

# Building Your Classroom Community

*Conversation Guide*

Thursday, April 2, 2009

**Team Builder:** Why did you choose to come to this *GIFT* session?

**Facilitator's Background**

**Successful Strategies to Build Social Support:**

- "Birds of a Feather" (Bowman, 2001)
- Permanent Base Groups (Social Groups of 3 - 5)
  - Why?
    - Make a big class feel smaller
    - Positive Interdependence
    - Social Support
      - Identifying similarities
      - Gaining perspective and appreciation for differences
    - Classroom Management
      - Attendance
      - Accountability & Responsibility
  - Team Names/Ground Rules
  - Daily team builders
    - Example...Would You Rather?
      - Shave your head once and get a tattoo on your entire scalp or shave your eyebrows permanently? Why?
      - Bring out to entire class and see polarity...where do you stand?
- Flexible Groupings (Academic Groups)
  - Development...What are your goals/objectives?
    - Random or teacher-selected
    - Group Make Up
      - Homogeneous
      - Heterogeneous
  - Size:
    - Duos
      - TTYP (shoulder, knee)
    - Small Groups (3 - 5)
      - Review
      - Discussion
      - Assignment Completion
  - Peer Teaching
    - JIGSAW (Expert Groups then Teaching Groups)
    - Reciprocal Teaching
      - Generate Questions
      - Summarize
      - Clarifying difficult or ambiguous words or ideas
      - Predicting upcoming content
    - Out of class study group

**Social Support Literature:**

- TTYP...Read and respond
- Generate questions with your peer

"Toss it Around"

# Social Support Information

Eric Jensen, author of *Enriching the Brain: How to Maximize Every Learner's Potential (2006)*, has identified 7 ways to maximize a classroom. One such way is through the use of positive "Social Support".

- "The key is a sense of belonging, invitation and connectedness" (p. 185).
- "Connectedness is an important enrichment factor because it can regulate stress levels up or down" (p. 185).
- "Of those in school, (social support) increases their likelihood of having better friends, fewer illnesses, less absenteeism, and a more positive attitude" (p. 185).
- "Social contact can influence gene expression; improve student health; and reduce discipline, bullying and violence" (p. 185).
- Jensen recommends the use of reciprocal teaching (a structured, specialized form of peer teaching), flexible groupings (pairs, groups, triads, etc.), and group investigations (groups with a content purpose) (p. 218 - 219).

In the book, *How College Affects Students (2005)*, authors Pascarella and Terenzini report the impact of peer interactions, in particular, cooperative learning, within the classroom on learning outcomes.

- "Cooperative learning is usually considered the most operationally well-defined and procedurally structured form of collaborative learning" (p. 104).
- "In a meta-analysis conducted by Johnson & Johnson of about 120 experimental and quasi experimental studies...Cooperative learning produced an achievement advantage of .49 of a standard deviation (19 percentile points) over competitive learning and .53 of a standard deviation (20 percentile points) over students learning on their own. These results held for verbal tasks, quantitative tasks and procedural tasks" (p. 104).
- "Brief (2 minute), unstructured reciprocal peer tutoring sessions during lectures can significantly enhance course learning..." (p. 111).
- "Tutoring itself can have an important, positive impact on knowledge retention" (p. 111).
- "In a well-conducted quasi experiment by Garside (1996) randomly assigned intact classes in an introductory interpersonal communication course to two instruction approaches: lecture and small-group cooperative discussion. Both conditions were taught by instructors with equal teaching experience...The small group cooperative discussion condition produced gains in knowledge at the higher level of cognitive functioning that were about 1.7 times as large as the gains for the lecture condition" (p. 202).
- Research indicates that the relationship between peer-to-peer interaction and student persistence/attainment is positive, as well as crucial to other important factors such as student growth and development.

In the book, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*, Harvard Professor, Richard Light, reports what undergraduates find to be both inspiring and frustrating about their college experiences.

- "...the correlation between the number of 'small classes' any student takes and his or her self-reported personal satisfaction with the overall academic experience is about .52". Likewise, "When undergraduates were asked what they viewed as 'small', the most common answer was fifteen or fewer people" (p. 45).
- An interview response from one student in regard to powerful homework assignments..."At the outset of (the) tutorial, there is not a doubt in the world I would have chosen to work alone on any project wherever possible. No hassle. Do it when I want. How I want. I don't have to worry about what other people think, or their work styles. Now, after this tutorial experience, I would give the opposite answer for most situations. The wisdom and the amount of work and the arguments that developed in our small group taught me a whole new way of getting a job done. And the biggest message I want to share is that teamwork ultimately depends almost entirely on human connectedness...I had to learn how to criticize constructively. I had to learn how to argue constructively...Most of all, each of us in the group had to develop trust in one another" (p. 51).
- "...how students study and do their homework assignments outside of class is a far stronger predictor of engagement and learning than particular details of their instructor's teaching style. The design of homework really matters. Specifically, those students who study outside of class in small groups of four to six, even just once a week, benefit enormously. They each do the homework, independently, before they meet. Their meetings are organized around the discussions of their homework. And, as a result of their study group discussion, they are far more engaged and far better prepared, and they learn significantly more" (p. 52).

## Resources

Bowman, S. (2001). Preventing death by lecture: Terrific tips for turning listeners into learners. Glenbrook, NV: Bowperson Publishing Co.

The Cooperative Learning Center @ <http://www.co-operation.org/>

Jensen, E. (2006). Enriching the brain: How to maximize every learner's potential. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing.

Light, R. (2001). Making the most of college: Students speak their minds. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Pascarella, E. & Terenzini, P. (2005). How college affects students. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing.

