Implementing Kagan Cooperative Learning Groups to Increase English Language Learner Achievement and Engagement

A Project Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education California State University Channel Islands

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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## Chapter 1

## Statement of Problem

On any given school day, about seven thousand students drop out of school in the United States. That calculates to be approximately 1.3 million students a year that fail to get a high school diploma, thus condemning them to a life that in most instances, promises them lower salaries and a higher incarceration risk ("High School Dropouts in America," n.d.). Each drop out case has its own conditions and circumstances that caused the given individual to drop out of school. Teen pregnancy, marriage, poor grades, a conflicting teacher relationship, and poverty, are all common reasons why students make the decision to leave school early ("The School Dropout Crisis", 2006). Studies show that by middle school, poor academic performance and a lack of motivation, challenges, and engagement are strong predictors of whether or not a student will drop out of high school in the future (Kennelly \& Monrad, 2007). For some, being an English Language Learner can also be seen as a predictor. A 2011 California Department of Education News Release cited a $56.3 \%$ graduation rate of English language learners in 2010. That equates to just under half of the potential English language learner graduates dropping out of school. As an educator, I find this drop-out rate among English language learners to be very disturbing, so drastic action needs to be taken to prevent further youth from following the trend.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to document the effects of Kagan cooperative learning activities on the engagement and academic achievement of English learners of different language proficiency levels, in an elementary school setting.

## Significance

The educational obstacles for ELL students are significant because having spent my entire teaching career working with below grade level English language learners in the upper grades of elementary school, I have seen firsthand the struggles and obstacles these students face on a daily basis in preparing themselves for middle school. Teachers have a responsibility to the school and school district to meet the ever increasing demands of NCLB (No Child Left Behind). NCLB and its annually increasing performance targets have over the years put an enormous amount of pressure on teachers to achieve those targets, especially those working with below grade level students. Many teachers with ELL students are forced to "teach to the test" instead of teaching for mastery and learning, because conclusive evidence shows that the ELL population score is on average twenty to fifty percentage points lower than native English speakers (Menken 2010). Failure to meet the established targets results in a school being labeled as failing, which in itself removes the incentive for schools to accept and teach ELL students (Menken 2010). NCLB legislation, when looked at very closely, punishes ELL's far greater than it helps them (Menken 2010).

Teachers have a fundamental obligation as educators to meet the needs of all of their students, whether they are above, below, or at grade level. A teacher should enlighten, challenge, motivate, and inspire his/her students, not discourage them. On numerous occasions, I have seen the disappointment on students' faces when they received a D or an F on a test, when I knew they had worked tirelessly to prepare. I saw the dejection one student exhibited when he thought he had earned an A or B, but instead earned a much lower mark. I witnessed the confused expressions students had when they read math questions written in words, when we both knew that they could have solved the problems if they were written with numbers and
symbols. Because assessments used to gauge content knowledge are normally given in English, an ELL student's language proficiency inhibits his/her performances. Not being able to understand what a question is asking, simply because one does not understand a word or phrase, does not give an accurate account of what a student actually knows (Menken, 2010). Furthermore, an inaccurate grade is then attached to that assessment and the ELL is subsequently labeled accordingly. This practice helped me come to the realization that something had to change to improve the academic performance, understanding, and educational experience of the ELL's that I served. I therefore hoped that the creation of a cooperative learning environment within my classroom would encourage dialogue, questioning, and engagement, along with improving assessment results.

Researchers have found that students learn greater when working in cooperative learning groups, compared to individually (Johnson et al., 1981). Furthermore, all students benefit equally from this practice, regardless of their achievement level (Manning \& Lucking, 1991). Student achievement is increased when working in cooperative learning groups when team goals and individual accountability are present (Manning \& Lucking, 1991). These two factors require students to be responsible for not only their own learning, but for their peers (Slavin, 1991). This creates an environment that enhances critical thinking skills, better peer relationships, and stronger social skills (Johnson \& Johnson, 1999). Specifically, English language learners and children in poverty are often successful in cooperative learning groups because their anxiety level decreases, making them feel comfortable to practice their language skills (Calderon, Slavin, \& Sanchez, 2011). It also makes students feel inspired to learn, which has a direct effect on school attendance and behavior (Slavin, 1991).

## Working Definitions

Child in Poverty - a child from a family of at least four members with a yearly income of less than $\$ 23,050$ in 2012

Engagement -a student's physical, verbal, and/or emotional actions that are related to the task at hand

English Language Learner (ELL) - a student whose parents denote on the Home Language Survey that the student's home language is something other than English

English as a Second Language (ESL) Instruction - instruction English language learners receive in English to help develop their English language skills. Instruction is usually given at their English proficiency level

School Choice - the act of a family voluntarily choosing to have their child or children transfer from their neighborhood school to another school in the district.

