, describing the purpose, confidentiality issues, ethical considerations, and potential future published outcomes. The project site was one with which I have past affiliation and a current relationship with and any potential researcher bias was addressed and considered due to this relationship. The all day in-service trainings took place at different times throughout the project: once at the beginning of the school year to include an all day in-service on cooperative learning instructional strategies and another all day in-service at the beginning of the study. The teacher-trainers for the cooperative learning instructional strategies involved in the project included a state certified teacher with more than 20 years of teaching experience and more than 10 years using cooperative learning instructional strategies and a retired principal who specifically facilitates cooperative learning seminars in the county. Some of the curriculum used for the trainings included a resource from the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development on cooperative learning called Getting Results from Cooperative Learning (Stahl, 2005).

The entire faculty at the school participated in 2 one-day in-service trainings at different times on cooperative learning and then weekly classes on the same topic were offered to all faculty members as well. The weekly in-service classes on cooperative learning were offered at two different times during each week over the course of over twenty weeks. All the participants from the study attended the 2 one-day trainings on cooperative learning and most of the participants attended the weekly in-service classes.

The teachers involved in the study were all certified under the Florida Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (FACCS) accrediting board. FACCS is the accreditation board used for many private Christian schools in the state of Florida. All participants were given in-service points toward recertification for their attendance at the trainings.

The teachers who participated were trained in several cooperative learning instructional strategies as well as the history and methodology of cooperative learning. In the proceeding weeks the participants were then encouraged to teach using the cooperative learning instructional strategies in their classrooms. There was no change in the curriculum for each of these classes in each grade level for the purpose of the study.

Observations were conducted on a weekly basis to ensure the strategies were being used throughout the participant's classes. These observations were done throughout the six-week study to gauge the perceptions of the teachers and to guarantee the instructional methods were indeed used. Participants were able to choose the day and time for the observations. The observations ranged from 40 to 50 minutes each week.

After the six-week period where the participants were asked to use the cooperative learning instructional strategies in their own classrooms, the teachers were interviewed to gather information on their perceptions of the cooperative learning trainings and the subsequent use of the cooperative learning instructional strategies in their classrooms. The qualitative approach was chosen for this study as the perceptions of the experienced teachers is a reflection of how they feel about cooperative learning when used in their natural setting, the classroom. The participant's point of view was given during the interview following the six week observational period.

After the interviews, all tape recordings were transcribed verbatim and all field notes typed out for clarity. Coding categories were defined by specific thoughts, phrases or patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This allowed the descriptive data to be organized in a user friendly format for further study and evaluation.

The Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in this study is as the instrument of the qualitative research. Patton (2002) states, "The principle is to report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation either negatively or positively" (p. 566). It is important to mention that I am the Head of School at the research site. Every precaution was taken to prevent any bias on the part of the researcher or participants. In the informational meeting this was discussed at length as the participants were assured that my role as the researcher would not include or overlap with my role as their Head of School. However, the interviews documented the perceptions and feelings of the teachers about the trainings and the use of cooperative learning in their classrooms. Having personal relationships with my faculty and knowing some of them for many years, as well as the fact that I am their boss, may have allowed for researcher and or participant bias. The participants may have expressed information in the interviews that they possible thought I wanted to hear. This should be taken into consideration in the findings.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of interviews, participant observations field notes, reflections, and information from different documents from the trainings. A large part of the documentation was from interviews as the primary data collection tool along with observations that were compiled from the field notes. Interviews were scheduled and

took place with the nine teachers and two administrators. Each participant was aware of the questions before the interview to allow time for reflection. The interviews took place in a private office and had several specific questions but also allowed for open ended consideration and added perspective and insight. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed afterward verbatim. Emphasis was placed on the teacher interviews to gain a perspective from the teacher's point of view on the trainings and use of the cooperative learning instructional strategies in the participant's classrooms. These interviews were triangulated with the classroom observations as the teachers were observed while they implemented the different cooperative learning instructional strategies in their classrooms. The tape recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim and several member checks of the interviews as well as the observations followed to clarify responses. These member checks of the observations and the interviews provided the participants the ability to know exactly what was documented assuring them that only information concerning the study was included.

I collected data over the course of a six week period. All participants were identified by pseudonyms to protect their identities. I also collected data throughout the study by observing each teacher's performance as it related to the instructional methods that they were using with each class. In other words, it was observed whether or not they were using the cooperative learning instructional strategies. These observations allowed me as the observer to be a part of the classroom where the cooperative learning instructional strategy was being used. However, I did not interact with the teacher or the students during my observations. I observed the teachers to verify that the cooperative learning instructional methods that were taught during the trainings were indeed used in their classrooms and to determine the setting, activities, events, strategies, relationships,

and methods used (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Patton, 2002). Particular observations helped to note the area of method of instruction. It is also important to state that one of the participants chose not to utilize the cooperative learning techniques taught in the trainings, and the three administrators did not currently teach, so no observations could be conducted for those three. The field notes taken during these observations documented the experience through the observer's eyes, the content taught, the reaction of the students, and the structures used, if clear. These notes were handwritten and transcribed later which allowed time for reflection and further thought (Creswell, 2009).

The data were analyzed to explore the perceptions of experienced faculty members and any possible relationship to the cooperative learning training methods the teachers were taught during the in-service classes and also their perceptions of the use of those methods in the classroom. This was evaluated to summarize any significant finding. The time schedule for this study involved approximately six weeks.

Stage one of the research study involved contacting IRB for approval to begin the project and obtain exempt status. The nature of the project and the questions on the interview questionnaire did not include sensitive information. Permission to use the school was obtained by the President of the school to include written permission to conduct the study. After IRB approval had been granted, I conducted onsite evaluations of teacher files to determine the possible participants by years of teaching experience.

Stage two involved the acclimation of teachers, administration, students, and parents with information concerning the study. This took place in the two weeks prior to the beginning of the project. Communications were sent out to all parents and faculty explaining the project. After files had been evaluated and subjects identified, the

potential teachers were briefed as to participation requirements and documents explained.

Stage three involved teacher identification for participation. The participants were briefed on the study and their voluntary participation, consent agreements were administered and collected, and teachers signed participation and agreement waivers. Teachers also agreed to be observed and evaluated during the six week time frame in the instructional strategy method taught.

Stage four was the administration of the training in cooperative learning instructional strategies. The teacher-trainer provided a one day in-service training on cooperative learning instructional strategies and then weekly scheduled in-service meetings for instruction in cooperative learning. During the trainings, time was given for practice and questions to be sure the strategies were correctly understood. These instructional strategies were then encouraged by the trainer for the teachers to implement on a daily basis within the lesson plans throughout the six week period. Throughout the six weeks of the school year within stage four, teachers were periodically observed during instructional time.

Stage five involved the conclusion of the observation period and the interview questionnaire. Following the questionnaire, all data were compiled, coded, triangulated, and analyzed for final documentation and recommendations.

The study utilized an interview questionnaire as well as multiple direct observations. The semi-structured interview was used as a guide as there were also opportunities given for clarification of statements and allowances made for follow up questions. An example of the items from the questionnaire follows:

1. What is your definition of cooperative learning?

2. What did you know about cooperative learning before having cooperative learning training?

3. What experiences have you had with cooperative learning before this training, if any?

4. Have you ever used a cooperative learning structure before this training? If so, which one and with whom? Please describe this experience.

5. Have you used a cooperative learning structure since the training? If so, which one and with whom? Please describe this experience.

6. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what stories can you share about using a structure?

7. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, which structure(s) do you use with your class and how frequently do you use them?

8. If you have not used a cooperative learning structure, what are the reasons for not using them?

9. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what were the positive effects on your students, if any? What were the negative effects on your students, if any?

10. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what were the effects on you as a teacher, if any?

11. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, will you continue to use them in the future? If you have not used a cooperative learning structure, will you use them in the future?

12. How long have you been teaching?

13. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Data Analysis

In a phenomenological study, the foundational question is "What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). The interpretation of the experience as well as the perspective of the person is of great value. Phenomenology has its beginnings in

philosophy (Patton, 2002), although its application to sociology via Alfred Schutz is often regarded as the key link to qualitative research (Borchert, 2006). Schultz focused on everyday life and the world around people.

> First, he (Schultz) aims to describe and analyze the essential structures of the life-world. Second, he offers an account of the way in which subjectivity is involved in the construction of social meaning, social actions and situations – indeed social 'worlds'. Relying on Husserl's analyses of intentionality and the life-world, Schultz accordingly claims the social world reveals and manifests itself in various intentional experiences. (as cited in Overgaard & Zahavi, 2009, p. 100)

This study follows a similar philosophical orientation. The data analyzed through the interviews, observations, transcriptions, and field notes were filtered through these participant's experiences. Furthermore, when combining phenomenology with reductionism, defined by Sloane (1945) as "the attempt to explain a complex interrelated whole in terms of its simpler elements or parts or in terms of elements belonging to a lower level of phenomena" (p. 217), this study utilized both approaches to analyze and reduce information to emerging themes, drawing from the participants' interpretations of their world to see if this group of people shared a similar experience. In phenomenology, "What is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

In analyzing the data, I evaluated the interview transcriptions and the observation field notes which were organized into relevant themes. I conducted classroom observations as a triangulation strategy (Patton, 2002). This data triangulation allowed me to use both sources to compare and contrast the data from interviews with that from the observations the findings. Notations were made throughout the process and two

column memoing was effective during both the observations and the interviews (Creswell, 2007). I interpreted the information and the responses in order to analyze and accurately describe the perceptions of the teachers. Particular emphasis was given to the interpretation of the teacher's perspective in the learning process in regards to cooperative learning training and its use in the classroom.

