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Contemporary Global Perspectives on Cooperative Learning – Personal Reflections

*Gilies, R. M., Millis, B. & Davidson, N. (2023).
Contemporary Global Perspectives on Cooperative Learning.
Application Across Educational Contexts. Routledge.*

The first thing that struck me about this book was the title, which I had to read twice to fully realize the scope of this impressive volume. After all, the flow of publications based on research and practice of cooperative learning (CL) has not abated since the early 1960s, and I was eager to discover what this new volume has to offer. The names of the three editors were reassuring, as they have been at the forefront of CL research and practice for many years.

On the second reading of the title, the word “global” caught my attention, and reassured me that the multiple chapters by veteran and “new” (for me) researchers and practitioners, from all over the world, would offer readers an adventure. The short introduction on the very first page details the scope of this adventure and creates anticipation of what may be experienced en route.

Turning the page, I was struck, again, this time by the homage to four late leaders in the field: Morton Deutsch, Elizabeth Cohen, Shlomo Sharan and Robert Slavin, people who inspired and enriched the study and practice of CL. Usually, names of people whose work is referred to in a publication are listed at the end in bibliographies. Therefore, it was extremely moving to see these names in the book’s forefront.

And now to the contents of this volume. In the first section, appropriately titled “Contents,” readers are introduced to the multiple contributors. Obviously, without the 24 authors’ contributions there would be no book, and as noted, details about authors are traditionally found at the end of an article or book. This unusual order, in which the editors’ introduction, titled: “Cooperative Learning and the State of the Field...” follows contributors’ names, immediately infers that the editors regard these contributions as valuable as their own.

In the introductory chapter the editors present the purpose of the book: “to capture contemporary global developments in CL and to highlight the factors that contribute to its success, including the effectiveness, benefits, and limitations of CL...” The short (though incomplete) review of CL research that follows, beginning in the 1970s, emphasizes “the success of CL as a pedagogical practice that promotes socialization and learning,” and forms the basis for the research reported in this book.

True to the editors' respect for the contributors to this volume, the introductory chapter ends with an overview of each and every one of the subsequent chapters. These are divided into four sections:

Section I – Effectiveness, Benefits, and Limitations of Cooperative Learning

Section II – Achieving Equitable Learning through Cooperative Learning

Section III – Initiating and Deepening Cooperative Learning in Diverse Educational Contexts

Section IV – Cooperative Learning in Action

These titles alone suggest that the articles in each section present a continuation of issues that have always concerned researchers and practitioners of CL. While going over chapter titles it was a pleasant surprise to come across old “friends,” such as Think Pair Share, peer assisted learning, group worthy structures, and even CL and philosophy, as well as CL in engineering education. These and many other CL related topics have been discussed, researched, practiced, and published over the years, and form a solid basis for the current research presented in this book, specifically to its relevance to the ‘contemporary global’ world of CL. For example, Chapter 5 focusses on the contribution of cooperative strategies to the development of intercultural citizenship. Chapter 8 is a study of Syrian refugee teachers in Lebanon and their perception of STAD and Jigsaw. Chapter 15 offers a “shift to the future” involving CL and online practice.

Another welcome feature of the book is the truly global representation of its authors. I counted 13 countries of origin and will not list them all; suffice it to say that in addition to the U.S., England, Italy, Australia, and Catalonia, there are several countries not as widely represented in CL literature, such as Ethiopia, El Salvador, Hungary, and Japan. This, too, is welcome evidence of the ‘contemporary global’ nature of this volume.

Reading the varied contributions to this intense and important book confirms CL's role in ‘contemporary global’ efforts to harness CL in the ongoing attempts to improve education for all. As befits veteran CL devotees, the editors have the last word, and offer a concise final chapter that reminds readers of the universal and ongoing value of CL research and practice. Readers are left to look forward to the next volume of applications of CL in global educational contexts.