



Spectrum

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Cooperative Learning: A Framework for Success

Cooperative learning (CL) is a student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning **and** the learning of all group members. CL is much more than placing students in groups and expecting them to discuss a chapter and then report back to the class. Although lively discussion from this type of activity can take place, typical group discussions tend to be less focused with little in the way of meaningful learning taking place. CL, on the other hand, holds all of the group members accountable for their own and the group's outcomes. Several essential characteristics must be present for a group to be called "cooperative." Even though the instructor structures the majority of CL activities, it is the group and each of its members who are responsible for learning. A group must: exhibit interdependence, support one another's learning, will hold each other accountable for the group's process and outcomes, exhibit acceptable interpersonal skills, and process group dynamics (Johnson and Others, 1992).

The literature has shown that students who are given opportunities to work in CL groups are able to learn more quickly and efficiently, are better able to grasp and retain content, and take a more positive stance toward their own learning (Felder and Brent, 2001; Hamilton, 1997; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Stahl, 1994). CL experiences give students the opportunity to collaborate, assume various group-related roles and hold each other accountable. These skills are transferable and sought after in today's competitive workplace.

Although different approaches exist in creating CL groups, a number of characteristics instructors can use are considered vital to successful cooperative learning experiences.

- Structured outcome-oriented objectives are planned by the instructor,
- Each group member must accept or "buy into" the outcome-oriented objectives,
- A set of well-defined and explicit instructions or directions is given to the group before it begins group activity,
- Heterogeneous groups are formed based on the project, size and composition of the class, and how long the class meets (or how long the topic is studied),
- Ways to achieve self-efficacy must easily be attainable where each group member feels he or she has the ability to succeed,
- Learning tasks are structured where students must rely on each other's skills and abilities to succeed. Accountability for themselves and the group is required,
- Provide a means to teach students social skills and behaviors before the group is formed,
- Provide enough time for the groups to function as a group, where members or students learn to rely on, cooperate with, and learn from one another,
- Reward groups that achieve beyond expectations. Doing this in public encourages further success of that group and other groups to do as well (Stahl, 1994).

See Stahl (1994) for a more complete and detailed list.

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GRANT DEADLINE

For Development Grants Application for January – June 2007 Cycle:

Faculty Development Grant deadline:
November 10, 2006

Supportive Professional Staff Development Grant deadline:
November 17, 2006

Cooperative learning (CL) can be adapted across learning domains, can work well in small and large classes, and can meet the needs of students with diverse learning preferences. When properly implemented, cooperative learning has been shown to impart learning. CL, then, may also be helpful as instructional methods are developed.

To learn more about creating effective cooperative learning opportunities in your own classroom, register for the spring 2007 Teaching Effectiveness Institute, Thursday, January 11, 2006, presented by Barbara Millis, University of Nevada, Reno, a sought-after speaker in the area of cooperative learning. Look for more details mid fall semester at the Faculty Development Web site (<http://www.niu.edu/facdev>) and on flyers that will be distributed across campus. Register early for this motivating and dynamic workshop.

References

- Felder, R. M. and R. Brent. (2001). Effective strategies for cooperative learning. *Journal of Cooperation & Collaboration in College Teaching*, 10(2): 69-75.
- Hamilton, S. J. (1997). *Collaborative learning: Teaching and learning in the arts, sciences, and professional schools*. (2nd Ed.). Indianapolis, IN: IUPUI Center for Teaching and Learning.
- Johnson, D. W., and Others. (1992). *Cooperative learning: Increasing college faculty instructional productivity*. Retrieved September 11, 2006, from <http://www.ntlf.com/html/lib/bib/92-2dig.htm>
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- Stahl, R. J. (1994). *The essential elements of cooperative learning in the classroom*. ERICDIGESTS.ORG. ERIC Identifier: ED370881. Retrieved September 11, 2006, from <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/OR/ConsumerGuides/cooplear.html>

Call for Faculty Development Grant Proposals

Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center is offering grants of up to \$2,500 each annually to continuing tenured and tenure track faculty. The purpose of the grants is to encourage and support faculty development activities that directly benefit the applicants' departments, colleges and/or the university. Equal matching funds from the applicants' academic units or appropriate external sources are required. Five copies of each proposal, including the proposal cover sheet, accompanying letters of support and other relevant documents must be submitted to the Grant Review Subcommittee, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 319 Adams Hall, by Friday, November 10, 2006 for activities scheduled between January and June 2007. Complete proposal guidelines, cover sheet, and a sample proposal can be found on the Web at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/development/grants.htm>. Tenured or tenure-track faculty who plan to submit proposals by the November 10, 2006 deadline and need more information are encouraged to register and attend the Faculty Development Grant Writing Seminar that will be held from 12:00 to 1:00 pm on Friday, October 6, 2006. Register online at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/forms/fsprogreg.htm> or email facdev@niu.edu.