I read the interviews and field notes, reviewing all relevant data. All data were reduced, typed, and organized accordingly. A reflective log was kept throughout the research process to document running thoughts and assessments. Findings from the interviews and observations were accumulated, documented and examined to determine any phenomenological base or frequency of the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

All participant information was analyzed to determine if there were any significant findings in the experienced teacher's perceptions due to the training and subsequent use of the cooperative learning strategies in the classroom. Emergent themes were documented.

Ethical Considerations

This study examined the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and use in the classroom. The experiences and the voices of theses experienced teachers were the main focus of the research. These experienced faculty members volunteered for the study, and their trust in me as the researcher allowed for open communication and indepth discussion. I communicated with participants in writing and verbally concerning the parameters of this research and their responsibilities as participants. Precautions were taken throughout the study to protect the participant's

identities and their voices. All IRB protocol and procedures were followed to ensure the protection of each individual participant of the study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and use in the classroom. Experienced teachers (those who had taught five or more years) participated in multiple cooperative learning trainings and then implemented the structures in their own classrooms. After the six-week observational period, interviews were conducted, taped, and transcribed. Data were coded and emergent themes were documented and analyzed for significance.

In chapter four, emergent themes are described, a descriptive overview of participants is provided, and a review of the research questions is given. Then, in chapter five, I address how the data, organized into emergent themes, answered the four research questions that informed this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and its implementation in the classroom. Patton (2002) indicates that this type of study captures how an individual experiences a phenomenon. He clarifies that experience as "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p.104). This study afforded the opportunity for the participants to explore and discuss their experiences through their own personal lens and for me to observe participants using cooperative learning in the classroom. The study explored individual's definitions of cooperative learning, prior trainings, experiences with cooperative learning, frequency of its use, and effects on students. Through training in cooperative learning, individual interviews, and classroom observations, I was able to explore the phenomenon of cooperative learning as perceived and experienced by the teachers and as carried out by them in the classroom.

In this chapter, I will analyze the findings from the trainings, observations, and interviews of eleven participants: nine who currently teach and two administrators who have previously taught. The two administrators choose to participate in the study to learn more about cooperative leaning as a means of assisting teachers with various instructional strategies that may be effective in the classroom. All participants discussed their perceptions of the cooperative learning trainings and its subsequent use in the classroom. The administrators discussed their experiences with the trainings and any prior use and or future plans of use.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore the following questions concerning the perceptions

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of experienced teachers in regards to cooperative leaning training and use in the classroom:

1. What do experienced teachers perceive about cooperative learning training as it relates to their classroom teaching?

2. What do experienced teachers perceive regarding cooperative learning use as it relates to their classroom teaching?

3. What are the impacts of cooperative learning training and implementation on experienced teachers?

4. What challenges do experienced teachers face when implementing cooperative learning structures in their classrooms?

This research was concerned with the perceptions of these experienced teachers as they participated in the cooperative learning trainings and then implemented the cooperative learning strategies in their own classrooms. The research study also focused on teachers actually using cooperative learning in the classroom via observations I conducted during a six week time frame.

Participant Summary

The participants for this study were chosen from a private K3 – 12 school because of their time in the field of education, particularly teaching. All faculty that met the time in teaching criteria were emailed to attend a meeting about the study. After given information about the study and answering questions, teachers were asked to voluntarily participate. Thirteen total participants originally volunteered for the study, and eleven completed it. The original group comprised three administrators who had previously taught in the classroom, three preschool teachers, one preschool aide, three elementary teachers, and three secondary teachers. One administrator dropped out due to health

issues, and the preschool aide dropped out after one training session. Participants all had at least five years of teaching experience. The years of experience ranged from five years to 33 years with the average of 16 years of teaching experience.

Participant Overview

Participant	Content taught	Grade taught	Experience	Degree
Sara	All subjects	1st	33 years	B.S.
Debbie	All subjects	4K	6 years	C.D.A.
John	Math & Science	7-12	22 years	B.S. & M.BA
Michelle	All subjects	4K	7 years	C.D.A.
Mary	All subjects	4K	14 years	C.D.A.
Mike	Math & Bible	7-12	12 years	B.S & M.Ed.
Kathy	All subjects	2nd	25 years	B.S.
Jane	All subjects	4th	16 years	B.S. & M.S.
Bob	School Counselor	K3-12	8 years	B.S. & M.A.
Tina	Preschool Director	K3-K4	21 years	C.D.A.
Beth	Social Studies	7-12	18 years	B.S.

Individual Description of Participants

The following is a descriptive synopsis of each participant and his or her area of teaching and experience. All teachers have been assigned a pseudonym.

Sara

Sara was a thirty-three year veteran elementary teacher. Most of her time in education has been at the lower elementary level, specifically teaching first grade. Sara has spent the majority of her career in the private school setting. She had not had any

previous training in cooperative learning before the study but had heard of the term

cooperative learning.

Debbie

      Debbie was a six year veteran preschool teacher. She has only taught 4-year-old

kindergarten students and is currently taking college classes to complete a further degree.

Her teaching experience has been only in the private school setting. Debbie heard of

cooperative learning through her college classes and has been a part of cooperative

leaning groups in some of her classes. She also has had previous trainings in cooperative

leaning throughout her college courses and has previously used several structures with

her students.

John

      John was a twenty-two year veteran secondary teacher. He has taught multiple

grade levels within the secondary area of grades 7 – 12. Because of his credentials, John

teaches math and science. His teaching experience has predominantly been in the private

school setting. John had heard the term cooperative learning during his master of

business administration courses and had participated in several cooperative leaning

exercises during that time. He had not realized at the time what cooperative learning

exactly was, but thought it was just group work he was participating in.

Michelle

      Michelle was a seven year veteran preschool teacher. She has taught 2-year-old

preschool, 4-year-old kindergarten and 5-year-old kindergarten in the past and was

currently teaching 4-year-old kindergarten. Her experience had been predominantly in

the private school setting. Michelle had heard of the term cooperative leaning but had not

known much about it other than heard the name. She realized at the completion of the

study that she had been a part of a cooperative leaning group in a teacher training in the past, but did not know what it was at the time.

Mary

Mary was a fourteen year veteran preschool teacher. She had taught first grade, second grade, and 5-year-old kindergarten in the past and was currently teaching 4-year-old kindergarten. Most of her experience during her career has been teaching 5-year-old kindergarten. She has taught in public as well as private schools. Mary had heard of cooperative leaning as a teaching method and has used many different cooperative leaning structures in her past teaching experience.

Mike

Mike was a twelve year veteran secondary teacher. He has taught multiple subjects on the secondary level to students in grades 6 – 12 predominantly in the private school setting and is currently teaching math and bible. Mike had heard of cooperative learning before the training and had heard there were benefits for students but did not know the structures or had any training or experimentation with it.

Kathy

Kathy was a fifteen year veteran elementary teacher. Her teaching experience has included 4-year-old kindergarten through fifth grade in the private school setting; she currently teaches second grade. Kathy had not had any training in cooperative leaning but was familiar with the term. In her experience, she did not know any of the cooperative learning structures, just that it was a method of students working together. She had experience with differentiated instruction where the instructor broke the class into groups for a project. That was the extent of her experience with cooperative learning.

Jane

Jane is a sixteen year veteran elementary teacher. Her teaching experience had been only in the private school setting, on all different elementary grade levels. She is currently teaching fourth grade. Jane has had no experience or training in cooperative leaning before the current training.

Bob

Bob was a five year veteran teacher on the secondary level and has been an administrator for three years. Bob has eight total years of experience in private school systems. He currently serves in the role of school counselor. Bob had heard of cooperative learning before the current training. He knew there were different techniques to cooperative learning and had participated in cooperative leaning groups as part of his current Ph.D. degree program course work, but that was the extent of his knowledge on the topic.

Tina

Tina is an eighteen year veteran preschool teacher and has been an administrator for three years. Altogether, Tina has 21 years' experience in private school systems. She has taught 3-year-old preschool, 4-year-old and 5-year-old kindergarten and currently is a preschool director. Tina has had no previous experience or training in cooperative learning before the current training. She has heard of the term cooperative learning and her only knowledge was that cooperative leaning involved children working in groups or pairs.

Beth

Beth is an eighteen year veteran secondary teacher of social studies. Her teaching experience is only in the private school setting in secondary grades 7 – 12. Prior

knowledge of cooperative learning was the perception that it was group work. She had

no experience or trainings in cooperative learning before the current trainings. Beth

originally declined to participate in the study although she had voluntarily attended all the

trainings. When asked about the reason for declining participation, she indicated that she

would not be using the cooperative learning structures for her classes. Upon further

discussion, Beth agreed to participate, even though no cooperative learning structures

were to be used in the classroom for the duration of the study. However, throughout the

six weeks of observations, there were two occasions that cooperative learning was

utilized.

Trainings

The trainings included multiple sessions in cooperative learning history,

philosophy, rationale, and structures. The participants attended two full days of trainings

conducted at Hollywood Christian School on different dates and with different trainers

and curriculum. They also voluntarily attended weekly sessions one day a week for 20

minutes each session during the course of the study. The curriculum for the trainings

included a variety of materials on cooperative learning by Dr. Spencer Kagan, Step By

Step Expressions, Inc., and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development. Participants were also encouraged to view multiple videos on Kagan

Structures. These clips were of different teachers using cooperative learning structures in

the classroom setting.

During the trainings, nine predominant cooperative learning structures were

taught: Jigsaw; Think Pair Share; Three-Step Interview; Round-Robin Brainstorming;

Three-Minute Review; Numbered Heads Together; Team Pair Solo; Circle The Sage; and

Partners. Handouts and practice time during the classes, for the structures, was also

utilized for the purpose of solidifying the concepts and trial and error for the use. All participants attended the two full days of training and the majority of the participants attended the weekly trainings. All received in-service credit for their attendance.

