

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

GROUP PROJECTS IN PRACTICE: A SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDY

By

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Group projects have been employed in the pedagogy of cooperative learning since its advent. They combine the educational goals of intellectual advancement and socialization. Proponents see joint efforts such as group projects as means by which both goals can be achieved simultaneously. Numerous studies have sought to identify the efficacy of collaborative learning in its various forms.

This 2005 qualitative research study employed a questionnaire and follow-up interview process to evaluate the roles of educators and students in group projects at the secondary school level and to assess their effectiveness according to the goals and objectives established by the advocates of cooperative learning. A sample of 103 students, educators, and parents participated in the questionnaire, and approximately 25% of the sample was interviewed. The 3 research questions, (a) Do teachers direct, oversee, and monitor group projects regularly?; (b) Do students benefit from group projects, both academically and socially?; and (c) Are group projects in practice formatted to maximize

selection, organization, learning time, and benefits?, were designed to solicit experiential input from the sample populations for analysis and interpretation. The hypothesis that group projects do not always follow the organizational structures outlined by proponents such as Robert Slavin (1995) and David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1998) was proved. Additionally, the difference in perceptions among the sample constituencies was shown. The research report concludes with recommendations and practical suggestions for the improvement of group projects in practice and raises questions for additional research concerning an integrated approach to the interview process that enables the constituencies to interface.

This qualitative research adds to the existing literature regarding cooperative learning through group projects. A range of participants had the opportunity to evaluate its practice at the secondary school level. Unlike studies that have quantified group projects from an achievement perspective or have concentrated on their elementary or middle school applications, this case study focused on experiential data provided by stakeholders in a high school setting. It is designed to provide insight into the use of these projects in practice and the way in which they conform to the standards of cooperative learning advocates.