

**TOWARDS COOPERATIVE
LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doctor Glenn Kirchner is an internationally recognized expert in elementary school physical education. He received the Margie Hanson Award for Distinguished Service in 2000 for his contributions to elementary school physical education programs in the United States. His teaching career includes elementary through university teacher education programs. He has traveled to many countries as an expert clinician and visiting professor. As an author, his books include *Introduction to Movement Education*, 2nd Edition (1978), *Physical Education for Elementary School Children*, 10th Edition (1998), and *Children's Games from Around the World*, 2nd Edition (2000). He has also produced over thirty instructional films that have been used in several countries.

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By

GLENN KIRCHNER

*Professor Emeritus
Simon Fraser University*



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*To
Diane
Thanks for your support, ideas and patience*

PREFACE

There is a strong contemporary trend toward establishing a more cooperative learning environment in all grades and with all subject areas. The reason for this educational shift is based upon substantial research evidence indicating cooperative teaching strategies are superior to individualistic and competitive methods. To support this statement, cooperative teaching strategies produce higher academic achievement in all subject areas and in all grade levels. Children show a significant increase in individual and group motivation, a more positive attitude towards the subject matter and show a higher level of inferential and creative thinking. Other studies reveal a positive improvement in interpersonal relations among children with different ethnic backgrounds. And children who work in cooperative learning groups demonstrate more positive social behavior than students working in traditional structured learning situations.

Although there are several acceptable definitions of a cooperative teaching strategy, four essential elements are common to all definitions. First, each learning group, regardless of size, must be a heterogeneous mix of the abilities, interests, and ethnic and personal backgrounds represented in the class. Second, and perhaps the most important element, is positive interdependence. This means the members of each group perceive they cannot reach their goal unless they work cooperatively together. Third is individual and group accountability which means that each individual is assessed and the results reviewed by the individual and his group. This process ensures that every member of each group knows who needs help, support, and encouragement. The fourth element is social collaborative skills. If an individual who does not understand and use social skills such as sharing ideas and equipment, respecting another person's point of view, encouraging and praising teammates, there is little hope in establishing a cooperative learning environment within the group. Arranging heterogeneous working groups

is the responsibility of the teacher. The remaining three elements must be taught to children in a gradual and systematic way if a cooperative learning environment is to be established.

Virtually all investigations that have proven the superiority of cooperative teaching strategies have been done in academic subject areas, with almost none in physical education. Our current physical education programs stress individualistic and competitive teaching strategies which have been successful with highly skilled and physically fit children. They have not been successful with children who have minimum levels of motor skill and who lack an appropriate level of fitness. New problems, such as children who are overweight, obese, undernourished, or new arrivals from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, require more cooperative programs that can integrate these children into a more cooperative learning environment.

This book is not a collection of cooperative games, although there are several included, or a selection of gymnastic, dance, and fitness activities that require children to work together. It is a book that begins a process of gradually introducing creative and cooperative teaching strategies into the physical education program. The six cooperative components of fun, cooperation, success, participation, equality, and trust, described in Chapter 4 are the important catalyst or factor that allow teachers to change existing games, dance, and gymnastic activities into cooperative activities. These components are also used to guide children through a process of creating their own cooperative activities. When these components become part of movement challenges and tasks in games, dance, gymnastic and fitness activities, they also emphasize the cooperative learning elements of heterogeneous groupings, positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, and many social collaborative skills.

As a writer of other physical education books, I know it is important to provide photographs, sample lesson plans, and student and teacher follow-up comments on how these new ideas work. The creative and cooperative results of teacher's and student's work is proof that we can create a cooperative learning environment in our physical education programs.

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