Observations

Each participant allowed six different occasions for observations of their classroom teaching within a six week time frame with the exception of the two administrators who are not currently teaching. The participants signed up for the observations indicating a specific day and time for me to observe. This allowed the participants to plan a lesson that involved cooperative learning so that I could observe the cooperative learning structures being used in the classroom environment. The observations took place once a week during the six week data collection period and ranged from 40 to 50 minutes. Not every observation involved cooperative learning being implemented in the classroom. In fact, one of the participants did not purposefully use cooperative learning at all during the observations. However, the majority of the observations for each participant indicated a cooperative learning structure used verifying that the participant did indeed use the structures on multiple occasions. Field notes were taken during all observations noting the cooperative learning structures used, the engagement of the students, the proficiency of the teacher using the structure, and the linkage to the content of the curriculum.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in a secure office at the conclusion of the six week observational period. All participants were asked the same thirteen questions concerning the cooperative learning training and the implementation of the cooperative learning structures in the classroom. At the end of each interview, the last question asked the

participants to share anything else that they would like to add. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions were then coded and evaluated for significant themes and then triangulated with the observations.

Themes

Throughout this research and interview process, several themes began to emerge. These themes were consistently heard with the majority of the participants during the interviews as well as seen to a certain extent in the observations. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the perceptions of the experienced teacher in regards to cooperative learning training and its use in the classroom. The emergent themes from the interviews are as follows:

1. Prior Knowledge: Experienced teachers used some form of cooperative learning in their classrooms before the trainings.

2. Enjoyment: Experienced teachers appreciated and enjoyed the trainings.

3. Student Effects: Experienced teachers felt the use of cooperative leaning in the classroom had positive effects on the students.

4. Reflection: Because of the cooperative learning trainings, experienced teachers recognized the difference between standard group work and actual cooperative learning.

5. Perception: Experienced teachers perceived few negative effects from the trainings.

6. Teacher Effects: Experienced teachers perceived the use of cooperative learning structures in the classroom an overall positive experience.

Further assessment into the participant's perceptions of these experiences and findings reveal common threads concerning effects of the training and the use of the cooperative learning structures.

Prior Knowledge: Experienced teachers used some form of cooperative learning in their classrooms before the trainings although they did not know the name or have any previous formal training.

Throughout the interviews the majority of participants shared their lack of prior knowledge of and experiences with cooperative learning. Although the participants stated that they did not have prior trainings in cooperative learning methods or structures, or classes in their pre-service time, the majority revealed that after the trainings they realized that they had indeed used a form of cooperative learning in their classes with their students in the past. According to Sara:

> I believe I've used it in my classroom for a lot of years but in different, different ways or different formats; not in such a formal way as I use it now.

Michelle:

> With me personally, with the children, yes I've used it, I did use it, didn't know that was the term for it.

Mike:

> Yes, now being aware of the different structures, I've realized I have used somewhat of some of the structures in the classroom before the training.

Jane:

> I think I knew some things about it but I never knew it was called cooperative learning. I think some of what I've done through the years in teaching, because I love kids to work in groups, and I'm big when it's stopping and going over

something and then going on and I realize that a lot of what I do falls under cooperative learning. But I never knew it from that title. I've learned so much more though through the training that I'm trying to put into practice, but I used it before having a name to it.

Tina:

Well, I found that I had actually been using, in a sense, cooperative learning. Like when I had students that were struggling and I had students that were excelling and so during a reading group if they were having a hard time with reading and I was busy with the group I'd have a student that was excelling pair up with one that was having difficulties and they would sit side by side and read together. And they weren't quite as intimidated as with me for when they didn't know an answer or they didn't know quite how to sound that out when it was another student. I also observed that one time I was doing an art project and this one student figured out a simpler way to instruct the students on how to even go about doing the project and he said can I show the class and I said come on up. So, they can break it down even more simpler than what I could.

This was a common response throughout the interviews. The teachers realized the importance and usefulness of students working in groups and had utilized this practice. What was different for them after the trainings was that they could put a name to the practice and attach a structure to the learning gain. The realization of this fact and familiarity of some past use seemed to positively impact the participants. Also, during the trainings as the methodology behind the cooperative learning structures was taught I could see the participants engaging more in the process due to their past experiences. They had seen the positive impacts. Now the tools were being given to them to use this

method in a more thorough way. Previous success and use in working with groups paved the way to embracing cooperative learning structures as a new instructional method.

Enjoyment: Experienced teachers appreciated and enjoyed training in cooperative learning and felt the training was a positive experience.

The participants all had positive experiences with the trainings. No negative impacts were discussed with the exception of Beth commenting on the time of the classes as this particular participant chose the 7:00AM classes on Thursday mornings for her trainings. This emergent theme was also identified and noted within the observations, as the teachers were observed by me to be enjoying their time in the trainings as well as in the classroom directing the structures.

Sara:

Oh, the training was excellent because it gave me so many ideas that I had not had about things that I could do or things that I could incorporate in my classroom.

Debbie:

The training had helped me to be more knowledgeable in cooperative learning and gave me more ideas that I can take back to the classroom and to use. I just think it's a very positive tool that you can work, that you can use in the classroom. And I find it effective especially with the 4K because they do like to work together.

John:

Well the training made me feel a lot more confident. Just because my problem with cooperative learning was that everyone would piggyback on a smart kid. You know what I mean? Cuz you said, some kids doing all the work and some kids doing no work and the whole group getting the same grade, which was how I understood it in the past. Okay, so the idea of hey, well cooperative learning and

you may not even be getting a grade for this particular activity. But the activity you're doing is going to be shadowed on your test. Or it's going to be mimicked on your test so you better know how to do it. You guys need to understand because you will see this again. And that idea of them working in the groups and getting them graded individually was kind of the door opener for me. Cuz that's one of my main problems with cooperative learning was. So once I got past that it was like alright let's play with this. It's kind of nice because I can get up there and teach, and I feel I do a good job teaching, but I'm sure, I mean I don't want to listen to myself five days a week, I'm sure they don't. So giving them a chance to talk and figure things out is great. Seeing how they apply the stuff, you know, seeing if they actually learned it or not, you know, because if you see them applying it you know they actually got it. So it's like all right, I got this one. It's nice to see. It's also good when they get stuck and seeing some of their misconceptions. And being able to correct the misconceptions because if you're just lecturing you don't see the misconceptions. So it's helped me out with that also. And to see where the kids are getting stuck because sometimes as a teacher I just don't understand why you're stuck there, you know?

Michelle:

I think it just opens, it made me realize that it does, I can think outside the box. It doesn't have to just be me in the front and the kids, okay eyes on me; no it actually gave me room to think outside the box and gave me room to maybe introduce something that they were having issues with. Well, let me try it this way or let me do it this way and I think it just opens the door for you to be able to do a little more with the kids.

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Mary:

> I would say that as a teacher, I am more aware of those students who are in greater academic need in certain subjects. And I am more aware that students may certainly learn from each other. And cooperative learning has helped me increase my expectations of my students being that I am able to observe each student at a more individual level. It has made teaching more enjoyable, being that I'm um, and many times I'm the facilitator, and I enjoy observing how each group and student accomplishes the goal set before them. And having the students engage in small group activities help me be able to be more efficiently manage potential and behavior.

Mike:

> On the training, I mean, I enjoy it. The thought that keeps coming back to mind for me is I feel like it gives the teacher another tool. But it gives me also the freedom if the students are because they're engaged. I feel like there's a healthy amount of pressure on the student to learn the material and it gives the teacher, I felt like it gave me as a teacher, more freedom to kind of float around and um, and kinda determine where each student is as far as their skills or their information. So I felt like it gave me some freedom, the pressure of maintaining the class attention, wasn't completely on me for all students. I felt that distributing the power so to speak gave me the freedom to kind of uh, to do other things that I wouldn't normally have been able to do like in say a traditional lecture. More empowered as a teacher in the classroom environment.

Kathy:

The training was good for me. It encouraged me to maybe step out and do some

things that were new. To make some changes in the classroom instead of what I

was used to and that both has both positives and negatives. It's positive because

it's great to learn new things and become a stronger teacher but yet it also

sometimes is a little I say scary, if that's the right word, to try something new.

Jane:

You know we wanna have all those different ways of teaching. I think the

training has been wonderful, I really do. And may, I don't know how the other

teachers feel, but I think because I like doing the groups, it's making me think

there's really a purpose in this group, let there be a purpose for everything I do in

the classroom and it's gonna serve the ultimate goal of what do I want them to

learn. So, I like that because it's put a name to it – cooperative learning, my

groups and even all the different structures, you don't have to be bored with it you

know you don't always have to do it the same way. And there's gonna be some

you're gonna fall into it and like. But I think the effect of the training has been

great and it's helped me grow. And like I said I even want to, probably not until

the summer at this point, but read through the material again and really mark and

which ones do I really want. Some are gonna fit different teacher's personalities

more of what they would like. But the effect of the training has been great. And

building on what I always do, as far as me as a teacher, I think because I like that

group work. I always tell my kids two heads are what? And then they always go,

"better than one" and I said okay and so by working together that's gonna be a

good thing. So I think the effect is good across the board, personally, I mean I

really do.

Beth:

I enjoyed it. Now, seven o' clock Thursday morning was a little hard to really

grasp everything. I enjoyed listening to them, like [person] and things and

watching the little videos and stuff and these teachers doing it and me going well

that would be really great but trying to put it into action. So, I'm one that I have a

tendency to look at stuff and go this is really great but then for me to take it and

put it into practice in my own room or whatever, I find that hard because when

I'm looking at something I really understand it.