Call for SPS Development Grant Proposals

Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center and Human Resource Services are offering grants up to \$1,000 each to Supportive Professional Staff (SPS) pursuing professional development activities that benefit the individuals as well as their units. To be considered for one of these grants, candidates must have completed a minimum of two years of at least half-time employment as Supportive Professional Staff at NIU and should have demonstrated an interest in professional growth supporting the instructional, research, or service functions of the university. Academic or support service units can submit proposals for arranging programs (not already available at NIU) that benefit a large group of SPS in their units or several units. Five copies of each proposal, including cover sheet, letters of support and other relevant documents, must be submitted to the SPS Awards Committee, Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, 319 Adams Hall, by Friday, November 17, 2006 for activities proposed between January and June 2007. Complete proposal guidelines, cover sheet, and a sample proposal can be found at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/development/grants.htm>. SPS who plan to submit a proposal by the November 17, 2006 deadline and need more information are encouraged to register to attend the SPS Development Grant Writing Seminar from 12:00 to 1:00 pm on Friday, November 3, 2006. Register online at <http://www.niu.edu/facdev/forms/fsprogreg.htm> or email facdev@niu.edu.

Web logs, more commonly referred to as blogs, have become commonplace for online communication. A blog is a type of Web site that includes entries made in the same fashion as a diary or journal in reverse chronological order. The individual posting to the blog (aka: "blogger") is able to quickly make new entries without any advanced knowledge of HTML scripting. Blog posts can be configured to permit comments, whereby readers are able to respond to the content of the postings. In early 2006, over 50 million blogs are reported to be in existence, with at least one new blog created every second of every day. A study by Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 8% of current U.S. Internet users are actively using blogs as a means of creative, personal expression (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2006).

A blog is a type of website that includes entries made in the same fashion as a diary or journal in reverse chronological order.

So why all the recent interest in blogs? Some faculty have turned to blogs as a means for personal self-expression and self-publication, while others have incorporated blogging into their class activities (Perlmutter, 2005). The ease of use for both contributors and readers coupled with the ability for the content to be syndicated to others through the process of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) are among the many contributing factors leading to the prominence of blogging among the various modes of computer mediated communication. RSS makes it possible for readers to use an aggregator to check for updates from numerous blogs simultaneously and view the content of new postings without physically having to revisit the source blogs.

Those interested in blogging have a wide array of approaches available for blog creation. Many free or low-cost hosted services are emerging that cater to instructional applications of blogging within higher education. Using one such free service, <http://www.edublogs.org>, faculty can easily register for an account, create a blog, and begin contributing to it within a matter of minutes. A sister service, <http://www.uniblogs.org>, provides university students with similar blog creation and contribution capabilities. If one has a server and the ability to make some technical configurations, the open source software powering many common hosted solutions such as WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.org>) or bBlog (<http://www.bblog.org>) can be downloaded for free.

While blogging is becoming increasingly popular within higher education contexts, it is important for those engaged in blogging to be cognizant of the full spectrum of associated issues. Here are a few important considerations to keep in mind when deciding whether to use a blog for personal or academic purposes:

- **Access.** The content of blogs is typically available to ANYONE online. While this may be desirable when attempting to broadcast your message to a vast number of individuals, the information is in fact available to anyone, anywhere with an Internet connection.
- **Syndication.** RSS makes it possible for blog contributions to be read in a variety of different contexts, including directly within another Web page. All one needs is the URL of the RSS feed for a blog to syndicate the content of that blog to any other Web site.
- **Credibility.** Anyone with Internet access can setup a blog and post to it. Therefore, the credibility of content found on blogs is often questionable and is certainly nowhere near that of peer-reviewed publications.
- **Longevity.** The nature of computer mediated communication via the Internet is such that if at any point in the future the author wishes to delete postings, it may be extremely difficult to do so.

