The following is a list of policy statements which I believe would encourage the development and implementation of CL on a much wider scale than it is today. I have stated the ideas in the form of policys in order to add a certain amount of emphasis and strength to them. The idea of policies providing the impetus for stimulating CL use may appear to run contrary to the idea of collaboration unless the policies are developed by all the people effected by them, as is suggested below. People effect change, not statements made by outside agencies.

My suggestions are not based upon the reality of many institutional environments where economics drive educational decisions, but on the need to support a major change in teaching pedagogy both financially and psychologically, something which is difficult in the best of times.

I look forward to your comments. Please feel free to comment on any individual item or on the whole package. If I have left out an idea or approach which would facilitate CL at your institution and thus probably on a larger scale I would love to hear about it.

POLICY ISSUES NEEDED FOR THE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN CLASSES

Policy #1) Support and encouragement must come from the highest policy making and financial boards and from the chief executive at the institution. Boards of trustees, presidents, school committees and superintendents must embrace CL as a high system priority. They must be willing to provide the resources needed to implement CL in the form of training opportunities for all personnel, suitable equipment and materials, and manageable class sizes. If possible the CEO should participate in administrative training sessions (see policy #7). The CEO must provide the leadership in order to create an environment supportive of CL.

Policy #2) Teachers must be involved from the start in planning for CL and throughout the process of implementing CL in their classes. Even though the initial impetus must come from the top levels of administration, the development work must be done by the teachers and department level administrators to guarantee its effectiveness. Support in the form of release time for planning and working collaboratively with peers must be provided.

Policy #3) Funding must be adequate to provide for faculty development in the form of workshops, conferences, teacher presentations at conferences and in-house, release time for initial preparation, on-campus activities, materials for use in class and continuous training.

Policy #4) Textbook manufacturers must be involved in the conversion to CL by providing supplemental materials in the form of worksheets, handouts describing group activities, and faculty training materials. Eventually professors will develop materials unique to their courses; however, this process will take several years and an interim approach is needed. Publisher materials will also help model CL handouts for teachers who are just beginning to develop their own materials.

Policy #5) A support group mechanism must be developed and encouraged to involve teachers in the initial development process and in the initial training activities. Meeting times and facilities must be provided along with mentors to help the new groups function.

The Johnsons suggest base groups of teachers who meet weekly to discuss their class procedures, problems and successes. The formalize the process by having teachers sign contracts with each other regarding future activities.

Policy #6) Teachers need to be encouraged to adopt CL in a risk free environment. The teacher evaluation process must be modified to take into account the different teaching methods used, and student testing through standardized tests must be re-evaluated. Alternative forms of assessment will have to be introduced and accepted in order to provide an accurate assessment of the outcomes of CL.

Policy #7) CL should be modeled in institutional decision making. Meetings should be facilitated in a CL manner. Few leaders appear willing to delegate the power to teachers which is needed to implement institutional change. If we desire teachers to delegate power to their students and give up the control afforded by lectures, then administrators must be willing to make the same changes. Teachers must be given the opportunity to work in collaborative versus competitive environments in order to reinforce the benefits of CL.

Policy #8) Administrators and supervisors should be trained in CL and group dynamics in order to be able to evaluate it and model it for the teachers. This goal can be accomplished through seminars, by observing experienced teachers, by taking courses in CL and through in service training

Policy #9) A CL library should be established within the institution and materials provided by teachers should be archived for use by other teachers. Funding must be provided for training materials, books, video tapes, journals, etc.

Policy #10) Students should be involved in the process through a student council, advisory group or committee assignments. The student leaders should receive training in CL also via workshops and in-school activities. As a CL environment grows within an institution less time for individual training will be required since students will be using Cl in all their classes.

Policy #11) The general student population should receive training in conflict resolution, group dynamics and proper social behavior. This agenda could be accomplished outside of regular class time by bringing in experts and student trainers to work with student leaders and with groups of students. Teachers need to be trained in these techniques also. An institutional philosophy of cooperation and conflict resolution must to be established.

policy #12) Teacher training colleges and universities must emphasize CL as the primary teaching paradigm and hire professors who can teach using CL methodology. Teachers will follow the same model they were taught by, which explains why the lecture method is predominant. CL must be modeled in every college class in order to establish this method in teachers' minds.

policy #13) Colleges must adopt CL as the primary learning method in order to encourage secondary and primary teachers to follow suit. Secondary teachers use the lecture format because they feel they must train their students to succeed at the college level.

policy #14) CL must be implemented at all education levels simultaneously. College professors bemoan the fact that students weren't trained in CL at the secondary level, high school teachers criticize junior high teachers, who in turn suggest that primary teachers need to start the process. This situation needs to be rectified by everyone's beginning to use CL so that eventually students will be trained from the very beginning of their education. We can't wait 12 years for the first class to go through the entire process in order for all students to be versed in CL when they reach college.

policy #15) Absolute grading instead of grading on a curve must be adopted by the institution and alternate forms of assessment (such as group grades and portfolios) must be encouraged. The bell curve grading system by its very nature fosters competition, restricts collaboration, and leads to anxiety among students. Within this system, if one student helps another, then he/she alters the bell curve and lowers his/her own grade. Absolute grading eliminates this threat. Higher standards are set in that every student who performs well can receive a top grade.

Policy #16) Curriculum planning and instruction must go hand in hand. "When a curricula is created, instruction must be considered, and when instruction is planned, curriculum materials must be appropriate for the mode of instruction."