These cooperative learning trainings gave fresh ideas and feelings of

empowerment to experienced teachers who may have been out of an actual instructional

setting for themselves in quite a long time. Taking the time to teach experienced teachers

new instructional methods and creative pedagogical skills, which they may not be

familiar with, brought out new excitement and a fresh enthusiasm for classroom

instruction. This concentrated type of in-service, which just focused on one specific

teaching method, allowed the experienced teacher to direct their energies on one method

of instruction for a period of time. Also, this allowed for practice within a specific time

period to perfect their newly acquired skill.

Many times within an educational degree program multiple methods and

ideologies are taught and tested on. In the actual teaching environment, this occurrence

allowed the experienced teacher to practice a fresh new method exclusively. This

experience provided a positive time of growth, empowerment as a teacher and renewal of

their craft. I found the experienced teachers were very excited and thankful for the investment and opportunity.

Student Effect: Experienced teachers felt the use of cooperative leaning in the classroom had positive effects on the students regarding student engagement, social development, enjoyable environment, and academic gains.

Although the experienced teachers had practical knowledge that cooperative learning had positive effects on students, the ability to see the constructive outcomes in their own classrooms with their own students showed positive effects on the participants. This was also confirmed during the observations as it was noted during several of the observations that the students cheered or said "yes" when the teacher announced that the class was going to do cooperative learning activity. It was interesting to note that during the observations two of the classes would get really excited when I walked into the classroom as that symbolized that the class was going to do a cooperative learning activity.

Sara:

> Well, I find they are really remembering the material. Whether it's working with compound words or contractions or math families or concepts, because in the middle of a reading group now one of them will say "Hey, we had that earlier today, that was a contraction" or you know "Hey, that's a compound word [participant's name], did you know that's a compound word?" I find that they're integrating it more into other activities that we do in the classroom. They're on their own raising their hand or saying hey this is something we talked about earlier this is a "____" in referring back to what we've done.

Debbie:

Well one of the positive effects that I've seen is just the children. Like some children, they don't get along with others just when they're single but when they're in a group they're getting along, they're working together, uh some of the social and emotional. I have one child, he stays by himself but then I put him in a group and he's trying to interact with the other children. And, I just think it's great for them and then some of them on their own they wouldn't be able to do some of the work but when they work together they're able to accomplish it so they have a sense of accomplishment from working in a pair or in a group.

John:

Yeah, well, okay, the students seem to enjoy it. And also I've noticed that like some of the students who normally wouldn't be like the most popular kids but they're pretty good at math and stuff are all of the sudden like people flock to them. You know what I mean? And they take pride in that. I got a couple students who have speech impediments. You know they can't speak very well but they do great at math and when we do cooperative learning as far as the math, man two or three people always, come here, come here, come sit with us! You know what I mean? Come be our Sage! You know cuz they really want that kid with them and I think it really builds confidence with some of the kids.

Michelle:

Yes, they are able to work together, they learn how to share, how to cooperate with each other, to have patience with each other because it teaches them to be patient with one another, it teaches them even just caring socially. They see when

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somebody's lacking, even at four, and they'll go out and they'll help that person.

They'll help that other student so I think it's just all of it is a very positive thing.

Mary:

I have seen many positive effects in my students. For instance, it helped increase

social and emotional skills. Um, as a teacher I was able to offer students more

opportunity for more interactions with each other. Also, students learned the

importance of respecting other's opinions.

Mike:

I've mentioned the student engagement which for me was key. If they're engaged

I feel naturally that they're gonna absorb a lot of the skills or the information,

which of course helps for retention of the information later on for testing

purposes. So that just keeps coming back to mind for me just the student

engagement. If I look at in terms of the year, the beginning of the school year to

where we are now, I mean a lot of factors have played into their improvement.

But the cooperative learning has been part of that. I've experimented with that

students can work with what students and also my methods and how they work

together. So, I would say that yes, overall I've seen an improvement with most

students in my math class.

Kathy:

Many positive effects. The students I found were much more engaged and take

ownership of their learning, they enjoy the learning process. They developed or

worked on developing good, better communication skills listening as well as

speaking. The social skills they worked on, taking turns, um, I've noticed more

positive relationships in my classroom. I think they feel good about working

together. Their self-esteem increases. I find it very interesting that it helps define

both maybe strengths and weaknesses of classmates that I see as a teacher but that

they see with their peers and how they can use strengths to better their group.

Jane:

I think the social skills, becoming more sure of themselves. I think

communication too, being able to really communicate with another student and let

you know, express their viewpoints and feel that those are validated and then

working together. I've always told kids whenever they work as a group though,

even though they're working as a group, and they can come up with an answer

they're still responsible for their own paper or their own answers you know but

feeling like that's okay. They can think differently than me but I think that

communication, socialization and then just to me it's fun for them. They like

being up out of their seat I think that plays into it. You know me, I like to make

learning fun if I can and if it's a way that they can be learning and have fun at the

same time, hey that's great because then they're more into it, they like that.

Bob:

Say positive effects that I've seen for myself personally being a part of a structure

and also giving it, is able to hear other student's perspectives on a lesson.

Especially being in the Ph.D. program we all have different uh, content

knowledge and experiential knowledge and that information would not be relate if

we were not able to share it within a group setting. Um, so yes the knowledge

we're getting from the teachers is great, but obviously being able to hear from

other students and other perspectives helps solidify our knowledge.

Tina:

I saw a lot of positive. Hardly any negative. But the positive is each student gets to participate. And at a young age they have such a short attention span and the fact that they can all participate and you can reinforce what you've just introduced and you're using, you know, you're using different manipulatives and you're being enough for the kinesthetic learners you're able to be hands-on. That's a huge thing for young learners. Um, the socialization skills, they're learning to communicate with each other, they're learning how to get along with each other. Only one person can be the recorder, if you have a recorder, so you have a, you know, um, it boosts their self-esteem. I saw one little boy who just kind of wanted to sit back and not participate because he was shy and the teacher encouraged him to sit forward and lets read the word and the smile on his face when he was able to actually help with the group, there's just a lot of positives for it.

Beth:

I mean they enjoyed what they were doing. Uh, for the most part they enjoyed their freedom to move around. They enjoyed uh, you know, their conversations weren't always on task so they enjoyed the socialization of it. I find that it's positive when they're reviewing with each other because I will hear them say, oh no no that's not the right one this fits in there. And so I do that, and so I know that's got to be positive because I know they'll do better on their quizzes and their tests when they're helping each other.

Most of the participants had some comment on the social aspects of cooperative learning in a positive way. From drawing out a shy student to allowing a Sage on the

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Stage to shine when they would otherwise not have an opportunity to, the participants noticed the positive effects on their students. Due to the length of the study and the qualitative nature, achievement gains could only be measured in minor ways. However, it was noted by several participants that they did feel student comprehension improved in relation to the student's scores on tests and quizzes.

The participants also noted that the students enjoyed the cooperative learning structures with the ability to move around, talk to each other, and interact with their peers. Varying the instructional strategy for the students from the traditional lecture format was a positive experience for the students. This brought an increase in student engagement and was a positive factor for the teachers to experience as they watched this occur. Even Beth noted that the students enjoyed the activities even though she as a teacher was not comfortable with the experience.

Reflection: Because of the cooperative learning trainings, experienced teachers recognized the difference between standard group work and actual cooperative learning regarding individual and immediate assessment, the concept of structures, and productive interaction.

Before the trainings, several participants commented on group work being an instructional method that they had used in the past. The trainings taught the difference between traditional group work and true cooperative learning. This differentiation allowed clarity for the participants as they moved forward with experimenting with the newly acquired cooperative learning structures. One participant commented about the frustration with group work and how to assess individual accountability and content knowledge learned. After the trainings, this participant felt more confident with the ability to discern the difference.

Sara:

Well, I knew cooperative learning was, you know, working in groups, working together. I didn't realize all the strategies and different activities and ways that you could use it in the classroom. I've always done, you know, group activities or activities where, you know, children work together, but now the training has given me a better basis for different things I can do using cooperative learning. Like the training has given me ideas of ways I can use it more effectively in terms of achievement. To, you know, help the students understand, um, what we're working at or what we're trying to achieve through it. Um, to get more out of it.

John:

Well, before that it was more like group work. Like just put the kids in groups and let them try to figure it out, and you know that's the way I thought. I knew that there was more to cooperative learning. I knew there was some way to kind of organize the groups and stuff, but I never really saw the value of it, and I didn't really understand how many different *types* of groups there were. So, to me it was more like put them in groups, get the smart kid, the kid that's failing, a couple average kids, I understood that concept of put them together and let them show each other what to do. But really I thought it was unproductive. You know, I thought it was very unproductive because I thought it was a lot of time wasting and stuff, and you've shown that to not be the case. Problem is, what I want to know, the line between cooperative and group is a little fuzzy for me, because I remember doing it. But I remember in the past trying to put kids in groups to work out certain things, certain labs, certain projects. Especially like projects, you put the kids in groups, and I'm not sure that's considered cooperative

learning. But I was frustrated by the fact that a lot of times you have one kid take

over and do most the work, and you'd have the other kids who just wouldn't do

anything. And I thought, to me it was very unproductive because a lot of kids

wouldn't be involved. So my problem with it was always that I wanted

everybody involved. It doesn't do me any good to have the one smart kid do all

the work and everybody else just copy the answers, or just feed off of them. I

wanted everybody to participate, cause everybody's got skills and talents. I had

some success when I had them building things. I had the ninth grade build

electric motors, cause some kids that don't necessarily get good grades or

manually building things, or putting stuff together. But what I thought was good

is that…what I would do is that I would take whatever information we learned

there and actually have something directly based on that on their test so that if

they cooperated well in the group, then they would get a good grade on that part

of their individual assessment on the test. Which is the biggest thing I learned

from all the group work, is how to…ok we did a group work, ok, you all did

good, and now, see what you learn is that you're not going to be individually

assessed. But it's not like they're getting answers, it's like they're actually, hey,

how did you do this, they're actually cooperating. Which was great to see, cause

at the beginning I was concerned that we'd just get kids copying answers. But

since they know they got that individual assessment later, I really see them asking

each other the questions, seeking help, and doing all that type of stuff which is

very, very rewarding for me. And that idea of them working in the groups and

getting them graded individually was kind of the door opener for me cuz that's

one of my main problems with cooperative learning.

