Peer Learning Groups

Jared Barber
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Mentoring Seminar
Overview—Peer Learning Groups

- Peer learning group “features”
- Benefits of peer learning groups
- Implementation of peer learning groups
- Possible readings
“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
“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*
“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
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
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)
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)
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)
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.
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)
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)
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)
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
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
Implementation of Peer Learning Groups: Practical Advice

- Be organized and explicit: “You can never be too explicit”
- More explicit in beginning, less explicit later
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)
Conclusions

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


Works Cited


Works Cited


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