Policy #17) Facilities must be provided which are conducive to CL. Lecture halls with fixed ampetheater type seating makes student interaction difficult at best. Rows of desks neatly lined up are an anathema to CL. Moveable chairs and/or tables where students can work together must be provided. Tables large enough to seat 5 people would be ideal. This would allow plenty of room for groups of 4, which may be the maximum size for good group interaction, yet provide flexibility for larger groups.

Policy #18) Financing must be provided in order to maintain small class sizes and thus maximize student interaction and familiarity and student-teacher interaction. Class sizes of 20 are manageable, yielding 10 pairs or 5 groups of 4 students. Depending on the subject matter smaller classes may be desirable. In our present economy this appears to fly in the face of reality. However, large classes are a major impediment to CL and must be reduced in order to encourage teacher participation.

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From: Barbara Davies <cindylou@GETNET.COM>

Ted Thank you so much for all the time and energy you have put into the CL

discussions. i have enjoyed them immensely. I agree with you that many people

criticize CL without being properly trained or criticize it because of negative

things they may have heard about it. I think that CL can be an amazingly

effective instructional methodology to use, but the teacher is the decision

maker who decides when and how it is to be used. The students in any class

have varying abilities, needs, abilities, etc., and sometimes modifications must

be made-what works well with one group of students doesn't mean it will

work well with another. I have found that teachers often give up on using

CL when they try it and it doesn't go well. Some teachers are unwilling to

spend the time needed to teach collaborative skills and as a result, the

students don't cooperate well. Perseverance is important. Once teachers feel

successful at it, they are motivated to continue amidst the obstacles.

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From: "Wharton - Linda C." <lwharton@umd5.umd.edu>

Dear Ted,

I have been following this thread with intrigue! I am a responding simply to reflect on my experience with CL over the years. I attended one day of a Slavin conference by winning a drawing at a faculty meeting two years prior to becoming involved in a Success for All pilot program at my school. The one day experience whet my appetite for enhancing my arsenal of approaches and instructional strategies needed to meet the challenge of tapping the various learning modalities of my students. Yet, I knew that the one day was not sufficient to do an effective job.

I did include group work as a variety to the lesson, but I wanted more. More for me, and more for my students.

I was fortunate that a Success for All (SFA) program was being instituted at two middle school feeder schools and my school was one of the two. CL is a structured component of SFA. The training I received has extended my theoretical and pedagogical base regarding SFA and the CL component. My training was ongoing and intense. Attending SFA conferences was a part of that training. Working collaboratively with other colleagues was ongoing and just as intense.

The program was moved when the zoned feeder schools changed. Fortunately,

the knowledge and experience have stayed with me. I still use many of

the SFA strategies and the CL component, specifically. As many others have

stated, CL is simply one strategy. It happens to be one that has been

effective for me.

The comments have really been enlightening. They have helped me revisit

my direct, hands on training and experience.

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From: Diane Paulson <dipauls@JEFFNET.ORG> (EDSTYLE)

Subject: Re: Bad Rap for CL Undeserved

to KB--I appreciate your comments about your school restructuring process.

To address your questions, I am a family/school counselor in an elementary

school. It is easy to assess what isn't working well when you are an "outsider" My daughter is in 5th grade and has had some negative experiences with CL

that I would determine are the teachers lack of expertise in the area. For instance, once they were put into dyads forpracticing spelling, (this might not really be CL) and my daughter didn't have anyone to work with, the class had an odd number of students. The bad news is the teacher didn't notice! Later I talked with him and he said that she should have just talked with him, so he put the responsibility on the ten yr. old to figure out how to implement his lesson plan. Now my daughter is working with a boy in her class and she is complaining to me that she is doing all the work, he is playing with his friends. When I asked what she had done about it, she did talk with the teacher and she

said to tell so&so, the boy, to help. My assessment is that the teacher

has not taught the kids what CL is and maybe really doesn't know herself

how to teach it. Teachers need inservice support to learn this so that CL

can be implemented with good instruction and each child's learning style

needs to at the least be taken into account.

Sounds like your school is doing some effective restructuring. Prior to

this job, I worked with "at risk" youth in secondary level. They are some

of the most creative kids but their needs in the classroom and school are

different. I am relieved that we have started setting up different syles

of classrooms, and in ssome places Charter Schools to help kids find an

environment that reflects their educational and learning style so they can

stay in school and we will all benefit.

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From: Kim Mackey <mackeys@Alaska.NET>

To: nctm-l@forum.swarthmore.edu

Before supplying some comments to Ted Panitz's post on policies needed to

provide for the full implementation of Collaborative Learning, I would like

to quote from a previous post of Ted's to clarify what Collaborative

Learning is and isn't.

"Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle whereas

cooperation is a structure of interaction designed to facilitate the

accomplishment of an end product or goal."

"practitioners apply this philosophy in the classroom, at committee

meetings, with community groups, within their families and generally as a

way of living with and dealing with other people."

So it is clear that Collaborative Learning, as Ted has defined it, is 1) not

the same as cooperative learning, and 2) is a philosophy of interacting with

human beings that goes beyond the classroom to the core values of an

individual.

>Policy #1) Support and encouragement must come from the highest policy

>making and financial boards and from the chief executive at the institution.

This is a good point. The problem here is that leaders change, and what one

leader has started may be altered by another with a different set of

priorities and philosophy. Education at the k-12 level in the U.S. is run by

local school boards which have frequent elections. To think that we can

convince (and keep convinced) the majority of them to buy into the

philosophy of Collaborative Learning is a dream.

