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ABSTRACT
        While it is generally accepted that people working in
groups can accomplish more than people working individually, it is
equally accepted that parasites will attempt to feed on the other
group members. Group work has been called by several names--group
learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning--all of which
carry slightly different implications: collaborative learning, for
instance, suggests a more rigorous process of confrontation and
resolution of differences. All, however, require considerable
preparation on the part of the instructor if they are to be
successful. K. McKenney and M. Graham-Buxton suggest that instructors
allow students to choose their own groups and decide on their own
leader. Janet Mancini Billson lists eight criteria of successful
groups, which emphasize clear purposes, effective communication,
shared leadership, and respect for minority views. In a small group
situation, dealing with the do-nothing, parasite group member is an
inevitable problem. One tactic is to require that students bring
written work to class as a kind of ticket in to the group;
unannounced in-class written assignments can also be effective.
Despite the problem of the parasite, most experts are emphatic about
assigning one grade to the whole group, although some suggest that
individual grades can be assigned too. Grading on a curve is
discouraged because it induces excessive competition for the few
"As." A detailed example of how a project for an interpersonal
communication class might be organized illustrates these organizing
principles. (Contains 34 references and evaluation materials.)
(TB)

Dealing with Parasites in Group Projects

Presented at the

Speech Communication Association Convention

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Abstract

In a recent <u>Calvin and Hobbes</u> cartoon (Watterson, 1993),
Calvin remarks, "Calvin the ant puts down his grain of sand. He's
sick of working all the time! He hates cooperating with all the
other ants! Calvin doesn't want to labor for the benefit of the
colony! . . . Calvin the flea sucks the blood of the angry host in
parasitic contentment" (p. 8). The joys of group work! While it is
generally accepted that people working in groups can accomplish
more than people working individually, it is equally accepted that
parasites will attempt to feed on the other group members. It is
the purpose of this paper to briefly discuss the benefits of group
work, and then look specifically at developing a group project for
the interpersonal communication course. The focus will be on
organizing the project, working the project, dealing with the
parasite, grading the project, and supplying a project example.

In a recent <u>Calvin and Hobbes</u> cartoon (Watterson, 1994),
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parasite, grading the project, and supplying a project example.

We are not unfamiliar with group work. We serve on
committees in academia, in church, and in the corporate world. In
their book, <u>Organizational Communication: Balancing Creativity
and Constraint</u>, Eisenberg and Godall (1993) note "The world of
work is changing as there is increased competitive pressure. There

is a focus on quality and customer service" (p. 261). If the world is working in quality circles and teams then it is appropriate for the classroom to mirror the "associated life" (Bruffee, 1995).

Several authors have pointed to the value of collaborative learning groups at the college level (e.g. Mckenney & Graham-Buxton, 1994; Bouton & Garth, 1983; Bruffee, 1984; Rau & Heyl, 1990; Whipple, 1987). Some authors write of cooperative learning, others call it collaborative learning, but both have similar long-range goals. Chapman, Leonard, and Thomas (1991) state that when students work together "individual efforts become valued because they enable the group to succeed. Students become aware that they each have an important contribution to make. And, perhaps more important, they each realize a sense of self-reliance" (p. 46). Dinan & Frydrychowski (1994) relate that "Team learning requires students to be responsible for their own and their groups's learning. Team members tend to motivate attendance and preparation, handle discipline problems, and provide assistance to one another. Friendships often form, interpersonal skills are enhanced, and anxiety about academic abilities is

reduced" (p. 141). Bruffee (1993) agrees that "collaborative

learning gives students practice in working together when the

stakes are relatively low, so that they can work effectively together

later with the stakes are high. They learn to depend on one

another rather than depending exclusively on the authority of the

teacher" (p.1).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning promotes higher level thinking and

mastery of content in adults (Cates, 1995). According to Adams,

Carlson, & Hamm (1990) this results because "students have a

better chance to explore ideas, justify their views and synthesize

knowledge within a supportive environment. Instead of quiet

isolated "workers" reluctant to share answers, shielding their

papers from other students' eyes, students are encouraged to

share ideas, collaborate together and pool their knowledge to solve

or resolve problems. Learning is a cooperative rather than a

competitive endeavor" (p. 10).

Cooper (1995) finds that cooperative learning is a viable

alternative to traditional educational strategies at the college level.

She notes the following advantages of cooperative learning: 1) students take responsibility for their own learning and become actively involved; 2) students develop higher-level thinking skills; 3) there is increased student retention; and 4) student satisfaction increases with the learning experience and promotes positive attitudes toward the subject matter.