Blogging is simply one of the many emerging online technologies that can be utilized today to enhance the learning experience of students. Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center offers a variety of workshops over the academic year related to the implementation of various instructional technologies. A current schedule of workshops is always available online at <http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/events/current.htm>

References

- Pew Internet & American Life Project. (2006, July 19). *Bloggers: A portrait of the internet's new storytellers*. Retrieved September 12, 2006, from http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/186/report_display.asp
- Perlmutter, D. D. (2005). Blogs as a tool for teaching. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 51(42). Retrieved September 13, 2006, from <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v51/i42/42b03301.htm>

Podcasting is a blending of two words, 'iPod' and 'broadcasting'. It represents a method of (1) publishing online content such as audio, video, images, or text files, and (2) allowing users to receive the content in an automated fashion. This last feature distinguishes podcasting from the traditional method of acquiring online information. The traditional method requires users to locate the desired online information and 'pull' it to their computer every time. The newer model only requires users to seek out the information, in the form of a podcast, one time only, where a user can subscribe to an RSS feed. Future additions to the podcast, or 'episodes,' will be 'pushed' to the user's computer. This model is similar to subscribing to listservs, journals, magazines or newspapers in that the subscriber automatically receives materials.

Depending on the type of podcast, users can view the content on either a computer or audio mp3 player/or video-enabled iPod unit. The types include:

- Audio podcast (music, lectures, news broadcast)
- Enhanced podcast (synchronizing images (PowerPoint/Keynote slide presentations with audio files, only available with Macs),
- Video podcast (video clips formatted to play on computers or vide-enabled iPods),
- Other, as an attachment (class notes, word processing documents, PDFs, spreadsheets, photos).



Supporters of podcasting see a number of advantages in this relatively new teaching strategy. Some educators promote podcasting on the basis of the power of the spoken word, which can appeal to auditory learners. Podcast are also promoted on the basis of offering anytime/anyplace learning, also referred to as mobile or 'm' learning and personal on-demand instruction. Using the free podcatching software, students can view podcast episodes multiple times on their computers or download the podcast episodes to portable players.

Critics of podcasting charge that this form of instruction is not the same as actively engaging students with material in class, where learning occurs through a process of interacting by critical questioning. Others charge that by making lectures and class notes available for download, students will be less likely to attend classes. Advocates respond by noting that pedagogically, podcast should be integrated into the existing curriculum and used as supplemental rather than as stand-alone teaching units. Podcast material could be preparatory work for class sessions such as having students view video clips, listen to music pieces, or read in-class assignments, saving more time for face-to-face instruction. Faculty concerned about students missing classes might choose to implement a class attendance policy. Students could still benefit from viewing notes as well as listening to lectures following class. While podcasting is another useful tool to add to one's repertoire of educational strategies, faculty are discouraged from relying too heavily on any single technology strategy. In addition, faculty should be cognizant of how implementing a new technology impacts accessibility for their students.

Currently, the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center offers instruction on how to create podcasts in its 'Pod Series' of workshops. Check the Center's schedule for more information on upcoming workshops.

Development Grant Recipients for July -- December 2006

The following faculty were awarded:

Gerard Awanou, Department of Mathematical Sciences
Michelle Demaray & Christine Malecki, Department of Psychology
Luis Flores, Department of Management
Ashley Nason, School of Art
Deborah Robertson, School of Theatre and Dance

The following SPS were awarded:

Stacey Deegan, Department of Technology
Joyce Keller, Career Services
Peter B. Olson, Art Museum

2006 Faculty Summer Institute Grants

Sarah Mchone-Chase, University Libraries
Patricia Nelson, Department of English

Roland Winkler, Department of Physics
Shengde Zhou, Department of Biological Sciences

2006 David Raymond Grant for the Use of Technology in Teaching

Mace Bentley, Andrew Krmenek and Phil Young (Department of Geography) received the 2006 David Raymond Grant for the Use of Technology in Teaching sponsored by Mr. David Raymond (former trustee), Office of the Provost, and the NIU Foundation. Congratulations to all the recipients!

Spectrum is published every fall and spring semester by the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center, Adams Hall 319, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115. Phone: (815) 753-0595, Email: facdev@niu.edu, Fax: (815) 753-2595, website: <http://www.facdev.niu.edu>. For more information about upcoming events, Faculty Development programs, or featured articles, please contact: Brenda Hodges, Program Coordinator, at (815) 753-3015 or email: brhodges@niu.edu.