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# Peer Learning Groups

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Mentoring Seminar

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# Overview—Peer Learning Groups

- Cross, KP, Steadman, MH. 1996.  
*Classroom Research: Implementing the Scholarship of Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pgs. 172-182.
  - Peer learning group “features”
  - Benefits of peer learning groups
  - Implementation of peer learning groups
  - Possible readings
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# “Features” of Peer Learning Groups:

## Motivation

### ■ Motivation

- Active learning and involvement
  - Improving peer interactions through peer motivation and support (Students are teachers)
  - Elaborate and employ new concepts/techniques
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# “Features” of Peer Learning Groups:

## Examples

- *Collaborative Learning*
  - *Cooperative Learning*
  - Pairs (Pair and share)
  - Small group discussion
  - Peer tutoring
  - “Reciprocal Teaching”
  - Study groups
  - *Small groups*
    - Case Studies
    - Course assignments
    - *Research projects*
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# “Features” of Learning Groups: Cooperative vs Collaborative

- Both enable students to learn through sharing of ideas
  - Cooperative
    - More teacher involvement giving more student accountability
    - Originated in k-12
    - Group grades (eliminate class competition)
    - Proponent: Bruffee, 1995
  - Collaborative
    - Less teacher involvement giving less student accountability
    - Seen more in higher ed
    - Individual grades
    - Proponent: Cooper, Robinson, and McKinney, 1994
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Benefits: Is the group activity time well spent (e.g. compared to lecture time)?

- Reinforcing main points vs trying to pack in details
  - Big question: “Who does most of the complicated, difficult thinking in the classroom” (Cooper, 1995, p8)—What do you want as a balance?
  - See the processes behind the final results, regardless of how messy they might be.
  - Preparation, participation, and attendance become necessary
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Benefits: Is the group activity time well spent (e.g. compared to lecture time)?

- Shift in job (wider description): Student's job becomes: "Question, explain, express opinions, admit confusion, and reveal misconceptions;...listen to peers, respond to...questions, question...opinions, share information or concepts that will clear up...confusion." (McKeachie, 1994, p149)
  - Not fast vs slow learners, but "confused and unconfused benefit" (to help each other) (McKeachie, 1994, p149)
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# Benefits: More general

- Improved involvement and gains in achievement (Cooper & Mueck, 1992; Cooper, Robinson, & McKinney, 1994; Johnson et al 1981; Slavin, 1983)
  - 200 college survey (Astin, 1992): Student-student/student-faculty interactions important for retention
  - Differing viewpoints help intellectual development
  - Discipline vocabulary familiarity gotten from peers
    - “Often we [(e.g. faculty)] do not notice when we have stopped speaking plain English” (Nelson, 1994, p50)
    - Undergrad teachers’ classes did better than faculty in discussion sections (Nelson, 1994)
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# Benefits: More general

- King's peer questioning-teaching students to ask deep questions deepens students (King, 1990)
  - Article experiment (Benware & Deci, 1984)
    - Give students article
    - Tell half class they have a test on article
    - Tell half class they have to teach the article
    - "Teachers" had higher conceptual learning scores and felt more actively engaged
    - "pray to be a tutor, not to be tutored" (McKeachie, 1994)
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Promoting positive interdependence

- Promote individual responsibility for success of all
  - Suggestions:
    - Assign different portions of material (e.g. reading) for students to *teach* it to others
    - Assign different portions of project (e.g. coding), building in interdependence as much as possible.
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Individual Accountability

## Minimizing “freeloader” phenomenon

- Majority of credit on outside individual work
  - Participation allowed only if (e.g.) a worksheet is produced showing they’ve prepared beforehand (Rau & Heyl, 1990)
  - Assigning roles: Leader, recorder, reporter, presenter, writer, etc
  - Ask what people have learned from others (to make sure they pay attention to each other’s work) (Nelson, 1994)
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups

## Student Teamwork; Group-work skills

- Interpersonal skills: being friendly, listening to others, eye contact, speaking positively with no harmful forms of communication.
  - Group management skills: organizing the work of the task, keeping members on task, taking time for group processing and analysis of effectiveness.
  - Inquiry skills: asking clarifying questions, probing for additional information, critiquing ideas, probing assumptions, eliciting the views of other group members (helps promote intellectual development and critical thinking).
  - Conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution skills
  - Presentation skills: oral and written communication, including summarizing, synthesizing, speaking before groups
  - (Bosworth, 1994, pp27-28)
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups

## Student Teamwork

- Motivation: More prepared for job (Sharan, 1980)
  - Inform students of “Group-work skills” which enhance their work (Bosworth, 1994)
  - Demonstrate, model, talk through above skills (e.g. ask me a question) (Bosworth, 1994)
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups

## Group assignment

- Consider students' majors, ages, abilities (personally assign)
  - Study on correlations with worst vs best group experiences (Fiechtner and Davis, 1992)
    - Self-chosen groups bad (on basis of not having evenly spread talents like computers)
    - Constantly switching groups bad
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Practical Advice

- Don't go too far too quickly (i.e. our first time, don't be too idealistic)
    - One suggestion: Asking students to make up questions is good (not much overhead, easy for us to do and for them)
  - Tell students why we're doing the groups (why they are productive and valuable)
    - Goals and rationale
    - Benefits of group learning
    - Fair grading
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Practical Advice

- Be organized and explicit: “You can never be too explicit”
  - More explicit in beginning, less explicit later
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# Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Practical Advice

- Learn something...not just do something
    - Busy work vs work with a point
    - Personal teacher probing (just asking them deeper questions)...communicate that “the team’s work is never done until all members have mastered the skills that underlie the cooperative learning activity” (Cooper, Robinson, & McKinney, 1994, p93)
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# Conclusions

- Extent of “Peer learning groups”
  - How they can be beneficial
  - Things to consider when implementing them
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# Suggested Reading

- Bosworth, K, Hamilton, SJ. *Collaborative Learning: Underlying Processes and Effective Techniques*. New Directions for Teaching and Learning, no. 59. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.
  - Cooper, JL, Robinson, PR, McKinney, M. “Cooperative Learning in the Classroom.” *Changing College Classrooms: New Teaching and Learning Strategies for an Increasingly Complex World*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994.
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  - Slavin, RE. “When Does Cooperative Learning Increase Student Achievement?” *Psychological Bulletin*, 1983, 94, 429-445.
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# Definition of reciprocal teaching

- Reciprocal Teaching: a teaching strategy in which "students are involved in summarizing, question-generating, clarifying, and predicting as they read texts and observe phenomena...[and] both teacher and students share the responsibility for the conduct of the discussion" (Palincsar & Brown, 1985)

[www.nde.state.ne.us/READ/FRAMEWORK/glossary/general\\_p-t.html](http://www.nde.state.ne.us/READ/FRAMEWORK/glossary/general_p-t.html)

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