

Kagan Structures: Research and Rationale in a Nutshell

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Over a year ago I published on this website a detailed research and rationale article on Kagan Structures (*Kagan, April 2001*). That article is posted as a free article in the articles section of this website. Although I have received appreciation for that article, educators writing grants or wishing to circulate a more concise statement answering the question "**Why Kagan Structures?**" have asked for something more succinct. Below is my attempt to address that need. I hope it helps.



Without changing what is taught, the **Kagan Structures transform how content is taught**. This change in approach to instruction results in transformative positive educational outcomes. From the perspective of the teacher, the change is relatively easy—the teacher adopts easy to learn and implement methods without abandoning proven lessons or curriculum. From the perspective of the student, the change is welcome—class is far more engaging; students get to do what they most want to do: interact with their peers. From the perspective of the researcher, the transformation in instruction brought about by Kagan Structures aligns instruction with what is known about how students best learn and retain information.

The structures are carefully crafted to produce positive outcomes in the most important educational domains, including

- Academic Achievement
- Development of the Range of Intelligences
- Enhancement of Thinking Skills
- Development of Character Virtues
- Development of Social Skills
- Improvement of Race Relations
- Development of Emotional Intelligence
- Liking for School, Class, Self, Others, and Learning

How the simple Kagan Structures bring about a transformation in so many important educational outcomes has been detailed in numerous publications. Below is a thumbnail sketch of the most important publications that provide the theoretical rationale and the empirical evidence supporting the adoption of Kagan Structures:

"Of all the educational innovations we have reviewed for this book cooperative learning has the best, largest

"The traditional model of education that requires students to work alone and listen to an instructor has been replaced with dynamic, multi-modal learning, and flexible groupings of students and adult experts."—
Campbell & Campbell, 1999, p. 97

empirical base."—
Ellis & Fouts, 1993,
p. 123.

An introduction to and overview of the structural approach was provided in Educational Leadership in two articles (*Kagan 1989-90a, 1989-90b*). A massive amount of empirical and theoretical work supporting the use of cooperative learning structures was presented in the seminal book on cooperative learning research, co-edited by Dr. Kagan and other leaders in the field (*Slavin, R., Sharan, S., Kagan, S., Lazarowitz, R.H., Webb, C. & Schmuck, R., 1985*). In that book,

Learning to Cooperate, Cooperating to Learn, hundreds of empirical research studies were described, establishing cooperative learning as the most well researched and most strongly supported educational innovation to date. The empirical research demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative learning and multiple intelligences instruction continues to mount and is staggering in both its extensiveness, quality, and in the range of positive outcomes documented across all grades, content areas, and student populations (*Campbell & Campbell, 1999; Ellis & Fouts, 1993; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001*). Paniz (<http://home.capecod.net/~tpanitz/tedsarticles/coopbenefits.htm>) provides an online summary of hundreds of empirical research studies supporting the use of cooperative learning.

Numerous publications have elaborated both the theoretical rationale for Kagan Structures as well as their empirical support. Among the most important of those publications:

- **The six essential elements in the Kagan Model** (*Kagan & Kagan, 1994*);
- **Kagan cooperative learning and multiple intelligences structures for inclusion** (*Kagan, 1998*);
- **Kagan Structures and staff development** (*Kagan, 1998*);
- **Kagan Structures to improve race relations** (*Kagan, et. al., 1985*);
- **Kagan Structures to improve language and content gains for language minority students** (*Kagan, 1986, 1990; Kagan & High, 2002; Kagan & McGroarty, 1993; Olsen & Kagan, 1992*);
- **Kagan Structures to prevent school violence and foster character education** (*Kagan, 2001*);
- **Kagan Structures to foster thinking skills** (*Wiederhold & Kagan, 1992*);
- **Kagan Structures for brain-compatible instruction** (*Kagan, In Press*);
- **Kagan Structures for academic standards** (*Kagan, Kagan, & Kagan 2000a, b, c, d*).

"Of all classroom grouping strategies, cooperative learning may be the most flexible and powerful."—
Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001, p. 91.

The research and rationale for Kagan Structures has been provided in depth in a free downloadable article (*Kagan, 2001*). That article explains how Kagan Structures are consistent with a range of educational theories, and provides empirical support. Schools adopting Kagan Structures demonstrate positive results as measured by teacher testimonials, student statements, and empirical studies. The Kagan Structures align instruction with how the brain best learns implementing the essence of both cooperative learning and multiple intelligences philosophies and methods. The Kagan Structures replace an over-reliance on traditional teacher-centered instructional methods with the world's largest array of engaging student-centered instructional strategies.

As described in detail in the online Research and Rationale article (*Kagan, 2001*), Kagan Structures align with the following theories:

"Excellent! I leave here with ideas and materials I can put to use immediately. I have not attended

- Cooperative Learning Theory
- Multiple Intelligences Theory
- Brain-Based Learning
- Essential Elements of Effective Instruction
- Expectation Theory
- Learned Optimism Theory
- Flow Theory
- Vygotsky's Theory
- Behavior Theory
- Transference Theory

any seminar that has been as worthwhile. I would highly recommend it to anyone."—Sara N. Lyna, 7th grade mathematics teacher

The documented positive outcomes include:

- Academic Achievement Gains
- Thinking Skills
- Social Skills & Relations
- Caring Community
- Status Equalization
- Language Acquisition
- Education for Character
- Multiple Intelligences
- Emotional Intelligences

Perhaps the most important benefit of adopting Kagan Structures is that the positive transformations they produce are resistant to the replacement cycle. That is, when curricular emphasis shifts and when new programs are adopted, the Kagan Structures continue to be implemented and continue to produce positive outcomes. Why? There are two reasons:

"Thank you for opening my eyes to Dr. Kagan's Cooperative Learning. It really works! Dr. Kagan's strategies make the difference."—
Mike DiDeminico,
Staff Developer

1) Unlike other approaches to implementing cooperative learning and multiple intelligences, the Kagan Structures are not lesson based; once learned, they require little or no planning, preparation, special materials, or lesson design—they are used "drop of the hat" as part of any lesson. 2) Because the Kagan Structures are a transformation of how we teach, not what we teach, the Kagan Structures continue to be implemented even when content shifts, grade level changes, and/or the district decides to focus on a different innovation.

The theoretical and empirical research is consistent with what teachers and students say: The **Kagan Structures make teaching and learning more fun, more engaging, and more successful.** They transform life in schools in numerous positive ways, not just academically. Kagan Structures respond to the most

pressing educational needs by responding to the whole student.

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