## Chapter 2

## Literature Review

English language learners/children in poverty. In the United States, the fastest growing student population is children of immigrants. Half of these children are not English proficient, with about seventy-nine percent of them speaking Spanish as a first language (Calderon, Slavin, \& Sanchez, 2011). From kindergarten onwards in the Jarvis Unified School District, English language learners (ELL's) receive a minimum of thirty minutes of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction a day until they become fluent in English. Each year, it is expected that the ELL's move up a proficiency level, so that within five years they are fully proficient. Unfortunately, that is not always the case and many students enter middle school still classified as an ELL (Calderon, Slavin, \& Sanchez, 2011). Various factors can be blamed for the
lack of reclassification, such as school programs, curriculum, and teachers, but a widely accepted reason by many is poverty. In 2010 , of the 16.4 million children under the age of eighteen that lived in poverty in the United States, $35 \%$ of those children were Hispanic; that equates to just over 6.1 million children (National Poverty Center, 2012). By living in poverty, these children are faced with issues and obstacles that cause behavior and academic difficulties, but by implementing cooperative learning, some of these obstacles can be gradually overcome.

For many families in poverty, regardless of race or ethnicity, the parents or caregivers are often found working long hours and/or multiple jobs, leaving the children at home to take care of themselves. Video games and television are often chosen over playing outside with friends. The lack of peer-to-peer interaction and the exchanging of emotions make forming positive relationships with friends difficult for the children. The absence, or limited presence of the parents, also makes it difficult for the children to form strong, healthy bonds with them (Jensen, 2009). As previously mentioned, one of the key elements of cooperative learning is developing social skills, so this practice is highly recommended for children in poverty. Because children in poverty are more likely to exhibit more disruptive behaviors and less accepted emotional responses, teaching them the social cues and appropriate behavioral responses expected when interacting with others will help them become stronger citizens and students. Overtime, students will feel more accepted by their peers and with it, academic performance will improve (Jensen, 2009).

Due to the lack of funds and parental presence, many children in poverty do not get the mental stimulation and challenge at an early age that are afforded by the more fortunate. Because of this, many of these children start school behind their peers, and overtime, get caught up in a repeating cycle of low expectations and poor academic performance (Jensen, 2009). This
constant battering has a detrimental effect on the children's self-esteem. As was discussed earlier, cooperative learning groups have demonstrated that they are an effective strategy to increase both academic performance and self-esteem.

Cooperative learning has been found to be successful for all ELL's, irrespective of whether or not they live in poverty. Its success comes down to the fact that working in the small, cooperative setting provides the opportunity for ELL's to verbally express the English language without fear of ridicule. They are given the chance to practice the language, talk about the activity, and engage in dialogue with their peers without the pressure of failure with a larger audience. By being part of a group, ELL's can put their effort into learning the content and not worrying about their language deficiencies (Calderon, Slavin, \& Sanchez, 2011). With the level of comfort increased, the prospect of these students building up their self-esteem and academic performance looks brighter.

What is cooperative learning? Cooperative learning can be defined as an instructional practice in which students help one another learn in a small heterogeneous group (Tsay \& Brady, 2010). Leading scholars in the cooperative learning field, Robert Slavin and Roger and David Johnson, have identified key elements that are fundamental for cooperative learning groups to be successful. To begin with, positive interdependence must exist within the group. This is present when group members feel that they cannot succeed without the help of the rest of the group, along with the group not succeeding without the help of the individual (Overview of Cooperative Learning, n.d.). The idea that each part benefits the whole sends the message that everyone within the group has value and must contribute in order for the group to reach its goals. Reaching set learning goals and criterion provides opportunities for rewards to be given and the successful groups' accomplishments to be recognized. This is key to cooperative learning
because success and recognition strengthen and heighten the cooperative experience (Overview of Cooperative Learning, n.d.). It is also important that the students are aware that all groups achieving set goals have a chance to be rewarded for their success. By taking away the competition of limited rewards, it allows each group to focus on learning and not simply completing the activity (Slavin, 1991).

