

It has been called cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and group work. What ever you choose to call it, it is a mainstay in American schools—so much so you might say our education system holds the truths of cooperative learning to be self evident. But are they?

Commented [KR1]: Meta They say w/o a specific template

It has long been acknowledged that group work benefits not only the group, but also each individual student working within the group, for what a student is not able to do independently, he or she can surely accomplish with the assistance of a group. But the end product is not the only accomplishment that arises out of cooperative learning. Working in groups also builds social skills, self-esteem, and positive relationships. Win-win, right? Maybe not. New voices in the conversation are urging us to rethink the widespread use of group work in the classroom.

Commented [KR2]: Are rhetorical questions in the book?

Commented [KR3]: "Verb for Expressing Agreement" pg 39

Commented [KR4]: "Introducing Standard Views" pg 24

Commented [KR5]: Introducing What They Say...my own not a template

In her article "The Rise of the New Groupthink," Susan Cain rejects the commonly accepted notion that working in a group is the best way to accomplish complex tasks. Instead, she suggests that solitude and uninterrupted work time is necessary for creativity, innovation, and productivity. This goes against what education researchers Johnson and Johnson call "positive interdependence," or the notion that all members of a group are dependent on each other to do their very best. If Cain's is right about the value of working alone, as I think she is, then we need to reassess the popular assumption that more group work in schools is better.

Commented [KR6]: "Introducing Quotations" pg 46

Commented [KR7]: "Verb for Expressing Disagreement" pg 40

Commented [KR8]: "Verb for Making a Claim" pg 39

Commented [KR9]: "Templates for Agreeing" pg 64

Will Felps, from University of Washington, also finds fault with the fact that collaborative learning hinges on "positive interdependence." His "bad apple" study found that if just one person in a group is mean, lazy, or a downer it will negatively affect the performance of the whole group by 30-40%. While the idea of positive interdependence seems logical—it makes sense that four heads are better than one—we've all been in a situation where someone doesn't do their share of the work, or picks on someone else in the group and it all falls apart. By focusing on what students *should* be able to do in a group, Johnson and Johnson overlook the deeper problem of what students *choose* to do in a group. Any student who has been assigned to a group work project will agree that "interdependence" is not always so "positive."

Commented [KR10]: "Introducing Quotations" pg 46

Commented [KR11]: "Planting a Naysayer" pg 89

Commented [KR12]: Disagree with reasons pg 60

Commented [KR13]: "And yet..." pg 73

While it is true that carefully organized collaborative learning has benefits in some situations, it does not necessarily follow that group work should be a constant strategy used in every educational setting. After all, according to Cain, many notable figures throughout history were solitary, independent thinkers who did their best work alone. While we all know Steve Jobs as the charismatic face of Apple, his partner Steve Wozniak was the one who actually build the personal computer. Wozniak's advice to aspiring inventors? "Work alone...Not on a committee. Not on a team." Another introvert, Issac Newton, discovered the theories of gravity and motion. Newton nearly always worked in isolation and was described by the poet William Wordsworth as "A mind forever / Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone."

Commented [KR14]: Making a Concession While Still Standing your Ground (Planting a Naysayer) pg 89

Commented [KR15]: Transition example pg 109

The findings from Cain and Felps challenge some firmly established ideas about the appropriateness of collaborative learning as it is currently used in the classroom. Still, it is important to remember that our society has changed considerably sine the 1930's and 40's when collaborative learning theory first took root. Our responsibility is to ensure that as society changes for the better, so does education.