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Network of International Cooperative Learning Educators and Enthusiasts (NICLEE): Cultivating Global Connections

“My humanity is bound up in yours,
for we can only be human together.”

—Desmond Tutu

Desmond Tutu speaks to the fundamental truth that the human species relies on cooperation for its survival. While we may see ourselves as individuals, the reality is that we are all interconnected and our fates are intertwined. This is especially true when it comes to learning and education. We cannot learn in isolation; we need teachers, mentors, peers, and a community that supports us. The act of learning itself is a cooperative process, where we share knowledge and ideas with others to construct deeper understanding. In short, the quote reminds us that we are not alone in this world, and that our success and happiness are tied to the success and happiness of others. It is only through cooperation and collaboration that we can achieve great things and create a better future for all.

Being human together is at the heart of cooperative learning (CL) as we recognize people need each other to achieve shared goals that no one person can accomplish alone. In fact, empirical research on CL in education and other disciplines provides an abundance of evidence confirming the numerous ways that people benefit from participating in cooperative endeavors. Specifically, mutual group goals defined by *positive interdependence* — essentially, “*I need you and you need me*” — motivate interpersonal processes that consistently enhance CL outcomes in three broad areas, including (a) achievement and productivity, (b) positive relationships, and (c) psychological well-being. These areas of positive impact encompass a wide variety of benefits such as greater commitment and persistence to achieve, increased academic success and retention of learning, enhanced creativity and problem solving, higher-order reasoning and critical thinking, more time on task and affirmative attitudes toward tasks, enhanced peer relations and liking of teammates, greater ability to engage in social perspective taking and cope with adversity, and enhanced psychosocial development and social-emotional competence that affect personal well-being (JOHNSON & JOHNSON, 2017).

Indeed, numerous positive effects of CL have been demonstrated in thousands of research studies around the world. Early extensive research reviews were conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1974, 1989), Sharan (1980, 1990), and Slavin (1980, 1990). Since then, research evidence on a wide variety of factors has continued to accumulate and additional

(more recent) reviews on the effectiveness of CL have been published, such as those by Gillies (2014) and Kyndt et al. (2013). For a comprehensive view of the field of CL, see the volume entitled *Pioneering Perspectives in Cooperative Learning* edited by Davidson (2021). This volume contains chapters on the early originators of CL, most self-written, providing unique perspectives. The book presents each of the original CL approaches along with their theoretical foundations, research bases, and classroom procedures. The historical development of CL emerges as the originators describe their approaches to CL, reflect on developments, reveal personal stories, and share anecdotes about their work.

NICLEE: History, Origin, Purpose

From 1979 through 2019, the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) advanced CL globally as the only international nonprofit organization devoted to cultivating, studying, supporting, and advancing CL around the world. Notably, the IASCE “walked its talk” by practicing cooperation in its governance and operations as it co-sponsored conferences with local educational institutions in various countries around the world (23 conferences in 14 countries across four continents over 40 years), conferred awards for outstanding contributions to CL, interacted with CL affiliates, produced a newsletter published regularly, and maintained a website that provided timely information and useful resources related to CL. The conferences in particular provided ongoing opportunities for educators representing different professional roles across diverse cultures to gather face to face, share cooperative strategies, and celebrate cooperative initiatives, programs, innovations, and research. Teachers, curriculum specialists, professional developers, school administrators, university researchers, and so on, consistently expressed appreciation for the many ways that the IASCE enabled meaningful worldwide connections and interactions among those committed to CL in its many forms and applications.

After 4 decades of serving the international CL community, and after intensely thoughtful deliberation, the IASCE made the difficult decision to legally dissolve its nonprofit status that took effect the end of 2019. This created an opportunity to explore new possibilities for connecting globally for continued interaction on interests and issues relevant to CL. As in-person/on-ground gatherings became more challenging (especially during the Covid pandemic) and online options for connecting became more widely available and user-friendly, the Network for Cooperative Learning Educators and Enthusiasts (NICLEE) was born, launching a new virtual forum devoted to CL, readily accessible around the world via its website (<https://2020niclee.com/>). NICLEE—an acronym pronounced “nicely” in English—is intended to evoke images of people everywhere gathering in this virtual space to enjoy friendly, inclusive, supportive, inquisitive interactions on issues, policies, practices, and resources relevant to CL. Simply expressed, the purpose of NICLEE is to connect, support, and sustain CL efforts worldwide. We envision NICLEE as a promising network for continuing to discuss and share CL innovations globally on a range of topics, including classroom instruction, curriculum development, professional development, institutional leadership, organizational learning, and scholarly research.

NICLEE: Global, Virtual, Inclusive

NICLEE intentionally is a network readily accessible via an electronic platform to globally showcase CL initiatives and innovations, share CL resources and information, and explore

CL practices and applications around the world. Because NICLEE is not an association, participating does not require formal membership. There are no dues, no newsletters, and no sponsored conferences. Instead, NICLEE's virtual space is open to all, easy to access, and invites international participation every day around the clock across all time zones. People immediately can participate in NICLEE's virtual forum, along with inviting colleagues and friends near and far into this community devoted to cooperative approaches to teaching, learning, and leading. NICLEE extends a warm "cooperative" welcome to everyone—those who previously developed lasting friendships through the IASCE, as well as those new to CL and this network!