>Policy #5) A support group mechanism must be developed and encouraged to

So I am going to meet weekly with my peers to discuss the great things

happening in my room with Collaborative Learning. And formalize the process

by signing a contract with them about what I am going to do with

Collaborative Learning in the future. How is the contract enforced? If I

don't meet the contract will I be scorned by my peers or will there be more

substantive consequences? What do we do with those recalcitrant, surly

curmudgeons who think this is all fluff and nonsense and who insist on

teaching the "old way"? This is not just a question for Collaborative

Learning, of course. Do backers of Collaborative Learning believe in the

removal of tenure privileges so as to provide a stick with which to force

change?

>Policy #6) Teachers need to be encouraged to adopt CL in a risk free

So Collaborative Learning outcomes will become part of "high stakes" testing

in the sense that they will replace standardized tests as the comparison

between classes, schools, and teachers? Research on alternative forms of

assessment shows that there are problems of reliability, validity, cost,

time, and possible bias with these forms of assessment. See my posts on

Reform and Assessment for sources on this.

>Policy #11) The general student population should receive training in

"proper social behavior". I would like to know what types of social behavior

is "proper" for Collaborative Learning. I know this may sound innocuous, but

for some reason when I see this phrase, I am reminded of the Cultural

Revolution in China and how many teachers, scientists, and engineers were

"reeducated".

>policy #12) Teacher training colleges and universities must emphasize CL as

So Collaborative Learning, being a philosophy, is to be established as the

primary teaching paradigm, and professors who cannot or will not teach using

CL methodology are to be spurned in favor of those who do. If CL is a

philosophy, wouldn't this be considered a form of religious discrimination?

>policy #14) CL must be implemented at all education levels simultaneously.

"CL must be implemented at all education levels simultaneously." Of course,

this means we must all (every teacher, k-16) agree to do this. If we remove

CL and education from the above sentence, "\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_must be implemented at

all levels simultanteously", it sounds pretty revolutionary. And

revolutions, by their very nature, can get pretty bloody in both a literal

and a figurative sense.

In conclusion, I would like to ask a question of practitioners of

Collaborative Learning that has come to mind recently. Realizing that there

is evidence that cooperative learning can enhance the learning of students

versus straight lecture, what evidence is there that Collaborative Learning

is superior in this regard to structured cooperative learning or even the

use of informal peer groups or peer tutoring? I am thinking in this case

about level 2 research in the quantitative sense.

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From: Gary Dannenbring <gary\_dannenbring@qmbridge.drake.edu>

To: K12Assess-L Listserv <K12ASSESS-L@CUA.EDU>

RE>CL series #6- Policies needed for CL 12/7/96

My response to Ted's policies focuses on assessment and evaluation issues

and assessment has already generated some interesting discussion on this

list). The following suggested policies addressed this, at least to some

extent:

" Policy #6) Teachers need to be encouraged to adopt CL in a risk free =

environment.

"policy #15) Absolute grading instead of grading on a curve must be =

adopted by the institution and alternate forms of assessment (such as group grades and portfolios) must be encouraged.

Some comments:

1. The issue of norm referenced vs. criterion referenced assessment (which

seems to be the point of #15) has little to do with whether collaborative

learning is occurring. Both forms of assessment have legitimate, but

different, purposes. The purpose of classroom instruction should be for

all students to achieve at as high a level of possible. (Note - this doesn't yet address WHAT they are achieving). Thus, assessment should be tied directly to the curriculum, and success in meeting the instructional objectives should be appropriately rewarded. Clearly, this cannot be norm referenced. The purpose of norm referenced assessment is for sorting. If we want to determine who should be admitted to graduate school and who should not be admitted, a norm referenced test (such as the GRE) plays a legitimate role. Or, if we want to know how well our school system compares to national norms, we again might use norm referenced instruments (ignoring the debate about what it is that is being assessed by these instruments or how well they do it). None of this has anything to do, directly, with CL, except that we are talking about collaboration in a

classroom setting, and assessment of achievement in that setting requires

criterion-referenced measures.

2. The proposed policies avoid the issue of what is to be assessed. There are at least general categories of results, and each could (and I believe should) be assessed at both the group level and the individual level. These are: a) the knowledge, reasoning, and skills that are being taught (and hopefully learned), and b) the ability of individuals and the group to work together (collaboration skills).

3. Overall program evaluation of the system. There are a number of things

that should be looked at, such as:

Were adequate resources available?

Was the program implemented as designed?

What were the results?

What impact has this had, such as on performance of students when they

transition to another level of the educational system?

A well designed program evaluation system is critical, not just for

accountability, but to provide useful information to improve the quality

of the program.

Gary L. Dannenbring, Ph.D. Evaluation Coordinator

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center Drake University

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From: George Jacobs <gmjacobs@pacific.net.sg>

Sender: cl@jaring.my

Ted Panitz asks us for additions and comments on his list of 18 policies for

implementing CL. I don't have an any, but below are some supplementary remarks.

1. Useful references on school change are:

Cooper, C. & Boyd, J. 1996. Collaborative approaches to professional

learning and reflection. Launceston, Tasmania: Global Learning

Communities.

Developmental Studies Center. 1996. Ways we want our class to be. Oakland,

CA: Author.

Fullan, M. 1993. Change forces: probing the depth of educational reform.

Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. 1988. Leading the collaborative school. Edina,

MN: Interaction Book Company.

Senge, P. 1990. The fifth discipline. NY: Doubleday.

2. Policy 3 discusses faculty development. One point to add would be

research by teachers on CL. Research is very important to continuing

development of CL, as well as to teachers' professional development.

3. In Policy 4, Ted talks about materials for using CL. There seem to be

various ways to do this: (1) the textbook itself could do it; (2) the CL

techniques could be described in a teachers manual; (3) supplementary

materials could be provided; (4) it could all be left to the teachers who

have experience in CL via many of the other policies in Ted's list. What do

you think?