Along with positive interdependence and goals, it is essential that each individual is held accountable for their learning. This is important because in all aspects of life, including the classroom, many types of people exist. There are the individuals who lead, those that follow, and those who are left behind because they have no invested interest in what is going on. There are also people who embrace others' ideas and intellect, and those that are less accepting. Lastly, there are nurturers who encourage and motivate the struggling, and those who "step over" the less fortunate to pursue their own success. By having each student take an individual assessment after the cooperative learning activity is completed, it holds every student in the group accountable for not only their success, but the success of their group members (Slavin, 1991). This expectation creates an atmosphere that promotes inquiry, debate, and discussion amongst the group because every member has to be ready for an associated assessment, if given. It puts the onus on all students to be involved and learn, especially those that are accustomed to not participating.

Whenever a group of individuals work together, especially young children, social skills need to be taught and reviewed so that the group can function in an orderly manner. Ways to introduce oneself, communicate clearly, be supportive, and solve conflicts are just a few areas that should be addressed. Without civilized functioning group members that trust one another, it is very hard to build the rapport needed to be successful. On top of social skills, it is imperative
that the students are taught how to provide feedback to their peers, question ones reasoning and ideas, and be cognizant and open to differing opinions, so that a high level of thinking can take place. This interaction is a direct result of the group working and being held accountable as a whole to achieve its goal, so students need to know how to question their peer's intentions and contributions for their own benefit (Overview of Cooperative Learning, n.d.).

One final concept pinpointed as essential to a successful cooperative learning experience is providing equal opportunities for success. This translates to students contributing to their group by improving on their previous assessments. The theory behind this is that a student who grows from sixty to seventy percent has as much to contribute to the group as an individual who went from eighty to ninety percent. By doing this, students of all academic levels are challenged equally to give their all for the best of the group (Slavin, 1991). Knowing that they will have an opportunity to be as successful as their peers, all students, especially the ELL's and children living in poverty, have a great motivator for them to take their learning seriously.

Impact on academic performance and self-esteem. In the past thirty years, the cooperative learning movement has gathered steam with many studies supporting its effectiveness and value in a school setting. In 1981, Johnson and others conducted a landmark study in which one hundred twenty-two cooperative learning studies were compared. They concluded that when working in a cooperative learning group, regardless of whether or not the group would be competing with another, student learning was much greater than when students worked and/or competed individually. Most studies in this field also show that all achievers, whether they are low, high, or average, get an equal benefit from working in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups (Manning \& Lucking, 1991).

Two factors that increase student achievement when working in cooperative learning groups are team goals and individual accountability (Manning \& Lucking, 1991). In 1991, Slavin reported that when researching forty-four cooperative learning group studies, thirty-three of them found substantial achievement growth when team goals and individual accountability were present. In comparison, when those two factors were not present, only four out of twentythree studies showed positive achievement. Being held accountable both as a group and individually forces all group members to take responsibility for each other's learning (Slavin, 1991). This has a great impact on achievement because it requires students to take the initiative to help and explain concepts, directions, and materials to their group members, in order to meet their group goals. Those deeper level conversations that are a product of cooperative learning groups, not only increase the development of critical thinking skills, but they also help students retain information longer than those individuals working independently. Students are also able to apply what they have learned from their group experience to other content areas and interests (Johnson \& Johnson, 1999).

With academic success and a commitment by the facilitators conducting the cooperative learning activity to teach and model proper social skills, over time, the students will start to build strong relationships with their group members and classmates. Studies show cooperative learning experiences can even make individuals who dislike each other closer because of its power to create and nurture relationships (Johnson \& Johnson, 1999). Being successful academically and having strong peer relationships significantly attribute to a positive self-esteem (Manning \& Lucking, 1991). Furthermore, additional confidence with one's self, feeling accepted amongst your peers, and believing that you are able to contribute as much as the next person in your group makes students enjoy school more and want to be there (Manning \&

Lucking, 1991). For many children, especially those living in poverty, feeling engaged and inspired to learn has led to better school attendance, less behavior problems in class, and fewer school dropouts (Slavin, 1991).

Conclusions. The research on cooperative learning strongly supports implementing such practices in all classrooms. When managed and conducted properly by trained facilitators, cooperative learning groups bring students of all types together to achieve a common goal. They are held accountable for their learning, along with their group members. Opportunities to enhance and strengthen their social skills and interpersonal skills are provided, which overtime can result in better peer to peer relationships, a happier school experience, increased engagement, and a higher self-esteem. Academic achievement has been seen to improve when a student's fears and inhibitions are diminished. With children living in poverty, less stress and more success at school has shown to improve school attendance, the dropout rate, and behavior. Students are challenged by their peers in cooperative learning groups to think more critically and work to a higher level. Expectations are increased and exploration and inquisitiveness is promoted. Finally, having the opportunity to speak and interact with their peers without fear of being mocked is invaluable to ELL students, in addition to hearing other students speaking the academic language. Furthermore, with constant repetition and exposure to content, longer retention is more likely to happen.