However, Myers (1992) warns that without an understanding of the process of cooperation, cooperative learning becomes a "gimmick" and learning suffers. Students need to have had experience with the concepts of active listening, assertiveness, and conflict resolution.

Additionally, the instructor's role is not always obvious. Fiske (1991) points out that in cooperative learning teachers function as coaches and are responsible for the key elements of successful cooperative learning. Instructors must select and structure the task; prepare students to function successfully in groups; monitor the completion process; and evaluate the outcome. Temperly (1994) points out that the students should feel

as if their instructor is a part of every group to validate the

knowledge of any individual or group.

Collaborative Learning

William Whipple (Gamson - Kadel & Keechner, 1994)

contrasts collaborative learning with cooperative learning:

"Cooperative learning means noncompetitive learning, in which

the reward structure encourages students to work together to

accomplish a common end. Collaborative learning is always

cooperative, but takes students one step further: to a point where

they must confront the issue of power and authority implicit in

any form of learning but usually ignored" (p. 8). Eisenberg &

Godall (1993) agree that conflict in groups is inevitable. "but what

is most important is how the group members handle the

conflict....In general, the two highly assertive styles, *competition*

and *collaboration*, are the most effective....Contrary to what most

people think, *compromise* is not a very good choice for resolving a

conflict. compromise is usually classifies as "lose-lose" solution

from which neither person gets what he or she wants.

Collaboration is better, because when it works the parties can

come up with a potentially novel solution that satisfies everybody"
(pp. 269-270).

As with cooperative learning, Flannery (1994) suggests that
"collaborative learning requires an authoritative instructional
presence if it is to be successful....One cannot simply throw
students together with their peers with no guidance or
preparation and expect a successful collaborative learning
experience to result" (p. 22)

Adams, Carlson, & Hamm (1990): identify several aids to
collaborative learning:

" - Collaboration works best when students are given real
problems to solve.

- Learning to think as a team that "sinks or swims" together
can help many students learn more.

-A collaborative environment works best if it allows risks and
mistakes.

- Collaborative learning allows practice in solving problems.

- Individuals learn best when they are held individually
responsible for group subtasks" (p. 271).

Regardless of the term used, cooperative, collaborative, or group learning requires considerable preparation, and complete fairness of the instructor.

<u>Organizing the Project</u>

"As a college student, you have most likely had the occasion to work on a group project. Unless you are extremely fortunate, it probably wasn't a very good experience. Perhaps someone did all of the work and got no credit for it; maybe one of the group members didn't show up until the end, and then refused to take responsibility for his or her absences. When all was said and done, you may have concluded that nothing was accomplished in the group that you couldn't have accomplished better alone" (Eisenberg & Godall, 1993, p. 260).

While tension and conflict may still occur, much of the frustration can be relieve by careful organization of the group project. Several suggestions follow.

Mckenney and Graham-Buxton (1994) encourage students to form their groups by moving around, finding 2-4 other people to join them. "We insist that the groups be no smaller than three

persons and no larger than five; this range allows for some

heterogeneity while keeping groups small enough to give all

students the opportunity to contribute" (p. 59).

After the groups are formed, Kienitz (1995) recommends

that the first priority is to decide on a leader and the group's

format. Matters to be discussed include the division of tasks for

gathering information and setting a time frame for the group to

check on their progress.

Janet Mancini Billson's article, "Group Process in the College

Classroom: Building Relationships for Learning" (Kadel &

Keechner, 1994) gives eight benchmarks for effective groups:

1. A group must have a clear understanding of its purpose

and goals.

2. A group is flexible in developing strategies for achieving

goals.

3. An effective group works toward high levels of

communication; expression of feelings and attitudes is considered

important to the work of the group.

4. An effective group is able to evaluate its progress
objectively and adjust its operations to achieve greater
productivity and unity.

5. An effective group can proceed as a whole, while
encompassing minority views and opinions; the group
incorporates contributions of all its members.

6. An effective group enables its members to share
responsibility and leadership; the group is not dominated by the
leader or any member.

7. An effective group is cohesive, but allows for individual
expression.

8. An effective group can channel emotional behavior into
rational, productive group effort (pp. 35-37).

Tied closely to the responsibilities of the group is the
responsibility of the instructor to give clear directions of the task.
Specific criteria must be provided. Johnson & Johnson (1993)
maintain that proper organization of the group project will foster
positive interdependence as well as individual accountability.

Working the Project

To promote group autonomy, Myers (1992) uses the following classroom rules:

- Each member of a group is responsible for his or her own work and behavior.

- Group members must help any other member of their group who asks for it.

- No member of a group can ask the teacher for help unless all members of the group have the same question" (p. 131).