Mike:

Before the training I would say that I knew there were benefits to working in groups, for students working in groups, however I didn't, I wasn't aware of the many structures and the methods behind the groups, but only that it just benefitted for students in different ways to work together.

Kathy:

I didn't know that there were titles to different structures, just the fact that students work together. I didn't realize that there were certain, certain ways or I guess certain titles to structures. Before, I would give the students some direction, a task that I wished them to complete or learn or help with each other and then they would break up into their groups for a certain period of time and they would come back together.

Jane:

To me, I think because I do a lot of group work and I'm learning too that there's a different between just group work and cooperative learning. I think a lot of what I've done in the past is more group work but when I would actually have the groups come back together and talk about what they learned that's when it would fall under cooperative learning.

Tina:

All I knew is that it was you have the children work in groups or in pairs and that's really basically all that I knew.

Beth:

Other than the perception that I had or the thought I had was basically it's just group work. And that has changed cuz now I understand there's more strategies

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behind it but I didn't know anything of it before I sat in on the in-services and the training. There might have been, you know, I mean I might have paired students up if somebody was struggling or we would do some pair work in class. But as far as coming up with a specific strategy or something like that, no, it just kind of happened. You'd put them in groups of three or four or pair them up but it wasn't, you know, I didn't think to myself oh, I'm doing cooperative learning today. This was I just put them together so they could help each other on different worksheets and stuff like that.

The general consensus of the participants concerning group worked changed due to the trainings. When the different structures were taught to the group, participants recognized the different elements of cooperative learning opposed to just pairing students in to groups. The structures offered specific dynamics and guidelines to move instruction along, provide for individual roles and responsibilities within the group, and most importantly individual assessment. This formulation of knowledge broadened the participant's expectations of the groups and allowed for more formal learning to take place.

Perception: Experienced teachers perceived few negative effects from the trainings and the use of cooperative learning in the classroom. These negative effects included more time spent formulating lesson plans, loss of individual teacher control, and adjusting to a non-quiet environment.

The negative effects of the trainings were not noted by any of the participants. Regarding the use, several participants had some comments regarding the extra work required to implement the cooperative learning structures. Because these were new instructional strategies involving cooperative learning structures recently taught to the

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participants, the time spent leaning, as well as researching and applying these strategies to their lessons was demanding.

Another area of these experienced teachers that was noted concerning negative aspects was the alteration of classroom control. Many professional educators are assessed by the control and noise level exhibited in their classrooms. Administrative observations note a teacher's ability to control their class and limit wasted time and chaos. Preservice time is spent learning classroom management techniques to maximize instructional time. Cooperative learning allows for a less structured environment which was somewhat difficult for several of the participants to adjust to. From the observations I observed that it appeared to be difficult for a few of the teachers on several occasions to both relinquish their "classroom control" and be comfortable with the new noise level and apparent "chaos". Also, when the school weeks were busier, such as during Homecoming week, exam week, and weeks near a holiday it was less likely for the classroom observations to include a cooperative learning structure as several of the teachers commented to me that they did not have the time for the planning of the lesson to include a structure due to the added work load due to the event.

Sara:

> The only, and this isn't a negative, is you just have to plan, you have to be prepared, you can't just come in one day and say okay we're gonna do Think Pair Share. Well, you might be able to but you have to have a plan ahead of time; well what are you gonna do in that Think Pair Share activity.

Debbie:

> The only time that I might have planned something and not used it is that something particular happened that day, say I had an activity planned and then the

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fire drill went and that time we were like okay we noticed that's not a really good time for this activity to happen.

John:

Well, first of all, for me the, me the chaos was rough. I'm pretty structured, and having the kids sitting in little groups talking was just like, mind-blowing to me. Some of the downfalls is that you have kids not cooperating, you got groups wanting to get off task. So you gotta kinda stay on them to be on task. I actually haven't separated out any kids, like we said in the training to do for kids not participating well, just separate them out. I don't know if that's cause I haven't needed to or I just haven't done it. But that would be some of the downfalls, just you get some kids off task sometimes, uh, you get groups working at different speeds and sometimes they're done, you know, and that's sometimes it can be a distraction.

Mary:

I think one reason might be that they are afraid to use it because they haven't used it before. And sometimes when you do cooperative learning you have children very excited. Sometimes they have to get out of their chairs and sometimes for teachers that's scary because it seems like the class is out of control, even though in reality it's not.

Mike:

The usage, I would just say that you know it's still sometimes experimental. You know again I've found over this past year that some of them work so I've held on to those but as I was experimenting with some of the other ones the only negative

feeling which is not seeing it work out effectively or thinking maybe to myself, maybe there's something that I'm not doing to make it work so.

Kathy:

Well there's times where I've planned a cooperative learning activity or have the children use a structure but maybe there's certain students that if they're paired up with someone, um, they would maybe give me an attitude and they didn't want to be paired up with a certain student. I noticed this as a teacher, the rest of the class didn't, but then they would do the activity by themselves. Or maybe there's times where maybe they argued back and forth and we would try and facilitate working through the argument but there's times where they would have to take a timeout and then do an activity by themselves. Maybe there's times where the class is just too active and they're just not listening to the directions and we would have to go back to our desks and maybe regroup and we could try it again later or maybe the next day.

Jane:

Well, I think what would cause a teacher not to use it, and now I don't feel this way, is the classroom management. And that it could get a little chaotic. I like the groups. I don't mind a little bit of them up and about. I'm the one that likes field trips with them. Some teachers don't like that kind of stuff. They feel like they've lost that control but I like that side of it and seeing the students in different settings and watch them interacting. But I think that would be a main reason not to. Now if I had a class, and I have had classes in the past that are a lot more if I'd say challenging, and it's harder to get them back on track, I think I'd be a lot less likely to use it. So, but I think that would be the biggest thing the

classroom management. If you don't feel you have that then you might be not as likely to want to do it.

Tina:

If this is something new to them they're a little uncomfortable with it, takes a little bit more preparation time, you know you have to think through because you have to put them in groups of accelerated, you know the ones that aren't as accelerated little bit more planning and it's outside the box thinking.

Beth:

The experience I'm having with it I'm not real happy with what I saw. Um, because it always seemed like there was always that one person, no matter how I paired them up, there was always one person who did all the work. Or you have this group turning around trying to talk to the group behind them and so no matter how much I walked around or I tried to deal with them there was always other stuff going on. So there was a lot of time in that class where stuff that the actual task was not happening, even though as much as I tried to stay on top of them they still found ways of not doing what they were supposed to do. And it turned out to almost be, I don't want to say a waste of time for that class because some of them did benefit, but it wasn't what I wanted to come out of it. And what I saw happen in that instance was I would have a group over here, no matter how I separated them because I spent time separating them and trying to put all the calibers and get the right groups, one group would finish fifteen minutes in another group wanted three class hours to finish. And when this one thinks they're done, even when I tell them to go back and, you know, you need to do this they still finished extremely quickly and then they wanted to talk while these

other groups were trying to do their work. So you're trying to keep them quiet

and keep them on task and the other group wants help and this group is disrupting

this other group. And I even put them in a larger room and it still was a problem.

The noise level still got real loud. Even though you try to stay on top of them,

you walk over here in one corner the other corner sees your back is to them and

they get noisy and then you go over there and quiet them down and then the next

group gets up. And it was just, I like structure, and it was hard on me because no

matter how hard I tried to keep them on task and a structure it got unstructured.

And it was frustrating to me, as a teacher. I guess what it is, is I just find it hard

to fit it into the social studies as far as brainstorming or um, the different

structures. I find it hard to figure out how to actually do it. If you know, I had an

actual, you know, there are some books and you did give one um, say okay you're

gonna study the Great Depression here are specifics you can do. Um, and then

you can try to make it your own. I lack that knowledge. And you know lacking

the knowledge of how to actually to do it, I'm a person I want to be, I like to be

told this is how you do it and here's all the steps to do it. And I have taught for so

long that I know this is how I like to teach my classes. This is how I want to do it.

This is how I've been taught. And now there's a new catch being tossed in. And

it's the old dog trying to learn the new trick. And I'm willing; it's just that right

now it's hard. You know and another reason I don't I haven't used it is my class

structure. My class makeups and my class sizes. Because I got, you know,

classes of 25, 26 and you try to get them to move their desks and do this and that

then it's gonna get very loud very quickly and it's gonna disturb other classes and

I don't like noise. I like everything to kinda be nice and settled and when you get

all these kids moving around and all the different age groups in one classroom all moving around, you get a whole different, the chemistry is pretty rough. And I find that one of the reasons why I was kinda resistant to use it. When I did use it I felt my stress level go up because of trying to make sure that everybody was on task and everybody was doing what they were supposed to be doing. And you know I'm not having this happen here and this happen there and I want to be able to see everything and I can't see everything that's going on when they're turned in groups. And I like to know everything that's going on and controlling the classroom. As you can tell I like control in my four walls. And I couldn't do that so my stress level went up and I also felt stress trying to figure out sometimes how to do it. How to figure out what I'm gonna do and the planning of it. For the lesson plan. Cuz for me to whip out a lecture that's nothing. But to sit down and figure out how I'm going to do this and how I'm gonna make them understand what I want them to do, the stress level went up for that.