4. Policy 11 involves an institutional philosophy of cooperation. This is

supplemented by Policy 15 which calls for an end to grading on a curve.

Three ways to implement a philosophy of cooperation are:

(1) Cooperation as a theme, e.g., once my students provided each other with

peer feedback and other types of help while writing a composition on a past

successful group experience.

(2) Actually taking part in cooperation, e.g., public service projects in

and out of school.

(3) While CL is usually thought of as involving only small groups, it can

involve an entire class, an entire school, or interschool cooperation, e.g.,

one time my high school students prepared plays to educate elementary school

students.

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From: Michael Scriven <Scriven@AOL.COM>

Ted says:

>> Teacher training colleges and universities must emphasize CL as the

primary teaching paradigm<<

Too bad. I'd buy \_allowing\_ CL, pending more serious evaluation, but as for

\_establishing\_ it, that way dogma lies and dogma \_always\_ lies.

Michael Scriven (scriven@aol.com) Evaluation & Development Group

Inverness, California

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From: Gayle Gerson <ggerson@INTERACCESS.COM>

I have had problems with students who have been "taught" CL improperly.

The problem is that they think that sharing answers is CL and not

cheating. The other issue is the fact that the grade is usually earned

by the one student who is driven by competition and grades. Those who

care less under the traditional system, also "care less with CL.

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From: Richard Swerdlin <COE.COEFS.Swerdlin@WP.UNT.EDU>

Ted Panitz:

I was surprised to see the policy statement evidently reflecting still another "new gospel". Considering the policy element of hiring only teachers swearing allegiance to CL, it is unfortunate that such narrowness is being promoted. Have you heard of intellectual diversity? Have you heard of academic freedom?

Several years ago Southern Methodist University wanted applicants for teaching positions to swear allegiance to Creationism or at least agree to a disclaimer concerning Evolution. SMU was thus including a questionable litmus test of conscience, which again smacks of the Nazi and Communist approaches to uses of education.

Overall, CL can be used as a tool, but it is questionable whether CL or any other single approach will do the trick. The fly in the ointment remains the familiar one of individual differences in humans. Relatedly, behavior is complex.

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From: DavidMount <dmount@MAILBOX.ARN.NET>

Richard,

While I agree that the use of any one technique is detrimental to any

educational background, the collaborative learning approach encompasses

many different learning practices. The idea in collaborative learning is

that of non-isolationism. Far too often, learners, be they in school or on

the job, make like hermits, isolating themselves from the input or feedback

of others. The resulting output is not as rigorous or robust as that

attributed to a team effort.

While the term "collaborative" seems to be a buzz word for something \_not\_

new, the term describes exactly the approach to learning: all members of

the team work together in a collegial atmosphere, sharing information and

ideas, debating solutions and possibilities, critiquing concepts, building

the best solution to match the situation...

It is not easy for the mentor. It cannot be said to be a "cop-out" by the

instructor like has been leveled against some other methodologies, some

rightfully, others not. The preparation for a collaborative learning

session is difficult and time consuming, even when an experienced

facilitator. The facilitator must be well-trained and anticipate many

possible responses to each exercise. They must be, among other things,

expert real-time assessors so they can adapt the session to what is

happening....NOW! The session demands alot of concentration and energy and

when you're finished, you know you've expended yourself. BUT....the energy

in the classroom is incredible during one of these sessions when it's led

by a knowledgable facilitator/mentor. You often have trouble ending the

exercise because of the excitement in the students.

There is nothing about collaborative learning which says that it can't

include lectures, acted demonstrations, readings, handouts, videos/films,

debates, etc. It just describes the environment of learning and says it

should be different from "competitive". While it is debatable whether

competition is bad or good, it can be said that the result of competition

among students, cheating, stealing, lying, etc., is deemed detrimental by

\_nearly\_ everyone.

I hope that your reaction to the term does not turn off your receptivity to

the potential for improving the outome of our efforts as teachers. I know

from your posts that you are experienced, dedicated and committed. Let

those assets serve you to the community's benefit through a method of

teaching which is most like the preponderance of working environments

today.

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From: "Bourke, Denis" <bouden@TOPNZ.AC.NZ>

What is your opinion of this -policy list- for the implementation of

collaborative learning ???

I see several issues that would have to be worked through.

Funding the huge changes simply would not happen

Those who are expected to be leaders in the change process would have to

be converted first

The real world is not collaborative by nature -- it IS competitive

A Kunian crisis would be required to force the paradigm shift etc etc

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From: Richard Swerdlin <COE.COEFS.Swerdlin@WP.UNT.EDU>

David Mount:

The idea of "non-isolationism" as an element or characteristic of

CL is reasonable, as you suggested.

My reaction to CL#6 is affected by the language used in the

policy statement. Granted a policy statement, such as the listing

issued by Ted Panitz is intended to promote further discussion, the

statement itself seems categorical, rather than reasonably qualified.

Relatedly, I have always encouraged my elementary and college

students to qualify their language, so that distortion or

exaggeration are minimized. Often they do not do so. This

encouragement applies to both written and oral comments. Perhaps

nostalgically, I recall my own teachers at all levels generally

discouraging hyperbole. It was not unusual to see an exaggeration

circled in red. Certainly exaggeration did not wash in Composition.

As you surmise correctly, a problem with "collaborative learning"

stems from flippant users. There have been some recent situations in

which students have attempted to mask or avoid certain realities in a

an elementary math education course, on the ground that there is

lecture, boardwork, discussion, etc., but not the "relaxed

atmosphere" that prevails in Classroom X or Y. This even includes

the fact that drinking and eating are not permitted in carpeted

rooms, which is a rule I enforce, but which some colleagues ignore.