Adams, Carlson, & Hamm (1990) concur, "One of the goals is to have students rely more heavily upon their classmates for assistance in doing a task and evaluating an answer. Only after they have checked with everyone in the group can they ask the teacher for help" (p. 21).

Temperly (1994) further suggests that the instructor "set up a schedule with recommended times for each activity to help the students budget their time" (p. 97).

Dealing with the Parasite

A common complaint among those who use small-group instructional procedures is the inequitable distribution of the work load. Mckinney & Graham-Buxton (1994) call the student who contributes little, if anything, to the group the "free rider." They note that several colleagues use the "ticket in" strategy to deal with free riders; "before class students must prepare individually for the CLG assignment by completing a work-sheet of questions or writing out ideas. Students who do not produce the "ticket in" when they come to class are not allowed to participate in that CLG assignment or to receive credit" (p. 60). They further suggest unannounced assignments of asking students to write in-class individual responses before working on the group response and averaging students' individual and group response grades.

Vermette (1995) reminds us that "a student's ability to hide in a group and not contribute is the worst thing that can happen to a cooperative learning process. Simply put, it will undermine and destroy the process. Paul and Paula Parasite, those kids who just hang out in class and yet are perceived by others to succeed

because they get a high grade on a team-graded activity, will learn to take from the system and will teach other students that their own hard work does not matter" (p. 280).

Several suggestions come from those using cooperative/ collaborative techniques. Cooper, Robinson, & McKinney (1994) remind us to introduce the technique well and to "keep close tabs on groups as they work....the instructor may take that person aside, outside of class, and attempt to remedy the problem" (p.86). Rewalt (1995) gives the following instructions, "During each meeting of the group, minutes will be kept. These minutes will be turned in on the day of the presentation and will include attendance for each meeting" (p. 4). Cramer (1994) recommends "Periodic collection of work, such as drafts, journals, reflections, and progress reports, can help to determine students' current status in particular projects" p. 70.

McKinney & Graham-Buxton (1994) note that "most students' individual paper grades are raised by the group grade, although a few people write better individual than group papers. Initially we gave those students their individual grade which was higher, but

we came to believe that in doing so we encouraged lazy work on the group effort; thus, we gave them a group-individual average in the next semester" (p. 60). They go on to say that we "must make sure the students understand that the instructor is aware of their concern" (p. 63).

Michaelsen and Black (1994) provide for this concern through the use of **group** appeals. They have found that an appeals process as an "effective way of increasing both learning and group cohesiveness. When properly managed, the appeals process galvanizes the students' negative emotional energy" (p. 69). They further suggest insisting on written appeals. "requiring groups to put their thoughts in writing forces students to formulate their reasoning in a systematic way and also gives the instructor the opportunity to evaluate their arguments in the privacy of his or her office and avoid a public debate about the merits of the appeal" (p.70).

So far, we have dealt with extrinsic motivators. Sharan & Sharan (1992) note that group work also provides intrinsic motivation. This "refers to the nature of the students' emotional

involvement in the topic they are studying and in the pursuit of

the knowledge they seek to acquire. The goal is to have students

become personally interested in seeking the information they need

in order to understand the topic under study" (p. 19). A key

provided by Cooper, Robinson, & McKinney (1994) is that we

"structure the cooperative learning activities so that students must

learn something, not do something" (p. 83).

Grading the Project

Proponents of collaboration are very specific that the grades

assigned must be group grades. If a group earns a B+, then every

member of the group earns a B+. Veenendall, DeVito, & Smith

(1992) in the Instructor's Manual for DeVito' text The Interpersonal

Communication Book point out that "at first the students will

favor this approach, but as the semester progresses, it will become

clear to them that some students work harder than others, and

some students won't work at all. Group grades must be used,

however as the project represents a group effort and the grade

represents the real consequences of the groups' effort. The

system parallels life in that work groups are commonplace in

business and industry. In such groups, members share responsibility for the final group product."

Slavin and Graves (Chapman, Leonard, & Thomas, 1992) recommend giving both group and individual evaluations, with the group evaluation being the average of the individual evaluations. Cooper, Robinson, McKinney (1994) further recommend using criterion-referenced grading since norm-referenced grading (grading on the curve) often explicitly encourages excessive competition for scarce resources (A's and B's). Cramer (1994) expands by pointing out that "When a combination of approaches is used throughout the semester, graded assessment becomes woven into the fabric of the course" p. 71.

According to Michaelsen and Black (1994) the grade should be comprised of these factors:

- Each of the components should be given enough weight soit is clear to students that the instructor things it is important.

- The instructor must be personally comfortable with administering the chosen grading system.

- The grading system must be responsive to student concerns for fairness and equity.

