

## **September, 1992- Michael Sheehy, Mathematics:**

Are you tired of the same old teaching routine? Do you want to try something different? Why not try Cooperative Learning? Cooperative Learning is generally understood to be learning that takes place in an environment where students share ideas and work collaboratively to complete academic tasks or accomplish a common goal. A key to Cooperative Learning is that group members must realize that they are part of a team and that success or failure of the group will be shared by all members of the group. To accomplish the group's goal, students need to talk with one another about the problem and to help one another.

There are actually a number of different models for Cooperative Learning, models that vary considerably in their assumptions about the nature of learning and about the roles of teachers and students in the classroom. Cooperative Work can be incorporated into almost any classroom setting. It can be used in conjunction with practice of skills, discovery learning, laboratory investigation and data collection, group discussion of concepts and problem solving. Cooperative Work has also been combined with computer related instruction, peer tutoring, remedial work, review, brainstorming, and even group testing.

### Why Use Cooperative Learning?

Cooperative Learning capitalizes on the powerful influence of peer relationships. Since an individual's success depends on the success of the group, students want their peers to do well. Group members are motivated to be prepared with their work, to be on task during class time, and to achieve, for these behaviors lead to peer approval and group success.

Furthermore, by learning to work together in cooperative groups, students get to know their group members. In a working group, students of different abilities, cultural backgrounds and physical makeup have a common ground for discourse. As they learn to know and understand one another, the artificial barriers and prejudices produced by ignorance and unfamiliarity disappear.

I have used Cooperative Learning in my remedial Math classes. I thought that these students needed a different approach to succeed. I would present new problems for about 10 minutes and then give students a homework assignment, which they would work on for the remaining 40 minutes. Students would work on these problems in groups of four and eventually a member from the group, whom I would choose, would present these problems on the blackboard.

The group was rewarded for successful answers. I have had quite good results with this as shown by a high pass rate on their exit exam and a low WD rate. It certainly created an active learning environment, which was a goal I was hoping to achieve.