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Cooperative Learning and Competition

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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.



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.