## Chapter 3

## Research Question

What effects will Kagan cooperative learning groups have on the engagement and academic performance of English language learners of different language proficiency levels in my classroom?

## School Setting

Every year, Jarvis Elementary school loses local neighborhood families to other schools, as they school choice out for a number of reasons. Those reasons include the local school having a low API score, being a Program Improvement (PI) or Title 1 school, as well as public misconceptions about the school's performance and programs. Most of the time, the students that "school choice out" are from wealthier families and more educated backgrounds. On another front, the teachers at the school have been in constant turnover over the past five years, being transferred due to lost positions, voluntary transference, retirement, or leaving to form charter schools. In each case, the loss of a teacher has resulted in teacher teams breaking up and losing the cohesiveness that they once had. In some instances, individual differences between new grade level partners has made team teaching difficult and unpleasant. Furthermore, prior to getting its current principal four years ago, Jarvis Elementary went through seven principals in six years, making the culture of the school tense, toxic, and divided.

Jarvis Elementary is a unique school because it hosts two school programs on its campus. Those programs are the Open Classroom Leadership Magnet (OCLM) and the traditional K-5 school. The traditional program is made up of mostly Hispanic and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhood children, due to the more affluent or educated families' "school choicing" out to surrounding schools. A large percentage of the students in the traditional program are below grade level in reading, writing, and math, due to their background and home environment, so the curriculum and instruction has to be differentiated to meet their needs.

As previously mentioned, Jarvis Elementary is in its third year of Program Improvement.
Figure 1 displays the API scores over the past four years. What these scores show is the
performance of white students is much higher than other subgroups. If the white students' scores were taken away, the school wide API would decrease significantly.


Figure 1. Jarvis Elementary School Growth API Scores by Subgroup

Figures 2 and 3 on the following pages show the percentage of students performing at the Proficient and Advanced levels in English Language Arts and Math. In 2012, all the subgroups failed to meet the target scores set by NCLB. In ELA in particular, the percentage of students in the subgroups performing at Proficient or Advanced came out to be less than half of the total students tested. In mathematics however, the Hispanic subgroup was the exception in that just over half of the students tested were at least proficient, unlike the other subgroups that tested slightly below the halfway mark. It is important to note that the Students with Disabilities subgroup did not have enough students to be considered significant.


Figure 2. Jarvis Elementary's 2012 Subgroup AYP Data - ELA


Figure 3. Jarvis Elementary's 2012 Subgroup AYP Data - Math

Another area where Jarvis Elementary has not met its targets has been in English Language Development. The Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) calculates the percentage of English Learners that are making annual gains on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). The students are expected to grow one proficiency level each year; the levels are Beginning, Early Intermediate, Intermediate, Early Advanced, and Advanced. Once the students have reached the Early Advanced and Advanced levels, they are considered proficient, but they have to continue to perform at those levels until they are reclassified as a fully proficient English speaker. Figure 4 compares Jarvis Elementary's student CELDT proficiency percentage to the whole Jarvis Unified School District's (JUSD). The district as whole met the state target in 2011, but Jarvis Elementary fell short, with just over half of its English Learners moving up a proficiency level. However, the following year both entities met the state target, with Jarvis Elementary surpassing the JUSD.


Figure 4. AMAO 1: Students becoming proficient on CEDLT 2010-2012

All the data suggests that Jarvis Elementary is not, and has not, met the state and federal goals in the content areas of English Language Arts and Math. Additionally, the AMAO targets can be misleading because although it shows that Jarvis Elementary's proficiency level has improved dramatically, these figures simply show the percent of students who moved at least a proficiency level. These figures do not highlight the large number of students who struggle to advance from the intermediate level on a yearly basis. Without diminishing or judging the efforts put forth by the school staff, it is quite evident that new ideas and instructional strategies and practices need and should be adopted, and I think using Kagan cooperative learning structures would be a great start.