This occurred (along with mention of CL), when a student giggled over

the "foolishness" of dividing 13 by 4, using a number line. I had

mentioned and illustrated that anumber line should start with "zero",

which of course is directly related to whole numbers. Not

surprisingly, the student later gives me the story that I am a

"traditionalist" who is "unaware that is 1996". I did respond to the

effect that I am indeed aware of the year. Relatedly however I

mentioned that mathematical truth does not vary like yearly rainfall.

Repeatedly I had pointed out that there is no single best way of

performing most operations on numbers.

Overall, I trust that my encounters were with a minority of

questionable users of the term "CL".

Perhaps of mutual interest to listers, by chance I recall at

least two instances (involving teachers other than myself), in which

a student was expressing resentment over receiving a "B" on a small

group project, since said grade was not determined by the teacher,

but the peer group. Aside from the "B" issue, both students said

that they thought it was the teacher's responsibility to determine

grades. This recollection also triggers another. Some students tell

me (where they cannot be seen or heard by peers), that for their

tuition they would rather hear more from a college teacher than from

less knowledgeable peers. They evidently were voicing a measure of

skepticism, as reflected in the adage about "the blind leading the

blind". By the same token, I did not invent the observation that a

camel is really a horse, designed by a committee.

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From: Richard Swerdlin <Swerdlin@COEFS.COE.UNT.EDU>

David Mount:

As an afterthought of relevance, I recall visiting a student

teacher at the elementary level, while a class was following a

collaborative or committee scheme in studying the construction of

bridges. The nature of the route naturally made it a bit stickier,

at least initially, to fathom what was taking place.

Looking over the plans of the cooperating teacher and those of

the student teacher, my reaction was that the group route was useful,

although it seemed rather time consuming, considering what was

supposed to be learned from the lessons. Regarding the factor of

time, it is trite but true to realize that the school day is not

infinitely long. Even an idealist like myself cannot ignore the time

factor in class. All things considered, what I saw seemed to be

overdone.

Perhaps of interest too, the Director of Student Teaching at UNT

mentioned at least four times in the semester briefinng, that "we are

guests in the school system", which really meant that university

supervisors should say next to nothing about what they saw in

visiting a student teacher, short of a criminal act being committed.

I smiled at what I thought was questionable use of time, since I did

not want to "undermine" the Denton ISD.

The above is mentioned, since there is the possibility of an

observer being considered "not trained" or "indoctrinated" in CL, if

there is criticism of some element in it (assuming it is even clear

what CL is). This possibility is not entirely a hypothetical fantasy

on my part, since it is easy to recall some situations in Illinois in

the late 60's, where anyone who wondered about literally rubbing

shoulders in class or creeping on the floor was likely to be

considered "old-fashioned", "inhabited", "traditional", etc. This

was in a college class. At the time this seemed screwy. It still

seems screwy, even if intentions were pure in heart.

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From: Peter Doolittle <pdoolittle@SELU.EDU>

Basically, I would agree with Richard that it is unnecessary and probably

detrimental to place CL above all other instructional strategies.

Instructional strategies are tools and different goals and objectives

require different tools.

In addition, with the current trend toward an emphasis on individual

differences, it would seem inappropriate to mandate the use of CL. At our

school, group work and CL are used frequently (probably 75% of the time) and

while some student enjoy it and thrive within it, others \_hate\_ it.

I have found that the students that tend to not like CL are the independent,

internally motivated students (gross generalization, but that's what \_I've\_

experienced). That is, the very students that excelled under the "old"

non-CL system seem to be the most disgruntled. Not that these student do

poorly within a CL environment, they simply do not like it and would prefer

the independent model. Why is this?

By promoting CL as THE instructional strategy within both education and

business, are we placing the independent worker/student at a disadvantage,

in just the same way that we place the cooperative worker/student at a

disadvantage when only lecture is used? Why must we propose a system with

only one alternative?

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From: "Reinhard W. Lindner" <mfrwl@UXA.ECN.BGU.EDU>

You overwhelm me. Generally, speaking I have no problem with appropriate

uses of CL. However, institutional realities are not the only issue. What

about personal choice, appropriateness of instruction to the nature of the

course/student(lecture is sometimes appropriate and effective! and, of

course, there are more methodologies available than lecture and CL), and

academic freedom. CL conquers all, I guess.

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From: DavidMount <dmount@MAILBOX.ARN.NET>

Peter,

>Basically, I would agree with Richard that it is unnecessary and probably

>detrimental to place CL above all other instructional strategies.

>Instructional strategies are tools and different goals and objectives

>require different tools.

Is CL a singularity? In other words, is CL a single approach, or is it a

non-descript, non-boundaried collection of approaches, selectable for

maximal benefit?

>In addition, with the current trend toward an emphasis on individual

>differences, it would seem inappropriate to mandate the use of CL.

One asset of CL which puts it above other teaching strategies is that it

can address individual differences \_because\_ of it's flexibility.

>At our school, group work and CL are used frequently (probably 75% of the time) and while some student enjoy it and thrive within it, others \_hate\_ it.

If the use of CL is \_that\_ high at your school, it is unusual in my

experience and I would love to have that opportunity to teach in that

environment. But two points may be made here to consider the reaction of

the students:

(1) By the time students get to you, what approach have they experienced?

Have they been made responsible for their own learning before? Are they

able, \_and willing\_, to assess the validity of the information they secure

in their search? Do they test their solution in the context of the problem

they are trying to solve? What is the balance of risk demanded vs. security

offered?

