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Cooperative Learning and Competition

by Dan Rector

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Cooperative Learning Defined

Cooperative learning is an approach where children work in small learning groups and are responsible for learning and helping their teammates learn. Since the late 1800s, teachers have used cooperative learning in educational settings. Studies show that effective learning takes place within a supportive community of learners.

The longer children work together and the more responsibility they take, the greater their learning will be. In fact, research shows that cooperative learning leads to higher achievement for all children involved. Since Junior Bible Quiz builds around the concept of cooperative competition, use cooperative learning for practice and learning sessions. Cooperative learning is a win-win situation for everyone—coaches, quizzers, teams.

Encourage Cooperative Learning

Junior Bible Quiz is an opportunity for children to learn cooperatively with a team. The way the coach structures practice sessions, and how the coach prepares quizzers for their roles in matches can greatly influence how the children feel about their

individual growth and place on the team.

The main steps for this approach in practice is that the coach:

Q identifies the questions each child and team will be responsible for learning for upcoming matches;



Q teaches them group and study strategies; and

Q lets the group work together to help one another learn their questions.

Through this cooperative learning approach, the children develop a sense of interdependence. They learn to care about the success of others on the team as well as their own. The

whole team wins only when individuals do well. The team benefits when individuals help each other be their best. This learning approach reduces peer pressure, which results when individuals rate only their own achievements. Sometimes, negative peer pressure can keep children from doing their best. On a quizzing team, children should encourage each other to do better since they will all benefit as a team.

Cooperative learners share leadership responsibilities since each member has a job to do. No one person becomes the formal leader. Look for ways the children can help one another on the team learn the material and remember it. Ask the children for ideas to help others learn the questions. Talk about what each family is doing at home and share these ideas with the other families. Suggest the children get together on their own time to study and review the questions. Be sure to celebrate together when individuals learn their assigned questions. Continue to acknowledge the achievements of the team.

The cooperative learning process will help build committed relationships among the children. You will see how they care about and help each other. Another benefit you'll see from

this approach is the development of self-confidence among the children. Success in helping other children do well will boost their confidence, which helps the team excel.

Even you as a coach will reap the benefits of cooperative learning since the children take more responsibility for practice and learning sessions. As they work with the questions and help each other, they, not you, will manage the material.

Four Aspects of Cooperative Learning

The children need to believe they are in this together, and they need to care for each other's learning.

Basic social skills needed for this approach must be cultivated,

such as verbal communication, explaining, and sometimes resolving conflicts.

Since the success of the team relies on the best efforts of the individual, each person needs to be accountable for the information he is assigned to learn.

The team needs to periodically review how well they are working together and find ways to do better.

The Controversy of Competition Between Children

The use of competition with elementary-age children has been a controversial subject in both the church and in public education. Some believe that competition has a negative effect on the proper growth of a child.

Many picture children's sports coaches fighting it out on the field or shouting at their players. Negative experiences happen in competition, but other educational experiences can also be negative.

You may have memories from your own education of the spelling bee. Remember being singled out and given a word to spell? If you missed the word given to you, you were out of the competition. It didn't matter how many of the other words you knew. No one would ever find out what you did know. They only knew you missed the one word you were given. Children who are singled out for what they don't know can feel embarrassed and bad about themselves. Competition like this can have negative results.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What is cooperative learning?

2. What characteristics does cooperative learning help to build in children?

This article appears in the *Junior Bible Quiz Manual*, a how-to book containing everything you need to know to start, run, and improve a Junior Bible Quiz team. The *Junior Bible Quiz Manual* contains information for quizzers, parents, coaches, and area coordinators, and includes several reproducible pages. This and other JBQ products are available from Gospel Publishing House, 1-800-641-4310, or visit gospelpublishing.com.





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Cooperative Learning and Competition

Cooperative learning has become a respected theory practiced in educational classrooms. This theory implies that social interaction among children doing developmentally appropriate tasks will increase their understanding of skills and concepts. Cooperative learning is sound in principle, yet many proponents feel that competition does not fit with cooperative learning. However, these two terms, competition and cooperation, need not be opposites. Both are valuable approaches to teaching our children properly.

Some educators find they do not need to choose between competition or cooperative learning. The two can be used together to form one of the greatest learning tools yet. Cooperative competition is an important part of cooperative learning.

Group and individual competition complements the emphasis on teamwork. Cooperative competition deals with one of the most important issues in education: how to better motivate students. The secret to success in learning is motivation. In cooperative competition, children work together as a team. Team sports appeal to children because

children enjoy high levels of competition. This is especially true in games where everyone can be winners.

Cooperative competition motivates children by making learning into a game. Games are enjoyable activities. Even purposeful and constructive activities can have game-like characteristics, if they are



properly organized. Collective competition and cooperation make activities enjoyable and generate social engagement.

Despite the frustrations some forms of competition generate, it can be a powerfully motivating force. Harmful competition and methods of scoring rely solely on a win-lose contest. Cooperative competition encourages players to compete individually and with a team against an external opponent or obstacle.

Cooperative competition is a

strong approach, effectively educating children of certain ages. At what age can children handle competition? Developmental studies of children show that from ages eight to nine, memorization skills start to peak, and at ages ten to eleven, children love to compete. The church uses cooperative competition successfully through the Junior Bible Quiz program, geared especially for children of these ages.

Junior Bible Quiz as Cooperative Competition

The cooperative competition of Junior Bible Quiz is a great replacement for negative competition. Children are not embarrassed by being chosen to answer a question to which they don't know the answer. The children all have an opportunity to buzz in when they have the confidence to do so.

This approach creates a great learning environment. The system not only benefits individuals but also encourages team members to stimulate each other toward improvement. In the traditional classroom, academic stars embarrass their less adequate peers. In the cooperative competition approach, children

are glad their star helps them to be part of a winning team.

Since third- through sixth-grade children love competition, Junior Bible Quiz provides an excellent way to teach it properly. All children involved in JBQ are gaining valuable Bible knowledge, which gives them a positive feeling whether their team wins or loses.

The material learned for quizzing contains information about having proper attitudes toward others, including the Golden Rule: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). The program places strong emphasis on living the examples the quizzers are learning.

More research would be beneficial in this area, but all the signs currently point to very positive results from cooperative competition. With a strong coach, the academic, social, and spiritual benefits of Junior Bible Quiz to children far outweigh negative aspects.

The Coach's Role in Encouraging Positive Results

Competition is a part of life. Children learn to be good winners and losers through competition. Competition that encourages children to achieve more than they otherwise might achieve is good. Competition should be a pleasurable experience for all involved.

Be aware of children working to gain for themselves and harming others in the process. Teach these values through competition: taking turns, obeying the rules, and feeling part of a group.

In competitive sports, players can be envious of other players, dislike weaker players, and distrust others, causing them to become emotionally isolated from people. Competitive sports may promote a lowering of moral standards, and a player may wish the failure of others without realizing it. Competitive sports can keep players at a distance,

preventing a player from empathizing or helping another player. It can also reward and promote cheating. Even with the rules, some competitive environments create such a strong pressure to win that some participants may feel compelled to cheat. Competitive sports may teach children to equate physical force with success.

An important part of any competition is the coaching. Without proper coaching, negative results will occur. The coach who wants to keep these negative results from happening should downplay winning. Awards can focus on other aspects of the game besides winning. Coaches need to explain the true reason for following the rules. They need to look for and promote activities to downplay competition and promote cooperation and personal growth. As a JBQ coach, link the positives of competition with the success of cooperative learning.



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