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Building Learning Communities

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Introduction

More than any other single class I have taken, Building Learning Communities
may have changed my understanding of how to engage the learner while teaching. It
established strong philosophical reasons for why you do certain things and provided ways
to do this through a variety of methods. At this point one may be thinking, "What's so
impactful about that"? What was impactful, was this course modeled the philosophy of
Model, Prompt, and Practice (Reid, 1985)from the very first minute of class to the very
last second of the whole twenty days. The instructors used the actual method to introduce
the new skill thus modeling how it should be done. Then, we would practice the new skill
on each other receiving prompting, coaching, and feedback with each practice helping us
move towards mastery. Finally, we tried the new skill on actual elementary students,
which add a realistic workplace dimension to the application. Additional coaching and
feedback from this application helped prepare us for the transfer of the new skill into our
own classroom instruction.

A Cooperative Learning environment was the setting for teaching the Cooperative
Learning methods. This included over 100 structures, strategies, and techniques. The
twenty-day class immersed each of us in the actual environment that we would recreate in
our classrooms. This integrated learning experience provided a rich source from which to
draw when creating my own classroom-learning environment. During the last week of the
class, we began talking about the need for continuing support as we went back to our
classrooms and began implementing the new skills. This discussion naturally led to the
study group model and an understanding of the critical need for effective teacher study

groups became clear. This would provide the support, follow-up, and accountability we needed for accurate and successful transfer of our new skills into our instructional practices. Indeed, this class was a life-changing event for me.

Productive Learning Environments

Teaching consists of methods, strategies, structures, and techniques (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Methods are a planned set of steps for delivering instruction. Strategies are organized systems of instruction based on learning theories. The ability to produce relevant learning in a given activity has research support. Some examples are Cooperative Learning, Mastery Learning, Direct Instruction, and Mnemonics. A structure is a content-free process designed to organize the students for interactive learning. Numbered Heads, Random Call, and Think-Pair-Share are examples. Techniques are step designed to mange and organize the learning environment. These would be established practices and procedures to keep the classroom organized and productive throughout the day. Examples are getting a drink, going to the restroom, and waiting for the teacher when an assignment is completed.

In planning for an effective learning environment, we need to think about what it is that we want the student to know and do. We begin with the end in mind (Covey, 1990). Cooperative Learning is an excellent strategy for accomplishing an effective learning environment. The research on Cooperative Learning is overwhelmingly positive (Ellis, 2005). Cooperative Learning also provides a structure for facilitating more complex outcomes, i.e. higher-order processing of information, problem solving, social skills and attitudes, for greater learning effects (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2003). This

classroom strategy provides an intentional environment for success in which the learning

is largely a social activity. The learning attitude is cooperative: you win, I win, you lose, I

lose. Classroom structures that are competitive: I win you lose; or are individual: we are

each alone in this learning, were not modeled or promoted as part of this class (Green &

Henriquez-Green, 2008).   To enhance student achievement with Cooperative Learning,

research shows the most two successful key elements are group goals and individual

accountability; groups are rewarded based on the individual learning of all group

members (Ellis, 2005).

Cooperative Learning Concepts and Practices

There are five basic elements in Cooperative Learning. Each element must be

understood with proper structures and techniques employed for effective facilitation of

Cooperative Learning. The five elements are positive interdependence, individual

accountability, group processing, social skills, and face-to-face interaction (Fisher &

Fisher, 2001; Kagan & Kagan, 2008).

Positive Interdependence

Positive Interdependence occurs when participants feel connected to one another

(Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). There are Teambuilding activities designed to foster

this type of setting. Jones (1998) and (1996), Dockrey (1997), and Kagan (2000) are

some of my favorites though there are many more. These activities can be adapted to fit

a specific situation or one can even invent a new activity.

Three phases are involved in establishing positive interdependence (D. Johnson &

Johnson, 1999; D. Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998). The first is to assign a clear and

measurable task to the group. The task structure requires every member of the group to

contribute in order to complete the assignment. This provides a foundation for blending

other types of positive interdependence such as Goal Interdependence,

Celebration/Reward Interdependence, Resource Interdependence, Role Interdependence,

Identity Interdependence, and Environmental Interdependence (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

Because almost all students would rather work alone if doing so is easier, the group work

must not be easier for students to do alone to build positive interdependence (Green &

Henriquez-Green, 2008). Link the group's success to the successful participation of each

member.

Here are some ways to organize instruction to build positive interdependence:

1. Limit materials so the group must share.
2. Create a "Jigsaw" or "Expert Jigsaw" where every member is responsible
   for unique information, which he or she must share with his or her group.
3. Assign roles to each individual in the group, which requires participation
   to make the group successful.
4. Require only one product from each group rather than from each
   individual.
5. Use rewards to encourage working together. Make sure that everyone has
   the chance to earn the incentive by rewarding all groups that that meet the
   criteria.
(Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008)

Group Processing

Group processing requires the members to assess their progress determining

actions to take to accomplish their task (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Groups need

specific time to discuss how well they are working together in achieving their goal. The

instructor could facilitate this by asking the group to list at least three member's actions

that helped the group be successful and list one action that could be added to make the

group more successful in the future (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Effective group

processing provides for continuous quality improvement of the group's task and

teamwork; it increases individual accountability through focusing attention on other

member's responsible and skillful actions to learn and help each other to learn; it reduces

complexity by streamlining the learning process into simpler actions; and it can eliminate

unskilled and inappropriate behaviors. Group processing is comprised of feedback,

reflection, improvement goals, and celebration. Group processing should occur with the

small group and with the whole class. This enables everybody in the class to share the

collective observations (D. Johnson, et al., 1998).

