Is Competition Ever Appropriate in a Cooperative Classroom?
The notion that we best prepare children for unpleasant experiences by providing them with unpleasant experiences at a tender age is exactly as sensible as the
whether those features might not be attainable in noncompetitive activities. If some students — typically, those who win frequently — continue to insist that it is
the subtler examples of competition whose effects may not be immediately apparent to teachers: whole-class "Who can tell me…?" sessions in which students must race
want to set up competitive structures. While it seems less risky (particularly in a culture still wedded to the idea that people must struggle to be Number One) to
losers, and hostility and suspicion toward just about everyone. Not only is it irrational to help someone whose success might require your failure, but competition
For educators who see more harm than good in competition, my challenge is to name any advantage that can be achieved only (or even most easily) by placing children
arrangement in which one person can succeed only if others fail — that is, as a function of their very nature. Eating lead paint chips would seem to fall into this category: There is no level of consumption that can be said to
But the simple truth that we sometimes fail to grasp is this: Not everything that is bad when done to excess is harmless when done in moderation. The danger
it, makes children feel about themselves — and especially to maintain that core of acceptance even when they fail — the less we would ever want to put them into a situation where they must work at cross purposes with others. Competition
the record, learn to view others as rivals rather than collaborators, and are handicapped in terms of learning. Why, then, are so many educators reluctant to see their
need outside of the classroom. Our challenge is not to offer them more of the same but to provide alternative arrangements to help them achieve a sense of
Of the numerous benefits of cooperative learning (CL), the one that first appealed to many of us was its status as an alternative to competition. Some combination
proportion of educators who share this belief nevertheless feel compelled to add that, of course, they are not saying all competition is inappropriate; offered in
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The central message of all competition is that other people are potential obstacles to one's own success. Competition creates envy for winners, contempt for
Finally, while we want to cushion children from the effects of the adversarial experiences to which they will be subjected once they have left school, we also