The NICLEE initiative aimed at building a community of practice (WENGER et al., 2002) among researchers and educators in the field of CL. The network seeks to promote CL as a powerful pedagogical approach that fosters social and academic learning. It recognizes that meaningful learning requires an engaged and interactive community of learners, and that the digital age provides new opportunities to build such communities across geographic and disciplinary boundaries. The ultimate goal of the NICLEE is to build a cooperative learning community in cyberspace (PALLOFF & PRATT, 1999). To achieve this goal, the network provides a platform for sharing ideas, resources, and best practices related to CL, as well as for engaging in collaborative research and development projects. By connecting researchers and educators from around the world, NICLEE seeks to advance our understanding of CL and its applications in different contexts, and to promote the development of innovative CL practices that can benefit learners of all ages and backgrounds.

Currently NICLEE is forming a cooperative leadership team to embody the values of cooperation and shared decision making at the core of CL. Inspired by the co-presidency and international executive board model of leadership instituted by the IASCE to practice cooperative processes, NICLEE is also adopting a cooperative approach to leading the network. NICLEE's global team of leaders will be able to draw upon each other's diverse experiences and skill sets to guide the network, together identifying possibilities, seeking ideas, discussing options, and reaching consensus on decisions toward advancing NICLEE's purpose.

NICLEE: Website, Content, Goals

The NICLEE website serves several functions, one of the most important being to promote transparency regarding the network's main objectives and to welcome all participants worldwide. Another key role is to provide clarity for those interested in the diverse discourse of CL, showcasing its major branches and models from the past 50 years. The website serves as a platform to provide important information for both experienced researchers and educators in CL, as well as for those who are new to the field. Its fundamental task is to make transparent who has joined the network (About Us), to introduce the most important workshops related to the CL discourse (All CL Branches), to dispel any myths about cooperative learning (Myths About CL), to assist in practical adaptation through the most well-known models (Flow of CL), to report on the latest books and thematic journal issues published by members of the network (Reviews), and to commemorate the defining CL pioneers (Tributes). The aim is to offer visitors a comprehensive overview of different approaches and enable them to easily access their preferred model or workshop through online forums. In addition to highlighting various branches, the website also aims to feature the latest publications related to NICLEE and the broader CL discourse. The goal is to revive the former IASCE newsletter's review section

that enabled those interested to learn about the latest books, publications, resources, and research related to CL, all in one convenient location.

In addition to its current functions, NICLEE aims to notify researchers and educators working in the CL discourse about opportunities for collaborative events, such as conferences, workshops, joint research, and publications. Future plans include launching online forums to initiate these collaborations among network participants.

Another future goal is to create an online map that outlines and makes clear the scientific ideas underlying the CL discourse from its origins to significant approaches formulated in the present day. This would allow interested parties not only to have an overview of the different branches of CL but also of the scientific theories and findings underlying them.

In the future, NICLEE will maintain collaboration with the International Association for Intercultural Education (IAIE). As part of the IAIE's annual conferences, NICLEE will organize a CL conference strand and workshops that are customized to the thematic and contextual focus of each gathering. Along with international collaborations, another key focus for NICLEE in the future will be to highlight the national and international CL discourses by uniting researchers and practitioners working in or across specific regional or country contexts and making their work transparent.

The knowledge base for NICLEE was enhanced by the publication of two new volumes, which could play a crucial role in bringing together researchers and educators interested in cooperative learning. One of these volumes offers a comprehensive overview of the pioneering work of scholars who have been instrumental in shaping the CL discourse over the past 50 years. The other volume provides insights into contemporary approaches and research related to cooperative learning, offering a glimpse into the current state of the field. Each is described in the following paragraphs.

The book, *Pioneering Perspectives in Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Classroom Practice for Diverse Approaches to CL*, edited by Davidson (2021), offers a unique and insightful look into the history and evolution of CL through the eyes of its pioneers. The volume provides a comprehensive account of the development of CL, from its early origins to contemporary research, showcasing personal experiences that have helped inspire and shape CL. Intended for scholars, researchers, and doctoral students interested in learning theory, educational research, and educational and social psychology, the book also benefits practitioners of CL who are interested in small group learning in classroom practice, as well as those interested in the history and sociology of education. The volume provides a vivid picture of the 50 years of work that went into creating the major aspects of cooperative learning, including theory, research base, instructional practices, professional development approaches, and history. Through the personal reflections, stories, and anecdotes shared by the authors, readers gain a deeper understanding of the living history of cooperative learning and how it has transformed the field of education. This text will primarily be of interest to professors, researchers, scholars, and doctoral students with an interest in the theory of learning, educational research, and educational and social psychology more broadly. Practitioners of CL with an interest in small group learning and classroom practice, as well as those interested in the history and sociology of education, will also benefit from the volume.

The newly published book, titled *Contemporary Global Perspectives on Cooperative Learning: Applications Across Educational Contexts*, edited by Gillies, Millis, Davidson (2023), showcases the latest developments and trends in CL across different levels, subjects, and learning settings. With chapters from contributors throughout the Global North and South, this comprehensive volume offers a wide-ranging perspective and addresses a range of CL topics, providing diverse and comprehensive coverage of CL practices such as online, peer, relational, and dialogic learning, as well as established models such as STAD and the

Jigsaw method. Drawing on empirical research and theoretical frameworks, the book highlights the benefits and challenges of CL and emphasizes the crucial role of educators in implementing it effectively to foster students' social, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive learning. The book is an excellent resource for researchers, scholars, and educators who are interested in CL and seek to enhance understanding of its application and impact in various educational contexts.

Conclusion

Ultimately, CL is all about interacting to constructively learn, work, share, grapple, explore, and support each other in achieving mutual goals. The newly launched NICLEE website is a network inviting everyone to do just that—enter into this virtual space to continue cultivating global connections that inspire cooperative innovations.

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