## Class Setting

A fourth grade class within the traditional program is the setting for implementing this study's Kagan cooperative learning structures. My current fourth grade class, the only fourth grade class in the traditional program, has thirty two students, with twenty-five of them being English language learners, and most of them performing below grade level in mathematics and English language arts. Before last year had even finished, I was already hearing about the students that were enrolled in my class this year and how academically low they were compared to previous classes. Additionally, I was told on many occasions about how this group was very difficult to manage, with clashing personalities, impulsivity, and immaturity being the main reasons. I spent the summer thinking of how I would combat all of the challenges that would come, and cooperative learning groups seemed to be a solution that could alleviate my concerns. Looking at Figures 5 and 6, which compare my current students' English language arts and math scores from second and third grade, it is quite clear that every subgroup's proficiency percentage went down the succeeding year. This can possibly be attributed to the increase in content difficulty and
expectations, but it could also be that if students have not developed the previous grade level skills and standards, they start the following year already behind. The percentage drop in most subgroups and subjects ranged from five to nine percent, but the biggest drop happened for the English language learner subgroup in mathematics. A fourteen point drop was observed, with one hypothesis highlighting the fact that in third grade, common stumbling blocks for many students are taught, such as subtraction by borrowing, place value, multiplication, and word problems. It is that last suggestion that impacts the English language learner because being unfamiliar with the academic vocabulary and the English language in general, makes it difficult to interpret the question or directions

Current 4th Grade Cohort - Proficient/Advanced in ELA


Figure 5. CST Percent Proficient or Higher by Subgroups - ELA

Current 4th Grade Cohort - Proficient/Advanced in Math


Figure 6. CST Percent Proficient or Higher by Subgroups - Math

The CELDT data in Figure 7 compares the last two year's CELDT proficiency levels of the ELL's in my class. The graph shows that each year, more than half of the ELL students (nineteen in 2011 and seventeen in 2012) were in the intermediate proficiency level. The class had thirty-four ELL students in 2011 and thirty-three ELLs in 2012, so the difference in the number of students in the intermediate level from both years was only two. Without knowing specifically which students were at the intermediate level, it is hard to get a clear picture of which students advanced levels from year to year and which students remained stagnant. However, regardless of that, having such a large group of students in the intermediate level is a factor that must be taken seriously when planning what lessons to teach and the instructional strategies to use. The intermediate level, also known as the "intermediate plateau", is difficult for many English learners to advance from. Many English learners stall academically in this
proficiency level for many years, as they have already acquired the basic skills needed to move to this level, but do not have the advanced skills in reading, writing, and speaking to move on. Without those skills, learning the deeper academic content along with the additional language skills becomes problematic and difficult for the English learners.

## Current 4th Grade CELDT Profiency Level Percentages



## Limitations

This study's major limitation is the fact that is was conducted in one classroom, involving only a small sample of students. In addition, the classroom environment and the instructional practices being used are unique to the specific students and setting, so replication would be impossible. This study did not have a control group, so it is impossible to make definitive causal statements with the final results.

## Chapter 4

## Year 1 - Creating a Vision and Building a Coalition

Implementing change in one's classroom or school organization is often not an easy task because there are many variables and factors that have to be taken in consideration. My action plan on implementing Kagan cooperative learning groups in my classroom was built around Kotter's 8-step change model. Kotter's first step in implementing any change is creating a sense of urgency around the school and/or community (Kotter, 1995). As previously mentioned, I had already received word from other faculty on campus that the students in my incoming class had many academic and behavioral challenges. Knowing this, I began researching in the months before the beginning of the school year to come up with a plan on how to meet their diverse needs. When it was time to return to school in August, the California Standardized Test (CST) results had been made available to my school site. It was then that I engaged in active conversations with fellow teachers and administrators. The CST results provided concrete evidence that after two years of constant decline, something differently had to be done to turn the tide. Fourth grade is naturally a challenging time for any student, let alone for a student a year or more below grade level. With the pressures of reading to learn instead of learning to read, of working more independently and at a higher cognitive level, I knew that I had to change my whole approach to teaching in order to prevent yet another year of declining results for many of these students. Because the upper grade teachers work as one team, collaborating, sharing resources, and at times switching students, I felt it pertinent to share with them what I had researched over the summer, along with my new students' CST results. The plethora of evidence that supported using cooperative learning in the classroom and with our school demographics was presented to my colleagues and it did not take long before they were open to using
cooperative learning groups universally in all of the upper grade classrooms. Using the fear of yet another year of failure for this particular group of students helped me convince the fifth grade teachers that this was an effective practice that would benefit them the very next year. By doing this, I had just garnered the support of others to commit to my vision of implementing the cooperative learning groups in our upper grade classrooms, which is what Kotter states as the next step in implementing change (Kotter, 1995).

