

Some thoughts from North Park University
Writing Advisors about...

Collaborative Learning



Collaborative Learning is...

“The collaborative process is based on an exchange of knowledge, starting in the younger years with little knowledge and growing in it as one progresses. With greater knowledge between collaborators, there is more of an opportunity for creativity and personal voice. Collaboration at its best is a catalyst for writers to go beyond their knowledge of mechanics and grammar and truly create something artistic and unique with their writing.”

“What then is the definition of collaboration? Perhaps we might define it as peers working together to reach a common goal. The common goal for writing advisors and the students is to produce an engaging paper that combines the qualities of a good thesis with well-formed grammar and direct prose. Collaboration becomes the most effective way to form original papers because it utilizes the power of discussion to expand and refine ideas.”



Not-So-Positive Experiences with Collaborative Learning

“A recurring collaborative nightmare of mine always involves in-class peer editing. I always seem to get paired with weaker writers - I guess it’s some kind of teaching strategy, and never get anything constructive much less helpful written on my papers. Either other students don’t care, don’t take time, or don’t have the capacity to help. One time in Dialogue last year we spent forty-five minutes in class going through another student’s paper, and I went through a classmate’s awful first draft marking grammar and suggesting transitions. When I got my paper back with two spelling corrections on it you can imagine my frustration considering the amount of time and energy I spent racking my brains trying to remember grammar rules I learned in high school.”

“I misunderstood their motive: [my conferees] were not writing to communicate with me. They were writing for the express purpose of communication some idea to a teacher for a grade. They did not see a life for their paper beyond a vehicle for their knowledge and a plea for a passing grade.”

“Often one person cares way too much about their schoolwork, and other students slack off and depend on this ‘overachiever.’”



Positive Experiences with Collaborative Learning

“It was our duty to talk to [students]; help them better understand, but mostly help to spark their passion for their own work. This way of collaboration allows them to take control of their paper, and ultimately their education.”

“ It would be productive and beneficial to those studying collaborative learning to recognize occasional failures and from there, familiarize ourselves with successful ways of leading a classroom through using this type of learning.”

“Writers who share a similar base of knowledge of writing work together to hone each other’s skills, like metal sharpening metal. Each writer brings an individual perspective that, when shared through collaboration, benefits all of the writers involved.”

What North Park Dialogue students think about Collaborative Learning

What kinds of collaborative activities did you do in Dialogue this year?

“We had class discussions, and we often participated in going to plays.”

“We participated in having Chicago events, videos, class discussion, and we did some peer editing.”

“Peer editing and discussions.”

What did you enjoy?

“I enjoyed some of the literature and people in the actual class - we became a family.”

“The discussions and some of the books were enjoyable.”

“I loved the discussions...”

What didn't you like?

“I did not enjoy the lack of professionalism and the ignorance that was prevalent during discussions.”

What would you like to include in order to better prepare you for collaborative experiences in the future?

“..More training if we do peer editing.”

“More collaboration from the students.”

“Possibly we could do more of [collaborative experiences].”

What the *Experts* think about Collaborative Learning

Kenneth A. Bruffee explains collaborative learning as a “conversation” in his article, “Peer Tutoring and the ‘Conversation of Mankind,’”

“If we consider thought as internalized conversation and writing as re-externalized conversation, peer tutoring plays an important role in education for at least two reasons - both resulting from the fact that peer tutoring is a form of collaborative learning. First, peer tutoring provides a social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation that academics most value...[Secondly,] as a form of collaborative learning, peer tutoring is important because it provides the kind of social context in which normal discourse occurs: a community of knowledgeable peers. This is the main goal of peer tutoring.”

“Often times as thoughts are verbalized, as humans it is our attempt to determine what that thought is as we speak it. We are figuring out what we are saying even as we say it, and just the saying of it helps us to further understand what we are meaning.”

What the *Experts* think about Collaborative Learning

In her article, “Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center,” from the [Writing Center Journal](#), **Andrea Lunsford** describes the benefits of collaboration,

1. “Collaboration aids in problem finding as well as problem solving.
2. Collaboration aids in learning abstractions.
3. Collaboration aids in transfer and assimilation; it fosters interdisciplinary thinking.
4. Collaboration leads not only to sharper, more critical thinking (students must explain, defend, adapt), but to deeper understanding of *others*.
5. Collaboration leads to higher achievement in general.
6. Collaboration promotes excellence.
7. Collaboration engages the whole student and encourages active learning; it combines reading, talking, writing, thinking; it provides practice in both synthetic and analytic skills.”

What the *Experts* think about Collaborative Learning

John Trimbur, in his article “Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing” reflects on his positive perspective regarding collaborative learning,

“Collaborative learning seemed to offer a method to overcome the separation of learning and social experience in traditional education. Learning in groups...is often more effective than learning individually because learning involves more than simply acquiring new information. It also involves the acceptance of new habits, values, beliefs, and ways of talking about things. To learn is to change: learning implies a shift in social standing- a transition from one status and identity to another and a reorientation of social allegiances”

Tips for how to prepare students for Collaborative Learning

“In order for collaborative learning to function, it has to include people **who want to be included**, not people who just want to ride on the shirrtails of the hard workers, but students who will contribute to the cause.”

“**Free writing, conversation, outlining, thought-mapping, and other forms of brainstorming** create an active environment where a writer is able to create of coherent thought that he or she can write passionately about. Creative collaboration can pull productive thought out of laziness and distraction, creating a work that is filled with the writer’s passion.”

“Healthy group learning helps **keep ideas fresh by continually passing them back and forth**; growing them by handling them more and more. When ideas are not discussed, the student often ends up handing in a stale paper.”



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Additional Resources Include:

- Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'" *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984. 3-15.
- Lunsford, Andrea. "Collaboration, Control, and the Idea of a Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 12.1 (1991) 3-10.
- Trimbur, John. "Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing." *Perspectives on Research and Scholarship in Composition*, Ben McClelland and Timothy Donovan, eds. (NY: Modern Language Assoc., 1985) 87-109.