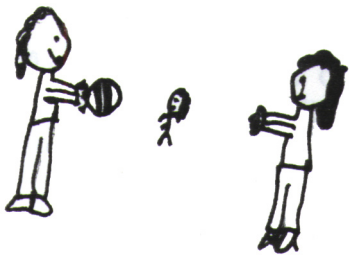
Collaborative Learning Methods

The concept of collaborative learning, the grouping and pairing of learners for the purpose of achieving a learning goal, has been widely researched and advocated - the term "collaborative learning" refers to an instruction method in which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The learners are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one learner helps other students to be successful. Proponents of collaborative learning claim that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also promotes critical thinking.There is persuasive evidence that cooperative teams achieve at higher levels of thought and retain information longer than learners who work quietly as individuals. The shared learning gives learners an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers.

Collaborative Learning is a relationship among learners that requires positive inter-dependence (a sense of sink or swim together), individual accountability (each of us has to contribute and learn), interpersonal skills (communication, trust, leadership, decision making, and conflict resolution), face-to-face promotive interaction, and processing (reflecting on how well the team is functioning and how to function even better).



Think-Pair-Share

(1) The instructor poses a question or topic, preferable one demanding analysis, evaluation, or synthesis, and gives students about a minute to think through an appropriate response. This "think-time" can be spent writing, also. (2) Students then turn to a partner and share their responses. (3) During the third step, student responses can be shared within a four-person learning team, within a larger group, or with an entire class during a follow-up discussion. The caliber of discussion is enhanced by this technique, and all students have an opportunity to learn by reflection and by verbalization.

Three-Step Interview

Common as a team-building exercise, this structure can also be used also to share information such as hypotheses or reactions to a film or article. (1) Students form pairs; one student interviews the other. (2) Students switch roles. (3) The pair links with a second pair. This four-member learning team then discusses the information or insights gleaned from the initial paired interviews.

Learning Teams

Members of learning teams, usually composed of four individuals, count off: 1, 2, 3, or 4. The instructor poses a question, usually factual in nature, but requiring some higher order thinking skills. Students discuss the question, making certain that every group member knows the agreed upon answer. The instructor calls a specific number and the team members originally designated that number during the count off respond as group spokespersons. Because no one knows which number the teacher will call, all team members have a vested interest in understanding the appropriate response. The verbalization and the peer coaching helps all learners become actively involved with the material.

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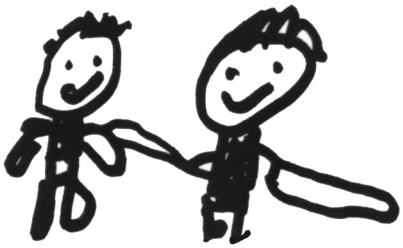
Collaborative Learning Methods continued

Read-Talk-Map

Read



The first step is having the students read or listen to the same selection: silently reading a selection to themselves; listening to a selection to the class. The selection can be non-fiction or fiction.

Talk

After finishing reading or listening to a selection, the students are paired up with an A and B designation. It is important that the paired students are physically facing each other during the Talk phase. The A student begins the process by sharing everything they know about the selection they read (or listened to) while B listens. Then they are instructed to switch their roles after a specified amount of time. The B student shares everything they know about the selection to A including anything new or what they have previously heard. It is helpful to provide a specified amount of time (an unusual number such as 23 seconds is very effective). A timer can be effective. It is important for the student sharing to keep speaking if they are the student talking. Before students are paired the teacher could pair with a student to model the procedure to the whole class. This provides a platform to model how one thinks.

Map (Draw; Perform; Write)

After completing the Talk phase, students then map (or draw or perform or write) what they have learned from the Read and Talk elements of the porcess. They map without looking at the text they just read or listened to.

Simple Jigsaw

The facilitator divides an assignment or topic into four parts with all students from each Learning Team volunteering to become "experts" on one of the parts. Expert Teams then work together to master their fourth of the material and also to discover the best way to help others learn it. All experts then reassemble in their home Learning Teams where they teach the other group members.

Collaborative Visual Mapping

Using visual cognitive maps (e.g. Thinking Maps) as a collaborative tool for thinking and understanding concepts, ideas and frames of reference.

Question Game

To start the question game the two participants must initially decide on a topic to question. One person starts with an open ended question, then the other person responds with a related open ended question. This continues back and forth with the two participants. Pairs can then share with small groups and/or the whole group.

An example is:
Topic: (e.g. object in the room) light bulb
Questioner A: How does a light bulb work?
Questioner B: Who designed the current light bulb?
Questioner A: Who invented the light bulb?
Questioner B: Why would someone invent the light bulb?
Questioner A: How can we improve the light bulb?

Sequencing in Silence

Please refer to the specific handout.

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