<u>Providing a Project Sample</u>

The project sample included in this paper was prepared for a community college entry-level interpersonal communication course. It is referenced to DeVito's <u>The Interpersonal Communication Book</u>, seventh edition. The project was first given to me by my colleague, mentor, and friend, Dr. Trudy Hanson. Dr. Laurel Vartabedian (1994) influenced a change with her article on the "Instant Essay." The group evaluation of "co-authoring" is based largely on the work of Debra Kirchhof-Glazier (1994). When I realized that many of my students were taking this class prior to English composition, further specific revisions were made.

This project is designed to lead the students through Bloom's taxonomy of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It supports both individual and group contributions. The project consists of a research paper, an oral presentation of the findings, and a class participation activity to teach the interpersonal concept being discussed.

Determining the Group: Usually three students form a group, but as many as five works well. I select "recording secretaries" based on previous performance to insure that at least one person in the group understands structure and grammar. Those students may then invite other students to work with them, or a class member may ask to join a particular group.

Working the Project: The project is assigned after four weeks of class. Lectures have covered listening concepts, assertiveness, and group skills. General topics are suggested to the students. The group selects a topic and after some initial research, subdivides the topic into sections allowing each student to make an individual contribution to the final project. Over the next eight weeks the students are given two or three full class periods to work on the project as well as time following two quizzes. Peer editing of the individual rough drafts comprises one of the class periods. The second is used for the group to write the introduction, application, conclusion, and bibliography. The third day is set aside for preparing materials needed for the activity.

Dealing with the Parasite: The students must meet a pre-
determined schedule. While I do not collect their work-in-
progress, I am in the room, available for questions, and they are
aware that I know whether or not they are prepared. Additionally, I
require them to turn in their rough drafts with peer editing, as
well as the group minutes of meetings, with their finished project.
Additionally, they may request bonus points, or deductions, for
"senior author" or "acknowledgment" status on the peer evaluation
form.

Grading the Project: The project is criterion based:

30% Individual Research Findings

20% Oral report

30% Group Activity

20% Group Paper

An example of the project is provided in this paper.

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PROJECT TOPIC _____ CLASS _____

Presentation - 50%

    Oral Report
    _____ Organization/ supporting materials   (10 points)
    _____ Report clearly presented   (10 points)

    Activity
    _____ Well developed & presented   (10 points)
    _____ Applicable to the topic   (10 points)
    _____ Degree of class participation   (10 points)

Paper / Group: 20%

    _____ Intro: Purpose clearly stated   (5 points)
    _____ Application to text   (5 points)
    _____ Conclusion, Bibliography   (5 points)
    _____ Draft Section/ Group Minutes   (5 points)

Research findings/ Individual: 30%

Intro/ Topic Sentence   _____   1st Contributor:
Source development
Personal analysis/ Link with IPC   _____
Conclusion
Grammar/ Proofreading   _____   Total: _____
Participation   _____

Intro/ Topic Sentence   2nd Contributor:
Source development
Personal analysis/ Link with IPC   _____
Conclusion
Grammar/ Proofreading   _____   Total: _____
Participation   _____

Intro/ Topic Sentence   _____   3rd Contributor:
Source development   _____
Personal analysis/ Link with IPC   _____
Conclusion
Grammar/ Proofreading   _____   Total: _____
Participation   _____

Intro/ Topic Sentence   _____   4th Contributor:
Source development
Personal analysis/ Link with IPC   _____
Conclusion
Grammar/ Proofreading   _____   Total: _____
Participation   _____

Designated Author Peer/Evaluation

When all students in the group contribute equally to the project, everyone gets the same group grade (remember that individual contribution grades will vary). On occasion, a student feels that s/he has contributed above and beyond the work of anyone else in the group. When this happens, the student who has put in the most work can propose to their group that s/he be designated "senior author" of the manuscript and receive the grade of the paper plus three points extra credit. All other students are named "contributing authors" of the manuscript and receive the grade as is.   If a student did very minimal work, according to the evaluation of the rest of the group, s/he is considered an "acknowledgement" and receives the grade minus five points. Students who do not contribute at all receive a zero.

The group has sole responsibility for differential grading, and demonstrates this by assigning the author designation as well as signing the document to indicate agreement. Group members usually agree with the decision -- recognizing differences in students' contributions. If necessary, the instructor may serve as a mediator to help students resolve the conflict, but will not determine the outcome for the group.

Please indicate the author status of your group:

Contributing Authors:
     (All receive the same group grade, but may have different
     individual contribution grades)

     _____

     _____

     _____

     _____

     _____

The following designations are optional:

Senior Author (3 bonus points)   _____

Acknowledgement (minus 5 points)   _____

The following signatures are required of all group members and indicate you are in agreement with the rankings.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____