Knowing that my upper grade team was devoted to my vision of implementing cooperative learning groups in our classrooms, I researched more about products and literature that would help me get a better understanding of how to incorporate these groups into my everyday classroom structure and lessons. After merely purchasing the book Kagan Cooperative Learning, by Dr. Spencer Kagan and Miguel Kagan on a whim, hoping that it would provide a simple overview that would be enough to get me started, I realized that I had discovered much more than that. This book provided me with the research to support cooperative learning, the keys to make it successful in my classroom, management tools, and most importantly the structures, or specifically designed activities, that could be used for team building, class building or academics. Motivated and inspired by this discovery, I purchased more books and upon discovering the Kagan website, I found workshops to promote and endorse their cooperative learning approach. Invigorated, I once again shared my discoveries with my upper grade team, and after contemplation and review on their part, we had come the consensus that this was the perfect program to use in our classrooms. Communicating the vision is step number four in Kotter's plan for change, which is exactly what we did when we met with our principal to discuss our new approach. Highlighting our concerns for the coming school year and expressing our willingness to expand our professional development, our principal gave us her full support
with little hesitation. Our plan to embrace Kagan cooperative learning groups in our classrooms gathered momentum on October $8^{\text {lh }}, 2012$, when I , along with my upper grade colleagues, attended a Kagan cooperative learning workshop in San Clemente, California. There, we experienced firsthand how to effectively use their structures to facilitate learning in our classrooms.

After the workshop, I returned to school the next day with an extra stride in my step, being reassured that using cooperative learning structures in my classroom was the best thing for my class. I was accompanied by many resources that I gathered at the cooperative learning workshop, such as a digital timer, Kagan structure posters, team table mats, student selector spinners, and a number of cooperative learning books. My first priority before starting the cooperative groups in my classroom was to put my students in heterogeneous groups of four, based on achievement level, sex, and ethnicity. Kagan recommends heterogeneous grouping for the following reasons:

Heterogeneous teams maximize the potential for cross ability tutoring, positive race relations, improved cross-sex relations, and efficient classroom management. Although there is good theoretical rationale for using a variety of team formation methods, it is important to note almost all of the empirical studies showing academic achievement gains are based on heterogeneous teams. (p. 7.3)

With the new groups developed in my classroom, the long process of trying out structures, teaching the social skills, and building functional teams and a class began. Over the course of the next four to five months, structures such as Round Robin, Rally Robin, Rally Coach, Numbered Heads Together, Showdown, Sage N'Scribe, Mix N'Match, Find Someone Who, Timed-Pair-Share and Talking Chips were used. I focused on these particular structures first
because I felt they were the easiest structures to introduce the social skills and expectations with, along with providing the necessary performance feedback I was looking for. Additionally, $\mathbf{I}$ liked that these structures could be manipulated, changed, and used anyway that I felt pertinent, especially when lessons needed to be adapted in the moment. I did not hold back from trying to utilize the structures whenever possible because I was trying to get a feel for their effectiveness during particular content areas, subjects, and student groups.

By mid-February, 2013 my Kagan book library had grown to fourteen books (See Appendix A for complete library). After consultation with my principal about the progress of implanting the cooperative learning structures in my classroom, I decided it was time to share with the school staff a brief synopsis of what I learned about Kagan cooperative learning and some highlights of my experiences using it. For an entire staff meeting, I introduced the key principles of cooperative learning, effective structures that I used regularly, the tools and books I had collected, and the observations that I had made. The motivation for sharing this all with the staff was the hope of building a greater coalition with other teachers, especially the primary grades faculty that fed into the upper grade. Having already established support from the fifth grade team, I hoped that by getting the third grade teachers to embrace cooperative learning too, my students next year will have already had exposure to some of the structures. My wish was realized a few days later when the third grade team approached me to discuss what they had observed. Being more than happy to engage in dialogue, we decided that it was in the best interests of their current class and future classes to start using the Kagan structures. Several weeks and multiple meetings later, the third grade teams class was arranged in heterogeneous groups like my own, and team table mats and poster were visible around the room. I had now just convinced half of the traditional school to start using the Kagan cooperative learning
structures by communicating my vision to other staff members. I would have another chance to repeat my presentation at my school site council meeting three weeks later to parent representatives, certificated and classified staff representatives, and the school principal, thus continuing to share my vision for future student success.

The main priority in adopting the cooperative learning approach was to build a foundation for my current fourth graders that would hopefully encourage more academic and language growth than previous years. By incorporating the third and fifth grade teachers into my plan, I was building an environment that when the time came for the fourth graders to become fifth, they would already be familiar with the structures, expectations, and the roles associated with Kagan cooperative learning. Furthermore, next year, another whole grade level will be prepared to start the cooperative learning structures because they will have already been versed in the practice of working cooperatively with their peers. My vision was created because of the varying challenges that my students posed to me, but for it to truly prosper and become an effective culture that I can create every single year, reflection, growth, and experimentation had to be allowed. In a way, my students were "guinea pigs", but regardless of whether or not I move to fifth grade with them next year or have a brand new class in fourth grade, year two is when the results, data, and the program's effectiveness will be recorded. However, it is important to not dismiss the hard work and effort that has been put forth this year to try and improve this class' academic and language growth, even though results and achievement outcomes have not been tracked.