(2) Is there any real harm, or perhaps a \_benefit\_, to "stretching" one's

preferred learning style to experience a different approach? Do we, in the

adult world, in our careers, in life, always have the \_valid\_ information

delivered to us on a silver platter?

> have found that the students that tend to not like CL are the independent,

>internally motivated students (gross generalization, but that's what \_I've\_

>experienced).

Will these students be successful and/or happy, or even keep their jobs,

when they get into the corporate world where the Fifth Discipline is

becoming the norm and they "can't accept it" because it's not their

preferred mode?

>That is, the very students that excelled under the "old"

>non-CL system seem to be the most disgruntled. Not that these student do

>poorly within a CL environment, they simply do not like it and would prefer

>the independent model. Why is this?

I don't know for sure here, I haven't enough information, but with those

students whom I have worked who have this reaction, they are discouraged by

several factors:

(1) the collaborative approach seems to be less efficient (they don't

recognize the better result coming from the group);

(2) the grading approach to which they have become accustomed fosters

competition for grades (they aren't comfortable helping others learn

because when graded under the Gaussian distribution or some skewed version

of it, they necessarily lower their own grade);

(3) they are likely to be uncomfortable in groups, perhaps due to social

retardation owing to years of independent study (the group approach

requires maturation of social skills);

Perhaps there are more, but this is getting long.

>By promoting CL as THE instructional strategy within both education and

>business, are we placing the independent worker/student at a disadvantage,

>in just the same way that we place the cooperative worker/student at a

>disadvantage when only lecture is used? Why must we propose a system with

>only one alternative?

Some would only permit a system of only one alternative as has been the

case for far too long. I have been a victim of it and know how detrimental

it has been to my dreams for there to be only one "choice".

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From: DavidMount <dmount@MAILBOX.ARN.NET>

Denis

While I agree with several of your points (funding, conversion of leaders,

reaching concensus), I take feel your statement:

>The real world is not collaborative by nature -- it IS competitive

is too generalized. There are many situations which are \_not\_ competitive

and when they are, the competition is detrimental to the desired outcome.

For example, the use of a "true" team to design a product, would require

collaboration to produce the best outcome. Tolerance of competition between

team members would compromise the success of the product and jeopardize the

job security of the team members as well as the viability of the company.

Yes, competition between companies is essential to drive product quality

improvement, especially in the absence of consumer sophistication. But this

is not the same as cooperation between individuals who need to share

expertise due to the complexity of today's world and that of the future.

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From: "Bourke, Denis" <bouden@TOPNZ.AC.NZ>

David Mount

I do not have a problem with Collaborative Learning in itself, and I

think I said that it has its place. Unselfish collaboration and teamwork

is the reason that New Zealand currently holds the America's Cup, how the

US put a man on the Moon, how the Romans built their Empire. These were

all achieved through effective leadership, bringing what Adair J. calls

his three circles -- tasks needs, individual needs, and group maintenance

needs -- to a theoretical overlapping. Commitment to the desired

outcome, what individuals are hoping to get out of the collaboration for

themselves, how they agree objectives and processes among themselves.

However, this has an inherrent danger. The collaborative group can

become so inward focussed that they become subject to what irving Janis

calls Group Think. And in time, if a member of the collaborative team

raises a dissenting voice, they get kicked out. This is what underlay

the Bay of Pigs debacle. However, I digress.

My issue is with pushing people into a collaborative environment to

undertake a task, the point of which is not explained first, and without

the requisite skills to do the task efficiently. A typical example is

the Military's search for leadership qualities among the new batch of

recruits. Teams of five, you have a piece of string, a box of matches, a

barrel and two short planks, and you have to get the whole team across

the creek without getting wet. Some bright spark might figure it out,

but the rest are made to look dumb.

You don't put a team together to design a new product unless they each

bring a requisite skill/knowledge set to the collaboration, and there is

a clear concept of what they are to achieve.. I remember reading

recently of a study of youngsters being steered towards an understanding

of mechanical advantage by building with Lego. The researcher was

facinated with the interaction as the youngsters collaborated. In my

view, the youngsters were involved in mere discovery learning by copying

a Lego model, and how best to fit the pieces so it worked. The overall

outcome was supposed to be an understanding of mechanical advantage.

They never achieved that, because at the end of the exercise they had

still not been told such a concept existed. But they made nice model

cranes.

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From: DavidMount <dmount@MAILBOX.ARN.NET>

Denis,

Thanks for your response. I am very interested in your comments. I have to

confess not being aware of Irving Janis, but have heard the term "group

think" but likely not capitalized. Can you provide a brief description or a

reference for me?

>However, this has an inherrent danger. The collaborative group can

>become so inward focussed that they become subject to what irving Janis

>calls Group Think

>And in time, if a member of the collaborative team raises a dissenting voice, they get kicked out. This is what underlay the Bay of Pigs debacle.

I am in agreement with you regarding the situation in which there is the

fear of raising a dissenting opinion within a group. However isn't this a

case of improper power balance? I am not familiar with the dynamics behind

the Bay of Pigs.

>My issue is with pushing people into a collaborative environment to

>undertake a task, the point of which is not explained first, and without

>the requisite skills to do the task efficiently.

And you provide a good example of how it \_should not\_ be done. I don't

believe this should be identified as collaborative. "Team" perhaps, in the

sense they're all seeking the same goal (to get to the other side), but not

collaborative: the person who figures it out gets the leader title, not the

group! Shared reward is part of the specifications of collaborative effort.

>You don't put a team together to design a new product unless they each

>bring a requisite skill/knowledge set to the collaboration, and there is

>a clear concept of what they are to achieve.

