

How This Learning Experience Reflects Current Scholarship in my Field and "Best" Classroom Practice

Much of this learning experience was structured cooperatively. Debate partners were linked interdependently in a number of ways (goal, identity, environmental, task) while still being individually accountable for their work.

Research supports the notion that cooperative learning helps student achievement but , more importantly, naturally facilitates a number higher order thinking skills and related behaviors the NYS Standards call for students to demonstrate.

For example, *In Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the Classroom*, David and Roger Johnson (University of Minnesota) argue research shows "cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences. These results hold true for all age levels, for all subject areas, and for tasks involving concept attainment, verbal problem solving, retention and memory, and guessing and predicting. Cooperative learning experiences, furthermore, promote greater competencies in critical thinking, more positive attitudes toward subject areas studied, and greater competencies in working collaboratively with others...."

More specifically, the Johnsons' suggest in *Advanced Cooperative Learning* that debates structured like The Outsiders' Debate Project, which use academic controversy and creative conflict, have positive effects on students in at least three areas: the effort to achieve, positive interpersonal relationships, and psychological health and social competence. Below are some of the specific positive effects they mention:

Effort to Achieve:

- greater motivation to achieve
- greater search for more information about the topic/position debated
- greater mastery and retention of subject matter being studied
- ability to generalize the principles learned to a wider variety of situations
- more frequent use of higher reasoning strategies
- higher-quality decisions and solutions to complex problems for which different viewpoints can plausibly be developed
- more frequent synthesis combining more than one perspective

Positive Interpersonal Relationships:

- greater liking and social support among participants
- concurrence - seeking

Psychological Health and Social Competence:

- higher academic self-esteem
- greater perspective taking accuracy