## Year 2 - Measuring the Effectiveness of the Program

During year one of the implementation plan, no assessment data was collected to measure the effectiveness of the Kagan cooperative learning structures. The reason for this was that in
year one, one of my main priorities was to gain familiarity with the cooperative learning structures, create a classroom environment that could/would foster cooperative learning, and identify and solve any problems and struggles that may arise. For the assessment data to truly paint an accurate picture of the impact of the cooperative learning activities, I felt it was pertinent to start from the very first day of year two with a strong foundation behind me, lots of practice, and a clear vision. By using the year one students as a trial class, it provided me with the learning curve that I needed to eradicate many potential factors that could have tainted the final assessment results. Another main priority of year one that pushed the assessment phase to year two was developing the cooperative learning vision at my school site by building a coalition. Without the principal's support, I would never have been able to go to the workshops to learn about the cooperative learning approach. Also, by having the backing of the school principal, it opened up opportunities to communicate my vision to the entire school staff, along with parent representatives. Additionally, knowing that the students I would pass on at the end of year one would most likely not take part in cooperative learning activities the following year in their new class, I thought it was vital that I got the support of the fifth grade teachers so they could continue using the cooperative learning structures. Furthermore, I felt that the students that I would acquire would have a smoother transition to fourth grade if they had already been exposed to some cooperative learning structures in third grade, so it was equally important to convince the third grade teachers to embrace cooperative learning too. By spreading my vision and creating a coalition around my grade level and school, I built a strong foundation and culture that would benefit the year two students and beyond.

Quantitative data. On the first day of school, the students will take a survey (see
Appendix B) that will highlight their current attitude towards school, learning, and their self-
belief. Then, at the end of each proceeding trimester, the students will retake the same survey, with the results being compared and analyzed in June. The surveys will hopefully provide evidence about how the Kagan cooperative learning experience has affected their interest in school and their motivation to learn. Besides collecting surveys from the students, a parent survey (see Appendix C) will be sent home on the same day that the students fill out theirs to get a parent's perspective about a student's learning experiences.

Before every unit taught in the subjects of reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and English language development, the students will take a pre-test to serve as a base point for growth analysis. Then, at the end of each unit, the pre-test will be given again in the form of a post-test, so academic growth can be assessed and recorded. Additionally, the students will take district trimester assessments in the areas of language arts and math to provide on-going data as to how they are learning each trimester. On a larger scale, the year two California Standardized Test results will be compared to the students' year one scores, along with any CELDT results from the current and prior year. By studying the results from yearly and monthly assessments, as well as unit assessments, it will provide me with both long and short term data. By assessing each set of data separately, differing or similar patterns and conclusions will be observed, providing a more accurate account of the year's academic gain.

Qualitative data. Qualitative data will be collected at the end of each day in the form of student journals, with the students writing reflections about the day's activities and lessons. The focus of the journals will be to describe how they felt during the lessons and activities, what they liked and disliked, and whether or not they felt they learned something new. The journals will provide a safe opportunity for the students to express their thoughts, without the threat of peer influence, judgment, or awkwardness. They will also provide me with a plethora of data that can
then be used to improve and/or guide future activities, along with measuring the engagement and interest of the class. The final piece of qualitative data will be collected by me in the form of anecdotal notes. During and after each cooperative learning activity, I will be recording my observations and reflections into a notebook that can later be analyzed and reviewed. The observations will focus on the students' interactions, contributions, and behaviors during the activities. By having not only the students' reflections, but my own observations, I will be able to compare and cross reference the two for any patterns and/or differences.

