The Effective of Cooperative Learning in Middle School on Reducing Bullying?

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While many studies show positive effects of cooperative learning on student achievement, a recent study examined the effects of cooperative learning on reducing bullying in middle school.

A total of 15 rural schools (n=1,460 seventh graders) in the Pacific Northwest were matched based on size and free-lunch percentage, and then seventh graders were randomly assigned to either receive a cooperative learning program (n=792) or to continue business as usual (n=668). The cooperative learning program used techniques by Johnson, Johnson & Holubec (2013), incorporating peer tutoring, collaborative reading, and methods where classmates rely on each other to learn new information while being held individually accountable for what they have learned. The theory behind this study was that in cooperative groups, bullies would not be reinforced by their peers to continue bullying, and socially isolated students would have opportunities to interact with others more and make new friends. All participating teachers received a copy of Cooperation in the Classroom and received three training days in person, and check-ins by video conference during the course of the 2016-17 school year. Pre-tests and post-tests (online surveys completed by students) evaluated students’ bullying and victimization, stress levels, emotional problems, relatedness, and engagement.

After 5 ½ months of the cooperative learning program, results showed:

- There were significant reductions in bullying (ES = +0.37), victimization (ES = +0.69), and stress levels (ES > +0.99) for students who had been shown to be marginalized at pre-test.
- There were reduced emotional problems (ES = +0.30) and greater relatedness (ES = +0.43) for all students, regardless of their feelings of victimization/isolation at pretest.

The authors suggested that comparing to existing curriculum-based programs, cooperative learning was not only effective in promoting achievement and addressing behavioral problems in middle schools but also advantageous in ways such as the sacrifice of instructional time was not needed.