

What happens when social intentions are introduced as part of the learning criteria?

Name: Alison Meechan

Group: 2D

Rationale

Co-operative learning offers the opportunity for pupils to work together to achieve a clearly stated goal. In order to be successful, all pupils must display a variety of social skills which enable them to positively contribute to group learning. As teachers, it is important that we teach such social skills in order that pupils understand:

- what the skill is;
- why they are learning the particular skill;
- ways in which the skill will be practised;
- how well they have used the skill and how they can improve.

(Bennett, Rolheiser & Stevahn, 1991)

According to Johnson & Johnson (2018), 'Teachers have to teach teamwork skills just as purposefully and precisely as teachers do academic skills'. With this in mind, an enquiry was designed to explore the impact of setting social intentions at the beginning of co-operative learning lessons.

Aims

To evaluate the impact of setting a social intention on pupils' ability to:

- display intended social behaviours e.g. good listening.
- work co-operatively with their peers.

Methodology

Data was collected over a series of four co-operative learning lessons. Learning intentions and success criteria were discussed at the beginning of each lesson and a social intention set. In order to ensure understanding of the social intention, pupils participated in a simple Think Pair Share activity. Pupil responses were recorded on a chart showing what the intended social behaviours ought to look and sound like. Four different social intentions were assessed over the course of the four lessons: to listen to each other, to take turns, to use kind words and to contribute to group learning. Pupils then carried out a research task, with each member of a co-operative group being responsible for learning about a specific subject area then sharing the information they had discovered with their group. At the end of the lessons, learning was

assessed using a variety of formative techniques. Achievement of social intentions were assessed using verbal and written peer- and self-assessment as well as teacher observations of the class as a whole and of specifically chosen pupils. Pupils were asked to self- and peer-assess using the 'Fist to Five' method and were later asked to provide written feedback using a comment sheet (see Appendices 1 & 2).

Findings

Across the four lessons, pupils generally self-assessed their performance of the various social skills very highly. When giving a 'Fist to Five' for the social intention of 'listening to each other', 21 out of 26 pupils rated themselves as a 4 or a 5. Those who were less confident were asked what they thought they could do to improve their performance. Interestingly, two of the children talked about looking at the person who was speaking, something which was identified when pupils created a class chart for their social intention at the beginning of the lesson. Further examples of pupils referring back to the social intention chart were evident when pupils produced written self-assessment (see Appendix 1). All pupils felt that they had used kind words at all times or most of the time and, for those who felt there was a little room for improvement, comments around the things they could do to improve centred around the behaviours identified in the class chart e.g.

Pupil 1: 'Be more kind and use words like please and thank you'

Pupil 2: 'Work on giving nice compliments'.

Pupils were also asked to provide peer-assessment of social intentions in both a verbal and written format. As was the case with self-assessment, most pupils rated their shoulder partners very highly with a 'Fist to Five' score of 4 or 5. However, they were very reluctant to offer further feedback on how their shoulder partners could improve. When offering written peer-assessment (see Appendix 2), only 1 pupil out of 28 felt that their shoulder partner did not meet their social intention of making a significant contribution to group learning. Interestingly for this social intention, most suggestions for improvement really focussed around better listening or speaking in a louder voice rather than on behaviours identified in the social intention chart.

Observation of the class as a whole showed that setting and, perhaps more importantly, discussing social intentions at the beginning of the lesson led to those social skills being consistently displayed throughout. Consequently, the fact pupils were listening to each other, taking turns, using kind words and making a contribution led to a more successful co-operative learning experience. For pupils previously identified as struggling with their social skills, class discussion around a social intention allowed an opportunity for pupils to consider exactly where they were going wrong and what they could do to try and rectify their behaviour. The social intention chart was also a valuable teaching tool as it remained on display throughout the lesson and could be referred to if a particular pupil required support or

a reminder of their social intention e.g. 'I don't feel that you are listening to me. I know this because you are not looking at me and you are talking at the same time as me.'

Conclusions

Overall, setting and discussing a social intention at the beginning of a co-operative lesson had a positive impact on pupils' ability to display the social skills required. This was clear from both peer- and self-assessments and from observations of the class as a whole. Discussing the social intention and constructing a chart around it allowed pupils to consider exactly what was expected of them and gave a clear set of criteria to refer to throughout the lesson, which was also useful from a teaching perspective. Through doing their best to display the social skills required of them, pupils had a more productive co-operative learning experience.

Implications for Future Practice

As this was a small-scale enquiry, the conclusions drawn are limited in nature. It would be interesting to find out if setting a social intention has a similar impact on lessons when there is not the same in-depth discussion involved. It would also be interesting to repeat such co-operative lessons over a longer period of time in order to assess their long-term impact on pupils' social and team-working skills.

Given the obvious positive impact observed in the short-term, setting and discussing social intentions within co-operative learning lessons is something that should be continued in the future.

Bibliography

Bennett, B., Rolheiser, C. & Stevahn, L. (1991) 'Where Heart Meets Mind: An Interactive Resource Book'

http://www.instructionalleadership.ie/images/pdfs/barriebooks/Barrie_Bennett_Cooperative_Learning.compressed.pdf (accessed 03/03/2018)

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (2018) 'An Overview of Cooperative Learning'

<http://www.co-operation.org/what-is-cooperative-learning/> (accessed 03/03/2018)

Appendix 1

Social Intention: to use kind words when speaking to each other.

Circle the emoji that best shows how well you did today.



I used kind words
at all times.



I used kind words
most of the time.



I did not use kind words
most of the time.

Is there anything you could do to improve? If so, what? -----

Appendix 2

Social Intention: to make a contribution to group learning.

Circle the emoji that best shows how you think your shoulder partner did today.



They made a very big contribution.



They made a good contribution.



They did not contribute much at all.

What, if anything, could they do to improve? -----