## Chapter 5

With the research supporting the use of Kagan cooperative learning structures in my classroom, along with the touting of real-life examples of schools and students that improved their academic results dramatically in the book Kagan Cooperative Learning, by Dr. Spencer Kagan and Miguel Kagan, it is my expectation that my class' academic performance and engagement will also improve in year two. The extent of the improvement is hard to predict as uncontrollable and/or unpredictable factors could potentially impact the results. However, I do not feel it is too farfetched to expect at least twenty percent of my students to move up at least one proficiency level in one or more subjects on the California Standardized Tests and/or the CELDT. Having had a year to practice implementing numerous Kagan structures, along with building my knowledge and repertoire in the cooperative learning approach, I also anticipate my students having a more positive attitude towards learning and an increased enjoyment of day-today classroom life. Through cooperative learning, the students will be more active, interact more with others, practice and develop essential social skills, be given more opportunities to process information in differing ways, and will be working in a safer, accepting environment. If all these factors can be replicated in my practice, which I am confident that they can be, then I also predict
a high level of student engagement to be present on a regular basis. As I progress through the year, the student journals, the pre- and post- assessments, and trimester surveys will provide invaluable data that will help me know if my current practices are being successful or not. If significant improvement is not being seen in the academic or engagement areas, then it will be imperative that I look closely to see if the fundamental principles of cooperative learning are being applied in my classroom. Additionally, I will need to reassess my goals and objectives for particular units or activities to see if they are realistic and/or unattainable.

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## Appendix A

## Accumulated Kagan Book Library

Agnew, M. \& McKay, S. (2011). Engaging mathematics mumbers \& operations, and algebra. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Agnew, M. \& McKay, S. (2012). Cooperative learning and grammar. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Candler, L. (1995). Cooperative learning hands on science. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Candler, L. (2008). Discovering decimals through cooperative learning. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

High, J. (1993). Second language learning through cooperative learning. San Clemente, CA:
Kagan Publishing
Kagan, L., Kagan, M., and Kagan, S. (2012). Cooperative learning teambuilding structures. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Kagan, M. (2001). Logic line-ups high-level thinking activities. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Kagan, M., Kagan, L., and Kagan, S. (2010). Cooperative learning classbuilding structures. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Kagan, S. (2000). Silly sports and goofy games. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing
Kagan, S., Kyle, P., and Scott, S. (2004). Win-win discipline. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Kagan, S. \& Kagan, M. (2009). Kagan cooperative learning. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Stites, R. \& Pfannenstiel, A. (2008). Cooperative math engaging structures and activities. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Stone, J. (1996). Cooperative learning and writing activities. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

Stone, J. (2000). Cooperative learning reading activities. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing

## Appendix B

Namc $\qquad$
$\qquad$

## Cooperative Learning Group Student Survey

Please take your time and answer the following questions honestly. The results are not graded and there are no correct answers.

## Use the following scale:

| 5 = SUPER YES $\quad 4=$ YES $\quad 3=$ NOT SURE (OK) $2=\mathrm{NO}$ | 1 = SUPER NO |  |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | SY | Y | NS | N | SN |
| 1. I enjoy school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I think learning is important. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I get nervous when I take tests or quizzes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I do not like working with other people on assignments and projects. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I am not as smart as my classmates. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I feel safe in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I find school difficult. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I am good at remembering things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I give $100 \%$ of my effort on all of my work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I believe I can get an A or B on all of my tests and quizzes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I do not work well with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I worry that I may not pass fourth grade. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. I am afraid that I will let down my classmates when working in groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I feel confident sharing my ideas with my classmates without fear of being made fun of. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. I worry that people will get mad at me if I make a mistake. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. I am afraid of disappointing my parents with bad grades. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I enjoy helping my classmates and friends when they need help. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I get bored in class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I get mad at myself when I make a mistake. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. I enjoy trying to solve challenging and difficult problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Appendix C

Child's Name $\qquad$
Trimester $\qquad$

## Cooperative Learning Parent Survey

Please take your time and answer the following questions about your child. Do not discuss these questions with your child as it may affect the results. There are no correct answers. These questions should be answered based on your observations and thoughts.

Thanks, Euan Davidson

## Use the following scale:

| $0=$ NEVER $\quad 1=$ SOMETIMES $\quad 2=0 F T E N$ | 3 = ALWAYS |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Never | Sometimes | Often | Always |
| 1. My child enjoys school. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. My child feels like school is a safe place. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. My child complains about how difficult the school work is. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. My child likes to do homework. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. My child talks about school when he/she comes home. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. My child enjoys learning. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. My child shows responsibility for his/her learning. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. My child is afraid he/she won't be liked by his/her classmates. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. My child is excited about going to school each day. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. My child gets nervous when he/she has a test or quiz. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. My child shows concern for other peoples learning. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. My child gets frustrated when things are difficult. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. My child is patient when waiting for others. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. My child gets picked on by other students. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. My child rushes when doing a job or work. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. My child thinks problems through before solving. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 17. My child takes care of his/her things. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 18. My child daydreams when doing his/her homework. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. My child is excited to talk about the school work he/she has completed. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20. My child takes care of other people's things. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