Beth shared the most about the negative effects on her as a teacher regarding cooperative learning use in the classroom. This participant was used to her style of instruction which involved predominantly the lecture format. The makeup of cooperative learning structures lends itself to a less formal instructional style with more freedoms in the classroom for the students. This particular participant was uncomfortable with the lack of control and structure and caused stress when experimenting with the cooperative learning structures. Also, because it was a new instructional method the time involved in lesson planning created more pressure for the participant. These combinations made for an unpleasant experience using the cooperative learning structures and a lack of desire to participate in the new teaching method.

Teacher Effects: Experienced teachers perceived the use of cooperative learning structures in the classroom to be an overall positive experience.

The majority of the teachers in this study perceived the time using cooperative learning in the classroom as a positive and enlightening experience. Most teachers enjoyed the opportunity to learn a new method of teaching and embraced the challenge. As they saw students enjoy themselves in the classroom environment, the teachers seemed to relax a bit and genuinely benefit from the experience. This was found in the observation as well. Most of the teachers seemed to enjoy the experience most of the time. However, when the students were really engaged in the structure and really enjoyed it, I observed that the teachers seemed to be enjoying the experience more and the experience seemed more positive. The teachers were observed to be enjoying the experience the most when the students seemed to be enjoying it the most as well.

Sara:

> I think as a teacher one of my greatest joys is when somebody gets it. And you
> can see that in their face, and in their attitude, and what they say, and so many of
> things we've done. The kids have been like wow that was really good. I really
> understand that [participant's name]. And I think cooperative learning had helped
> them because I think kids can get a lot from other kids, you know. They can, they
> can get a lot of knowledge from another person and, as I heard you say the other
> day, you know, you'll hear kids say "No, no, no, you don't do it that way,
> [participant's name] said to do it this way". So some of your kids that aren't
> really good listeners are hearing from kids that maybe are better listeners, you
> know, "No that's not the way she said to do it". So they're hearing it from other

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people and hopefully realizing hey, I need to listen a little bit better. But I think just the joy it brings them in learning is something that I just love.

Debbie:

 I think it also gives me a sense of accomplishment because I'm teaching the children like say their letters, and they come in some of them not knowing any of their letters, any of their sounds, and then having group work and having them grasp the concept and seeing that and it gives me a sense of achievement because I see, you know my teaching, look they're working together, you know, it's come for a good result. Because you see them succeeding and overall you want your children to learn but you also want them to succeed for the future, and it, it does. And when they're working together it's very good.

John:

So giving them a chance to talk and figure things out is great. Seeing how they apply the stuff, you know, seeing if they actually learned it or not, you know, because if you see them applying it you know they actually got it. So it's like all right, I got this one. It's nice to see. I think it's, you know, giving me a little bit more time to walk around and talk to the kids individually and work with them individually. It makes me feel more successful as a teacher. Having the individual time and seeing the little light bulbs go off rather than standing up there lecturing, and I think I've seen it benefit the kids.

Michelle:

Very positive, they were all positive. Um, it is a little bit more challenging because I do, since you are you have to incorporate a little bit more thinking. So it is a little bit more challenging to think just outside of that lesson plan itself.

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You have to do a little bit more with your lesson plan. You gotta think a little bit more with the lessons. But the structures made me more I dunno um; I was able to just learn more myself. With those structures, you know, and even as me doing it with colleagues or within meetings I can see how we have all worked together and done things.

Mary:

It has made teaching more enjoyable, being that I'm um, and many times I'm the facilitator, and I enjoy observing how each group and student accomplishes the goal set before them. And having the students engage in small group activities help me be able to be more efficiently manage potential and behavior. I found that when I go around I'm able to know the need. I'm able to know whether they're answering, whether they're engaging in the group and that gives me opportunity to know of any need that they might have.

Mike:

I felt that distributing the power so to speak gave me the freedom to kind of uh, to do other things that I wouldn't normally have been able to do like in say a traditional lecture. With the cooperative learning I found that as the student in the process, I can make more evaluations as far as where the student is at even though they're working in groups.

Kathy:

It was very satisfying for me to see how much the children enjoyed learning and learning the content within second grade, and taking ownership of their learning, and just, you know, instead of the teacher being so teacher directed. Just stepping

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back as a teacher being a facilitator and watching the children engage and learn and help their classmates learn that was just wonderful.

Jane:

I think the effect is good across the board, personally, I mean I really do.

Bob:

I felt uh, it gave opportunity for to know that for me as an instructor I was able to um, at least a part address different learning styles. Um, and to know that the class environment was a little bit more vibrant. Um, because obviously as I'm lecturing or giving information I could see I'm losing my audience um, and it allows me uh, to take a break to go in to Pair Share with some type of structure activity and that allows them to engage. And you see the neurons in their brains are firing off again and it allows them to get engaged and to participate in discussion and then also, kinda last, but it gives them opportunity to uh, to solidify certain things that we're discussed because maybe there's a certain need for clarification. And so then with the group discussion that may lead to it allows to foster more learning. So, I think it's a great component to lessons to make sure it spices it up. It has a positive effect.

Tina:

Well, me for the teachers, the positive is that you've got them all actively engaged and so you're there's it's like a behavioral kind of management thing in a way they're not getting bored with it's just you up there lecturing or reviewing. Everyone's doing something, they're doing an activity to actually learn and I think that cuts down on behaviorals.

Beth:

>   I like it when they're engaged. That made me feel good because they were
>
>   actually participating and doing what I asked them to do. Uh, that's always good
>
>   when you're seeing them actually discuss and then try to figure out okay no do it
>
>   this way, um, you know they're doing the crossword puzzles if they're doing
>
>   whatever, no do it this way, do it this way, and you see them cooperating with
>
>   each other. I like that because you didn't have, and even if they disagreed you
>
>   could see them work it out themselves. If I didn't necessarily have to step in and
>
>   that was good because I could see them developing some social skills that way.
>
>   So that was good.

The participants overall perceptions regarding the cooperative learning use in the classroom was positive. The reciprocal effect between the teacher and the students demonstrated positive emotions as both groups engaged in a new learning method. It seemed that the more the students enjoyed and became engaged in the experience, the more the teachers released the need for control over the classroom and allowed the process to take its course. The structures evolved into the parameters necessary for success to ensue for both groups of constituents.

Conclusion

The participants in this study embraced the trainings and the use of these cooperative learning instructional strategies. Their energy and dedication to openly try a new instructional strategy is noted as genuine and sincere. The time commitment to the trainings, observations, and the interview showed the group to be seasoned professionals who know and understand their calling and desire to teach young people. Education is their passion and it was shown in the dedication to their craft.

Experienced teachers have a unique dynamic as they have the experience of being in the classroom for possibly many years. This study's definition lists an experienced teacher as one who has taught five years or more. The average amount of teaching experience of these participants is 16 years. Although cooperative learning has impacted the field of education for many years and has a long history, it is a wrong to assume that experienced teachers have been exposed to the concepts or structures. This study shows that although the majority of the participants had heard of the term cooperative learning they had not had much exposure to the instructional method.

Cooperative learning instructional strategies that have been taught in this study, according to the participants, will continue to be a part of their classroom experiences. Experienced teachers in this study were open to learn and experiment with new instructional strategies that were promoted to improve the classroom environment. The time spent and things learned were positive for all.

Summary

Chapter four discussed the findings from the study to include the participant summaries, individual descriptions of the participants, a discussion of the observations, trainings, and interviews, and the emergent themes were identified. These six emergent themes were then discussed in further detail. The final chapter of this study will summarize the findings, address the limitations, and conclude with recommendations for further research and study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The focus of the final chapter of this dissertation is to address the research questions presented in this study. A brief summary will outline the major course of the study to include the methodology followed by conclusions and an overview of limitations. The final section will provide recommendations for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and its implementation in the classroom. In addition the study explored individual's definitions of cooperative learning, prior trainings, use, and experiences with cooperative learning, frequency of use, and perceived impact on students. The specific questions guiding this research concerning the perceptions of experienced teachers in regards to cooperative leaning training and use in the classroom were developed and are listed as follows:

1. What do experienced teachers perceive about cooperative learning training as it relates to their classroom teaching?

2. What do experienced teachers perceive regarding cooperative learning use as it relates to their classroom teaching?

3. What are the impacts of cooperative learning training and implementation on experienced teachers?

4. What challenges do experienced teachers face when implementing cooperative learning structures in their classrooms?

Data collection for this study included the trainings in cooperative learning, the six weeks of observations in the classrooms of each participant, and the interview section. The interview contained twelve questions concerning the cooperative learning trainings,

perceptions, prior and current use, perceived impact on the teachers themselves, perceived impact on the students, and particular stories of the experience. The participants shared their perceptions and feelings about the experiences of the trainings and of the subsequent use of cooperative learning in the classroom.

Theoretical Implications

This research study relied on two theoretical implications, the social learning theory developed by Bandura (1986) and the sociocultural theory developed by Vygotsky (1997). These two theories address social learning and the impact that observational learning and the environment play on human behavior. The theories also relate to the cooperative learning aspect of the study in several ways:

1. Cooperative learning has positive effects on students and teachers. These positive effects impact the feelings of the students as well as the teachers. Therefore, the environment is altered by the positive impact and modeling displayed. As the teacher and the students engage in the experience there is reciprocal teaching as well as reciprocal learning and all benefit.

2. The students and teachers learn from those around them. This observational scaffolding allows all participants to learn on their own while being helped by others. They react to rewards and punishments and are conditioned by their environment.

Cooperative learning is a group dynamic that involves all participants working together to achieve a common goal. This social experience has an impact on all participants and the behavior modeled influences thought as well as motivation (Slavin, 2006). Learning takes place within this group environment through collaboration and social context.