Agreed. Again a good example of your point. Again, the Lego project was not

a well-considered or -designed situation; although the intended goal was

reasonable, the exercise did \_not\_ focus on the principle to be learned.

Copying a previous result does not teach anything further than copying. We

have experienced this in our teaching of pharmacy compounding skills.

Students given a compounding project with a known drug, if they can't find

a "recipie" in the literature, will contact one pharmaceutical company

after another until they get someone willing to provide one. Whether it is

a "valid" one (stable, quality, bioavailable, right dose, etc.) is not

usually considered or evaluated. They take the source for granted. With the

Lego example, the kids may remember the design, but do they know if it will

support the intended load or do they test it?

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From: BROWNKB@CGS.EDU

Subject: Re: Bad Rap for CL Undeserved

I read the comments about CL with interest, as I see the uses and abuses on

a daily basis. I work at a small HS in Southern California, where we have

been undergoing restructuring. Before the change, there was great concern

over the high rate of failure on the part of our students, many of whom are

pigeonholed as "minority," "AFDC," "from a single-parent family," "below the

twenty-fifth percentile on CTBS," and the like. Our dropout prevention pro-

gram continues to be a viable place for these children (it uses computers and

CAI heavily, by the way); of our kids who complete the regular program, we

estimate that ten percent go on to college of any kind. Thus we have been

moving towards such strategies as career paths, internships, and the like to

further the chances of successful career attainment by most of our kids, not

merely the college bound.

And this has something do to with CL? Well, yes. I have seen the pendulum

swing from lecture-driven lessons to alternative learning strategies, CL, and

the like. A few observations that I have made over the years:

1) CL is NOT a substitute for teacher interaction. I have seen teachers go

from "use-the-book-and-answer-the -questions" to "do-the-same-only-in-groups."

The teacher MUST circle the room and become a part of the learning. It's

particularly great when we can ask the kids questions, sort of reverse the

roles, and let them teach us about what they have learned from the group work.

2) CL requires skills that MUST BE TAUGHT, especially to students weaned on

Nintendo. Most of our kids now lack basic social skills -- a sad but true

fact -- and do not know how to work in groups. The first few times I have

students do CL, I generally need to reinforce the material through lecture,

as the kids do not know haow to learn from other and need proactice. (Sorry

about my typing; I hope the errors don't conceal the content.)

3) Kids need to be disabused of the notion that they learn from the teacher.

I spend a great deal of time dealing with kids telling me, "You're the teach-

er; you're supposed to teach us." CL is harder than passively listening to

a lecture. Again, remember that these kids grew up on video; they are not

used to interaction.

4) Personality styles need to be addressed. Who hasn't dealt with "He isn't

doing his part!" only to then be told, "She's so bossy, she wants everyone

to do it her way, why should I bother?" Adults find group work hard; how

much more so do kids who again are not used to interaction and have a passive

notion of education?

5) Finally: if the lessons do not have obviously underscored value to the

kids, they see CL as one more form of busy work.

I would enjoy reading others' reflections, reactions, and experiences. How

many of our readership here are "in the trenches" and how many strictly

acadmic? How many of us are secondatry teachers, and how many post-secon-

dary?

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From: DavidMount <dmount@MAILBOX.ARN.NET>

Subject: Re: Bad Rap for CL Undeserved

Ken,

>I would enjoy reading others' reflections, reactions, and experiences. How

>many of our readership here are "in the trenches" and how many strictly

>acadmic? How many of us are secondatry teachers, and ho w many post-secon-

>dary?

I am not currently "in the trenches", but I was "performing" at the Faculty

of Pharmacy University of Toronto, co-teaching collaboratively in

undergraduate courses to 170 students in a class up until Summer 1995. I

know of what you speak from direct experience as well as indirectly from

consultation experience.

A few comments on your observations.

>1) CL is NOT a substitute for teacher interaction. I have seen teachers go

>from "use-the-book-and-answer-the -questions" to "do-the-same-only-in-groups."

>The teacher MUST circle the room and become a part of the learning. It's

>particularly great when we can ask the kids questions, sort of reverse the

>roles, and let them teach us about what they have learned from the group work.

Yes, it is exciting when the students can tell us, enthusiastically, about

their learning. Perhaps it is necessary to stimulate the interactions as

they become accustomed to this kind of learning, however, I have found that

it is best to "fade into the background" and observe, only intervening when

you note that the group is getting off track or stuck on some concept. We

want them to \_not\_ depend upon us so we need to wean ourselves (actually,

they will occasionally tell you that your presence is not wanted!).

Teacher interaction should occur, but in measured and well-considered

situations. Students are great at milking information from us, so beware of

their approach for information. Interventions can be great or you can

"crash and burn".

>2) CL requires skills that MUST BE TAUGHT, especially to students weaned on

>Nintendo. Most of our kids now lack basic social skills -- a sad but true

>fact -- and do not know how to work in groups.

Again, I agree with you. There are many sideline benefits to group work,

but be aware that the acquisition of these skills takes some time. This is

why Ted is suggesting through the Policy statements that CL be applied in

every level of education so we are developing higher skills in students

before they reach university, where the content of the curriculum is so

very important to the establishment.

>4) Personality styles need to be addressed. Who hasn't dealt with "He isn't

>doing his part!" only to then be told, "She's so bossy, she wants everyone

>to do it her way, why should I bother?" Adults find group work hard; how

>much more so do kids who again are not used to interaction and have a passive

>notion of education?

One of the things my partner and I do when we begin to introduce CL to a

class or to a group of administrators and/or teachers is to introduce the

concepts of personality and diversity. Even adults have trouble with this!

