

# Cooperative Kids

The concept of cooperative learning is **alien** to all of us who were taught the **traditional** way, but it offers our children the **adventure** of finding their own answers. Di Lilford reports.

If you took a doctor from the 19th century and put her in a modern operating theatre, she would have no idea what to do, but if you put a teacher from the 19th century into a modern classroom she would be able to **carry on** teaching without **pause**.  0  D

The idea **remains** that students are empty **containers** which the teacher fills with **knowledge**, and that all students have to do is listen and write.

Education **consultant** Alyce Miller says: "This approach does not work in today's changing world. We are not teaching **creative** problem-solving. We encourage competition, believing that this brings out the best in people." But this is not so.  1  She goes on to say that the teacher's role is no longer to feed students with information. "The facts are **available** in libraries, on CD ROMS and on the Internet. What students need are the skills to find this information, to use it and to think **creatively** in order to solve the problems of our world."

Miller believes that cooperative learning is the future of education and thinks of it as the best way to encourage responsibility, tolerance and **helpfulness** towards others.  2

In cooperative learning classes, the traditional classroom physical **layout** is abandoned.  3

Pupils learn to work first in **pairs**, then in threes, and finally in teams of four. Students **are required to** participate actively in discussing and **shaping** their own knowledge. The teacher, who is still very important to the **process**, becomes the helper rather than the **master**.

Aarnout Brombacher, head of the mathematics department at Westerford High School, says: "The incorrect **assumption** that many people make about cooperative

learning is that it is merely group work. It is much, much more.  4  With this **technique**, most of the time in the classroom is spent teaching them these **skills** - life skills."

Brett Melville, a 17-year-old pupil at the school, agrees. "You learn the same **material** as you would using the normal method, but this way you learn how to work with others at the same time. In our class, we are given enough time to discuss issues and problems in detail."

5  One teacher, Lynne Gedye, has been using cooperative learning in her classes for two years. She says, "This year we have several pupils in the class who can hardly speak a word of English. I was **tearing my hair out, wondering** what to do, but I need not have worried. The children's **response** was amazing.  6

All in all, it seems that cooperative learning turns the classroom from a competitive **arena** into a place where learning facts and life skills is both more fun and more **effective** for pupils and teachers alike.

- A Children do not sit in straight rows of desks facing the teacher, but rather face one another to make it easier to **share ideas**.
- B The strong ones **coached** the weak ones endlessly so that they could participate in the question time too.
- C However, she believes that this method is not suitable for all pupils.
- D Teaching methods have hardly changed in one hundred years.
- E She says that good relationships are the key to effective learning.
- F Encouraging children to concentrate on getting the best marks destroys motivation and takes the fun out of learning.
- G He adds that it might take longer than simply listening to the teacher lecture, but the students remember much more afterwards.
- H It recognises that pupils do not have the skills to work together.