<center>**Discussion of the Findings**</center>

Using the emergent themes gleaned from the data analysis, I have organized the discussion section by headings that correspond to and represent the research questions that informed this study.

Training

Participants in this study shared a common thread in that they all had taught at least five or more years. The average time spent in the classroom teaching for these participants was 16 years. With that thought in mind, these participants would have completed their college undergraduate coursework, on average, in 1996. If the participants did not engage in further graduate study or continuing college credits, the form of continuing education that they would most likely be receiving would be faculty in-service instruction (Hill, 2009, Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Depending on the direction and pedagogical style of the institution in which they worked, the in-service trainings could vary greatly. These in-service training sessions may or may not have involved cooperative learning instruction or exposure.

It would be incorrect to assume that each participant had prior college training and/or experience with cooperative learning even though it would have been an instructional strategy taught in many educational settings (Slavin, 2003). This gap in prior knowledge or training in cooperative learning instructional strategies was evident with the current trainings and interviews with these participants. The majority of the participants in this study indicated that they had heard of the term cooperative learning, but had no formal training. This fact, that experienced teachers may have had no experience and/or training in cooperative learning instructional strategies, is a significant finding in this study. With the amount of information in the literature regarding the

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benefits of cooperative learning on multiple levels, the significance of reintroducing the concepts, methodology, structures and ideology of cooperative learning to experienced teachers is noteworthy.

Experienced teachers in this study also indicated that they appreciated and enjoyed the training in cooperative learning as well as felt that the training was a positive experience. The teachers spent many hours in the trainings; handouts and hard copies of information were given, and homework encouraged. The teachers' participation in this study was voluntary, and therefore the time spent learning the various cooperative learning instructional strategies for use in their classrooms required outside time and preparation. Even with this extra amount of work, the majority of the teachers appreciated learning something new which would benefit their classroom environment. The trainings were described as enjoyable, positive, and a good experience which inspired feelings of confidence within the classroom. This finding is in agreement with the literature on cooperative learning and teacher in-service (Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevin, 2004; Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith 1998; Jolliffe, 2007; Mentz, van der Walt, & Goosen, 2008; Ross, 1994; Shachar & Shmuelevitz, 1997; Stahl 2005). It was indicated even by the teacher who did not use cooperative learning in the classroom that the training was still both an enjoyable and positive experience. Experienced teachers in this study seemed to appreciate the time investment into their personal educational careers.

Usage

Regarding the use of cooperative learning in the classrooms, the teachers in this study felt the use of cooperative learning in the classroom had positive effects on their students. Similar findings were noted by Mentz, van der Walt, and Goosen, 2008, and

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Shachar and Shmuelevitz, 1997. It was distinguished that retention of material increased, students seemed to experience a greater sense of accomplishment, students enjoyed the structures, shyer students seemed to be drawn out within the groups, cooperation and sharing amongst students increased, students became more patient, others' opinions were respected more, student engagement dramatically increased, students took a greater ownership of their learning, communication skills were developed, learning became fun according to the students, and there was full participation by all students. Although the length of the study was only six weeks in duration, some of the participants felt there were academic gains due to the student engagement and comprehension levels increasing. The participants also indicated that as the students became more engaged and the benefits were seen and felt throughout the classroom, it made the experience for the teachers a more positive experience as well in a reciprocal effect. As the cooperative learning structures became easier for the teachers to implement, the stress level decreased while the enjoyment of the experience increased.

Perceived Impact

Another finding from the study was that the participants who had had minimal knowledge of or training in cooperative learning realized that there was unique difference between standard group work and actual cooperative learning as a result of the new cooperative learning trainings. Many of the participants in the study had indicated that in their past experiences they had utilized standard group work as a method of instruction. They also indicated that they had seen previous benefits of group work in their classrooms. However, in standard group work, assessment was a difficulty as well as the chaos that possibly ensued. After the trainings, the participants indicated that learning how to assess individually through the cooperative learning techniques was beneficial

knowledge. These positive impacts are also discussed in Johnson and Johnson (1992). In addition, the dramatic difference between group work and actual cooperative learning revealed to the participants a more structured and productive interaction. Some of the participants indicated feelings of frustration on how to organize groups before the trainings, but adding the named cooperative learning structures brought clarity and meaning to the learning experience. The majority of the participants indicated that their students enjoy working in groups; however, the structures now gave definition and meaning to the process.

Challenges

The challenges to implementing the cooperative learning instructional strategies experienced by the participants were few but noted. Some of these challenges are congruent with what Kagan (2009) discusses. The participants indicated that there was extra time required in adding the cooperative learning structures to their lesson plans. Because the cooperative learning structures were new, more time was needed in assessing how the structure would fit into the lessons and curriculum. Also, the participants were not as comfortable at first using the structures across each curriculum and identified that they had more success in a specific subject area. This cumbersome task led some of the participants to not use the structures as frequently as they possibly would have due to the extra time required. Another challenge indicated by several of the participants was the loss of individual teacher control. This was the main reason why one of the participants was not comfortable using the cooperative learning structures and chose to not use them. Cooperative learning takes place in the form of a group rather than traditional lecturing where the individual teacher stands at the front of the room, in complete control, lecturing. Many of the experienced teachers indicated that classroom control was a top

priority in their college training and their current evaluation process. The seemingly

unstructured nature of cooperative learning made some of the participants uncomfortable

due to the loss of teacher control and noise level. The experienced teachers were used to

a quiet, structured, teacher led environment. This new way of learning took some of

them out of their historical comfort zone. After the realization of the benefits to the

cooperative learning structures, some of the participants felt more at ease. However, the

years of previous experience in a quiet, structured, and teacher led classroom was what

the teachers were predominantly accustomed to. Adjusting to the "chaos" and noise level

was difficult for some as even observed during the classroom observations.

Overall, the participants perceived the use of cooperative leaning structures in the

classroom as a positive experience for them. All participants indicated that they would

use the structures in the future and would like more training to become more

knowledgeable about the different structures. One participant indicated that it was a great

experience to try something new after the many years of previous teaching. Another felt

more successful as a teacher for having used the structures in the classroom. One felt

they grew as a teacher from the experience. In the area of assessment, several indicated

that because of the cooperative learning experience, they felt that as a teacher they had

more knowledge where the students were at so that the assessment of the content

knowledge was immediate. This allowed for revision and modification of the content of

the lessons as the knowledge level of the students was more evident. One participant

went as far as indicating that it would be a loss not to use cooperative learning in the

classroom as the effect on the students so dramatically impacted this teacher. Several

participants spoke about cooperative learning addressing all the different learning styles

and how beneficial that was. The traditional lecture style does not always address the

kinesthetic and visual learner. The one participant who chose not to use the structures even indicated that the door would not be closed to use of cooperative learning in the future as benefits were seen from the experience.

Recommendations

This phenomenological study has examined experienced teacher's perceptions of cooperative learning training and its implementation in their classrooms. These experienced teachers had little or no knowledge of cooperative learning and its structures before the study. Based on the findings from the observations, trainings, interviews, and data integration, the following recommendations for school districts, administrators, teacher trainers, and experienced teachers have been developed.

School Districts. Experienced teachers are an asset to many school districts. These seasoned educators are rewarded in many districts with a higher pay level for their years of experience. Their years of experience in the classroom as well as knowledge gained through these years of experience can be a benefit to a school system. Continuing education programs as well as effective in-service time for these experienced teachers may enhance the already existing educational knowledge base of these faculty members. Effective pedagogical skills taught during these in-service programs that improve achievement test scores, increase teacher efficacy, and strengthen student engagement would benefit all constituents. Although the current focus is on areas such as Common Core and differentiated learning styles, it may be beneficial to review some previously popular instructional methods that some teachers may not have knowledge of or are not currently using. It is popular for current educational themes to be the topic of many in-service programs. Perhaps revisiting some instructional methods that have a solid track

record would strengthen the new research and trends in education. Therefore, the following recommendations are noted:

- Provide in-service training in cooperative learning instructional methodology, strategies, and structures

- Identification in areas of previous training of experienced faculty to recognize possible gaps in knowledge of proven instructional strategies such as cooperative learning

- Release of funds predominantly for experienced teachers for continuing education college credit or advanced degrees to stay current with educational and instructional trends in their field

- Development of curriculum to include cooperative learning instructional strategies within the lessons and curriculum to make the use of cooperative learning more readily accessible and easily used

Administrators. School administrators have multiple pressures to ensure student scores are strong, the school environment is safe, faculty are retained, effective and content, and the budget is managed. Because of these concerns, investing in experienced teachers may be at the bottom of the priority list. However, experienced faculty may be a tremendous asset to a school in providing stability, ensuring a quality educational experience for students and families, and guaranteeing wisdom within the classroom environment. These experienced faculty may be overlooked as far as professional development is concerned as they have years of experience behind them. Assuming that experienced faculty members have been effectively prepared with all the best

instructional practices in the past may lead to an improper knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. With these thoughts in mind administrators should:

- Continually evaluate experienced faculty for possible deficiencies in their previous training to provide for quality in-service programs in needed areas

- Provide in-service opportunities for experienced teachers in all effective instructional strategies, past and present, to include cooperative learning

- Offer multiple opportunities for open dialog concerning the needs of the experienced teacher

- Make available resources for experienced teachers to grow and develop on a continual basis to encourage and refresh the experienced teacher

Teacher Trainers. Teacher trainers or instructional coaches are currently on the rise within school systems. Districts are recognizing the need for continual professional development for faculty and staff. These teacher trainers hold the keys to faculty development in choosing the best options and methods to be taught during the limited in-service time available within a school year. Also, teacher trainers should stay closely attuned to faculty needs and concerns. Listening to the needs of the experienced teacher is beneficial in the planning of these instructional sessions throughout the year. The needs of the novice teachers are important. However, continual development of the experienced teacher warrants a high priority as well. Based on these needs, teacher trainers should be obliged to:

- Continue to challenge the experienced teacher to try new and effective instructional strategies to comprise cooperative learning

- Take the time to evaluate and discuss prior knowledge of multiple

  instructional strategies to include cooperative learning at a one on one

  level

- Provide support and resources for these instructional strategies to be

  successful

- Offer time out of the classroom for these learning opportunities whether it

  is at a conference or observing another teacher use these strategies

  effectively

- Continue to stay current with past and present instructional changes to be

  able to provide the experienced teacher with current data

Experienced Teachers. Experienced teachers, for the purpose of this study, were

defined as teachers who have taught for five or more years (Gatbonton, 1999; Martin,

Yin, & Mayall, 2006; Tsui, 2003). These professional educators have had time to adjust

to the newness of the classroom environment and student challenges as well as the

policies and procedures of their current school system. As the years progress,

experienced teachers may find themselves comfortable with their routines and the

instructional strategies that work for them. Therefore, the rapid development of

technological change along with growing expectations of parents for an exemplary

student education may dictate that experienced teachers stay abreast of educational

developments that enhance the learning experience. Instructional strategies that may

have worked in the past must be continually reviewed and adjusted to the current

populations needs. Experienced teachers should:

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- Be aware of instructional stagnation where the academic flow has stopped and the same pedagogical techniques are used over and over

- Not be afraid to try new instructional strategies, such as cooperative learning, which allow one to think outside the box for a change

- Strive to be a lifelong learner in every area of education as our current population has ever changing needs

- Attempt to release some control of the academic environment to allow for more student centered activities on occasion, such as cooperative learning

- Realize that teacher centered instruction may not always be the best channel of content imparting pedagogy

Limitations of the Study

This study explored the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and its use in the classroom. The scope of this study is limited as it involved only experienced teachers from a private, Christian school for a six week period. The perceptions of this population may have been unique to the private school setting rather than the public school. Also, exposure to a broader range of educational experiences that may be available to a public school counterpart because of public funds may have affected the knowledge base of the participants. The time limitation of only six weeks may have played a factor in the results as well. A longer time period for observations and reflection may have led to a more nuanced assessment of cooperative learning training and its use in the classroom. The study was limited to thirteen initial participants and eleven who completed the study. Because this was a qualitative study, using a purposive sampling strategy may have limited the breadth of information and

experiences presented. Another factor was that the Head of School at this research site was also the Principal Investigator. Although documentation provided to the participants clearly stated that there would be no employment repercussions to the participation in the study, there may have been a feeling among the participants to respond in a manner that the participants felt was expected of them in a work environment. Although every effort was made to delineate the relationship between the Head of School and the Principal Investigator, there may have been some cross interference of roles in the minds of the participants. Finally, the researcher is a Christian school administrator at the school base studied and therefore the interpretation may be perceived as somewhat of a bias in perspective. Because of the position that I hold, strong conscious effort was made to view the study through the lens of a researcher rather than their boss and administrator. Each training, observation, and interview session my thought process was internally checked and altered to the role of the researcher for the purpose of an unbiased approach.

Implications for Further Research

This was a phenomenological qualitative study of experienced teachers. The importance of their perceptions played a significant role in their evaluation of the cooperative learning trainings and use of these strategies in the classroom. Although this study was qualitative in nature, the information gathered may have been conducive for a quantitative proposal. Following these experienced teachers for a longer period of time may allow for more data collection involving possible academic gains and perceptions regarding long term and/or continual use of the cooperative learning structures.

The experienced teacher may be overlooked in the current research as so much focus in education is on scores and common standards. This population must continue to be evaluated and assessed as to their ongoing educational and instructional needs. Older

pedagogical skills, which may or may not still be effective in the classroom, need to be appraised on a continual basis. The needs of the experienced teacher should be explored in greater depth. Assuming that because a teacher has many years of experience they are more effective in the classroom may be an improper assumption. Continual growth and development as a professional educator must be reprioritized within the individual as well as the school system. Further research concerning experienced teachers and the needs of their in-service training may lead to new insight into this population.

Cooperative learning is a popular instructional strategy that has been used worldwide with great success (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Yet, it is possible that this effective instructional strategy has slipped through the knowledge base of many experienced teachers. This proven effective instructional method should be reintroduced with vigor in the educational environment. Educational circles seem to focus on the new instructional strategies and techniques when perhaps an older method, such as cooperative learning, may need to be reevaluated for classroom use, particularly with experienced teachers who may need some fresh ideas to enrich the classroom environment. Extended research involving these two dynamics, cooperative learning and the experienced teacher, may result in further information that may benefit the seasoned professional.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of Experienced Teacher Perceptions Regarding Cooperative
Learning Training and Cooperative Learning Implementation in the Classroom

Susan R. Robinson
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study of the perceptions of
experienced teachers regarding cooperative learning training and its implementation in
the classroom. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an
experienced faculty member of the school system being studied. We request that you
read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Susan R. Robinson, Doctoral candidate, School of
Education, Liberty University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of experienced teachers regarding
cooperative learning training and its implementation in the classroom.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
Participate in the cooperative learning training, allow observations of your classroom
teaching throughout the study, and allow the Principal Investigator to conduct an
interview concerning cooperative learning training and its implementation in the
classroom.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study has minimal risks which should not exceed more than what you would
encounter in everyday life. Your identity and the identity of your school district will be
kept confidential.

The benefits to participation are several training sessions in cooperative learning instructional strategies which will be documented as in-service hours toward recertification of your teaching certificate, and learning various cooperative learning techniques which could enhance the learning environment.

Compensation:

Participation in this study is purely voluntary. No compensation will be paid for participation. However, in service points will be awarded for the time spent in the cooperative learning training sessions which will be applied toward recertification of teaching certificate.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In the event that this project is published, no information will be used to indicate the identity of the participants. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All interviews and observations will be anonymous, and no names will be reported. Printed interviews will be kept in a locked location and shredded after seven years. Interviews will be identified only by a numbering system.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or with Hollywood Christian School. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Susan R. Robinson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 786-295-9113, srrobinson2@liberty.edu . The advisor for this study is Dr. Jeffrey Savage and he may be reached at jsavage2@liberty.edu .

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian:_____ Date: _____
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

December 14, 2011

Susan Robinson

IRB Approval 1224.121411: A Phenomenological Study of Experienced Teacher Perceptions Regarding Cooperative Learning Training and Cooperative Learning Implementation in the Classroom

Dear Susan,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
IRB Chair, Associate Professor

Center for Counseling & Family Studies
(434) 592-5054

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO PARTICIPATE TO TEACHERS

Date

Dear Faculty,
You are invited to attend an informational meeting concerning voluntary participation in a research study that will be conducted on our campus. This meeting will discuss your opportunity to participate in this 6 week study on Cooperative Learning. All participation is voluntary and any information will be kept confidential. All information concerning this study will be discussed during the meeting.
This meeting will take place on   in Fellowship Hall from 3:00PM – 3:30PM.

Thank you,

Susan R. Robinson
Hollywood Christian School
1708 N. 60th Avenue
Hollywood, Florida 33021

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Time of interview:
Date:
Interviewer:
Participant:

1. What is your definition of cooperative learning?

2. What did you know about cooperative learning before having cooperative learning training?

3. What experiences have you had with cooperative learning before this training, if any?

4. Have you ever used a cooperative learning structure before this training? If so, which one and with whom? Please describe this experience.

5. Have you used a cooperative learning structure since the training? If so, which one and with whom? Please describe this experience.

6. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what stories can you share about using a structure?

7. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, which structure(s) do you use with your class and how frequently do you use them?

8. If you have not used a cooperative learning structure, what are the reasons for not using them?

9. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what were the positive effects on your students, if any? What were the negative effects on your students, if any?

10. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, what were the effects on you as a teacher, if any?

11. If you have used a cooperative learning structure, will you continue to use them in the future? If you have not used a cooperative learning structure, will you use them in the future?

12. How long have you been teaching?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

LETTER TO PARENTS

January 17, 2012

Dear School Families,
Greetings from Hollywood Christian School! I pray that this email finds you well and enjoying the new year!

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about a research study that is being conducted on our campus. The study – A Phenomenological Study of Experienced Teacher Perceptions Regarding Cooperative Learning Training and Cooperative Learning Implementation in the Classroom—will be conducted over the next six weeks. Several faculty and staff members will be participating in this study. Our entire faculty has received multiple trainings in Cooperative Learning Strategies throughout this school year. These instructional strategies are proven to improve test scores, student comprehension, student engagement, and student self-esteem.

The faculty will be observed approximately six times throughout the course of these six weeks and then be interviewed on their perceptions of the trainings and implementation of the strategies in their classroom. I personally will be doing the observations and while the observations will be taking place, classroom instruction will continue as normal and there will be no disruption to student learning or the classroom environment. This data will then be processed and documented in the research study. Your student and/or student's teacher will not be identified in any way in the study.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to contact my office.

Susan R. Robinson
Head of School
Hollywood Christian School
(954) 322-4365
srobinson@hollywoodchristianschool.org

HCS
Hollywood
Christian School
"Changing Our World, One Diploma at a Time."

October 27, 2011

Pastor Brian Burkholder, President

Hollywood Christian School

1708 N. 60th Avenue

Hollywood, Florida 33021

Dear IRB Board:

It is my understanding that Susan R. Robinson will be conducting a research study at Hollywood Christian School on "A Phenomenological Study of the Perceptions of Experienced Teachers Regarding Cooperative Learning Training and use in the Classroom ". Ms. Robinson has informed me of the design of the study as well as the targeted population.

I support this effort and will provide any assistance necessary for the successful implementation of this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at (954) 322-4402.

Sincerely,

President, Hollywood Christian School