>5) Finally: if the lessons do not have obviously underscored value to the

>kjids, they see CL as one more form of busy work.

You know, it really doesn't matter what form of teaching you use, if there

is no perceived relevancy to the subject matter, there will be little

acceptance of the method.

The CL methodology is not Plug'n'Play as they say. Educators need to learn

certain skills not unlike facilitation in order to make it work. I see this

as the major hurdle to it's use

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From: "Bourke, Denis" <bouden@TOPNZ.AC.NZ>

David Mount

On Group Think, a good reference is Janis, I., and Mann, L. (1977)

Decision-Making, Free Press.

As I recall, there are eight symptoms.

This occurs when a coterie has reached the stage where

concurrence-seeking eliminates the realistic appraisal of alternatives.

No conflict, or opposing opinion is allowed to spoil the cosy we-feeling

of the coterie, or power group. Janis and Mann identified eight symptoms

of Group-Think.

1. Invulnerability. The cohesive group becomes over-optimistic and can

take extraordinary risks without realising the dangers. This is because

the discordant voices are shut out.

2. Rationale. The group is swift to find rationalisation to explain

away evidence that does not sit well with its policy.

3. Morality. The group tends to be blind to the moral or ethical

consequences of its policy.

4. Stereotypes. Victims of Group-Think fall easily into a habit of

stereotyping their opposition, and shutting out discordant evidence.

5. Pressure. If any member voices doubt, the group exerts subtles

pressure to stifle the doubt. Doubts can be expressed, but not pressed.

6. Self-censorship. Members of the group are careful not to express

personal doubts or feelings outside the group, since this upsets the

cosiness.

7. Unanimity. It is important that once a decision has been reached,

divergent views are screened out.

8. Mindguards. Victims of Group-Think then set themselves up as

mindguards to the decision. A doctrine of collective responsibility is

invoked by the mindguards, to stifle any out-group dissent.

Janis and Mann then observe that the result of Group-Think is, that the

group looks at too few alternatives, is insensitive to the risks

inherrent in its favoured strategy, finds it hard to rethink a failing

strategy, and becomes very selective in the sort of facts it sees and

asks for. It is rife at the top of orgainisations when issues are dealt

with secretly.

Do Janis and Mann see a cure ? Yes. Such groups must actively encourage

self-criticism. They must seek alternatives, and introduce outside ideas

and evaluation wherever possible. They must offer a positive response to

conflicting evidence. If they do not, then they are doomed to move from

one blunder to the next.

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From: Linda Bryan <Mrs.Bryan@WORLDNET.ATT.NET>

Re: Cooperative Learning

>>Policy #18) Financing must be provided in order to maintain small class sizes

and thus maximize student interaction and familiarity and student-teacher interaction. etc. etc.

So Ted, what is the advice about groups for me if I say that I have four classes of 35 and one of (can I believe it?) 26? Last year I had six permanent groups of five or (occasionally) six in my social studies 7 classes.

This year, in social studies, geography, and languge arts, I've got mostly huge classes, although there's that one of 26 because my class period is scheduled at same time as an advanced math class (It's a long story). Anyway, I correct that one set of papers first! I look forward to talking to those kids one-on-one! In the other classes, I have seven cooperative groups of five, or (more often) six groups of six. That's awful. Try working with six or seven kids at a single

computer. Try keeping six on task!

When I have seven groups, I find I lose track of the groups. I can't get around the room fast enough.

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From: Lisa Dillinger <Dillinl@AOL.COM>

I find this discussion interesting and in line with the study and research I

have conducted lately.

The constructivist vs. the directivist view is the arguement that must be

discussed if a shift in education is going to come about. Teachers all over

the country are deciding which approach to take. Of course, what "ties our

hands behind our backs" is the way students are tested. If standardized

testing is an exam in fact regurgitating (sp?), any efforts by the teacher

to begin to take the critical thinking approach will back-fire when the

"leaders" of the schools demand, with a fist coming down on the table, that

schools improve test scores so everyone looks good on paper.

When our "leaders" in the school system listen to the business cry for

competent workers , then we might see a different view toward testing.

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From: powell@direct.ca (Ross Powell)

Subject: Re: CL series #6- Policies!?!

Fine policies. Maybe many are even great policies. But this list seems

strangely confused.

It is offered as "a list of... statements which... would encourage the

development and implementation of CL on a much wider scale than it is

today."

Now maybe I'm just not getting something, but how does a list of statements

"encourage"?

What's more, in what I've seen of effective management practice, policies

are \*guidelines\* which \*express a broad consensus\*. Otherwise, they are

not really policies but rules which some institutional power enforces.

So do you really mean that these are being presented as the kind of

guidelines which you think would emerge from a broad consensus, or are they

intended to be regarded as rules which ought to be enforced on people,

or... what?

Standing back from this posting, it seems to me that you have in mind a set

of goals for institutional change. If that's right, let's just call them

that rather than policies. Personally, I can get behind a call for

institutional change which takes CL seriously; I find it hard to get behind

policies.

As a list of goals, I like this list because it takes us beyond vague

statements about how "CL needs to be a more central feature of our

educational institutions" and points toward some concrete activities.

As a list of goals, I don't like this list because it muddles strategic (1,

2, 4, 12-15 - 12-14 are pretty scary BTW), tactical (3, 5-11, 17, 18), and

motherhood (16) concerns. As I just suggested, I think the tactical

aspects are its greatest strength; the scary, authoritarian strategic

elements are its weakest. [Notice that if these were statements of

consensus rather than as goals (or as rules), 12-14 could not be described

as authoritarian, by definition. It matters rather a lot whether one

conceives these as policies, goals, rules, or... whatever.]

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