Group processing also involves taking a few minutes after an assignment to

discuss the work of the group. The discussion can focus on simple things like how they

decided who would go first, who would do a certain job, or how they decided on the

organization of the project. Sometimes a group is lacking in social skills and need to learn

basic skills like "taking turns," or "using quiet voices." As the group becomes more

capable at working together, incorporate skills that are more sophisticated (Green &

Henriquez-Green, 2008). It is amazing at how many adults do not know how to work

productively in a group or how to use even the simple social skills.

Social Skills

The Cooperative Learning setting is perfect for learning social skills such as

listening, taking turns, encouraging others, checking for understanding, and many more

(Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). People generally are not instinctive in knowing how

to work together effectively. In order for cooperation to succeed, individuals have to

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know and trust each other, communicate clearly and accurately, support and accept each other, and resolve conflicts in a constructive manner (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). A skillful educator understands how the social mindset affects learning. He or she can target specific social skills that need improvement for the group. By employing strategies to improve the social skills, individuals become active participants assessing and solving problems through social interactions. This develops a more resilient mindset with the individuals as they expand their social abilities (Hagar, Goldstein, & Brooks, 2006).

Teaching social skills has both long-term and short-term outcomes. Short-term outcomes mean greater learning, better retention, and improved critical thinking skills. Long-term outcomes indicate greater employability and career success (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Resilient Youth (1996), lists some basic interaction social skills involved in conversing and interacting with others. They include:

1. Making frequent eye contact
2. Smiling when greeting people and talking
3. Showing "confident" body language: an open, direct stance, not fidgeting or twisting.
4. Basic politeness: saying please and thank-you, saying hello and good-bye, etc.
5. Showing interest in others, e.g., asking how their day was, how they thought they went on an exam, etc.

Making conversation are the skills you use when talking to other people. They include:

1. Taking turns when talking
2. Listening and showing interest in what the other person has to say
3. "Small talk": being able to chat about unimportant things
4. Nodding and smiling to indicate that you are following along
5. Using humor
6. Knowing when to disclose personal information and when not to

Building and maintaining friendships are skills involved in making and sustaining friendships. For example:

1. Approach skills: being able to go up and start talking to someone who you don't know or don't know well.
2. Sharing decision making, i.e., not always insisting on having one's way but negotiating about what to do, where to go, etc.
3. Showing appropriate affection and appreciation.
4. Maintaining contact, i.e., not expecting the other person to "do all the work" of keeping up the friendship.
5. Being supportive, i.e., showing concern when your friend is having a hard time.
6. Allowing distance and closeness. People need time apart as well as together.
7. Thoughtfulness: "thinking ahead" about what might be a nice ting to do for your friend.

Empathy means being able to put yourself into someone else's shoes and recognizing their feelings. Empathy is responding in an understanding and caring way to what others are feeling. It is not the same as sympathy or "feeling sorry for someone". Empathic skills include:

1. Noticing other people's feelings.
2. Expressing concern at others' distress.
3. Being able to recognize what someone else might be feeling in a given situation.
4. Showing sensitivity to others' feelings when communicating. For example, being tactful when making critical comments (when criticism is necessary and/or appropriate).

Conflict Resolution Skills are skills needed when social interactions do not run smoothly. Conflict resolution skills include:

1. Assertiveness, or being able to say what you are feeling without being aggressive or getting personal.
2. Negotiation skills: being able to discuss a conflict calmly and rationally and come to an agreement about a solution (Henriquez-Roark & Green, 1996).

Individual & Group Accountability

Every member of the group is accountable for demonstrating the accomplishment of the learning. Two levels of accountability are in any productive group work: individual accountability and group accountability. Each individual must be accountable for *knowing* what they are supposed to, *doing* what they are supposed to do, and *when* they are supposed to do it. Each group then, is collectively responsible for *knowing* what they are supposed to do, *doing* what they are supposed to do, and *when* they are supposed to

do it (Fray, Fisher, & Everlove, 2009). Activities that facilitate this accountability

include: students signing off on their group work, students being called randomly to

explain their groups answer, asking each group to turn in a brief report of its work,

having students compete a worksheet related to the work they did in their group, or

giving a quiz or test to the individual students (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Fray,

Fisher, and Everlove (2009) suggest six guidelines for building accountability.

1. Design tasks that emphasize larger learning goals ("How to make healthy food choices") rather than discrete knowledge ("What the food pyramid looks like"). This makes the division of labor into an assembly-line production unlikely.

2. Give students experience with small tasks before asking them to tackle longer projects. An incremental start helps them build the stamina required to sustain work extending over several days or weeks and gives individuals the practice needed to be successful in the group.

3. Establish timelines for both individual and group completion of each phase of the assignment.

4. Create interim steps for discussing individual and group progress and providing feedback.

5. Ask students to evaluate themselves and their group's efforts. We have groups complete their evaluation on one form so that all members see each other's words. It's amazing how honest they are about what they did and did not do.

6. Factor in both individual and group evaluations when grading the assignment. This means that each member receives two grades for the assignment—an individual grade and a group grade.

Regardless of the type of cooperative learning task, each student should clearly

understand his or her individual role as well as what the group is to accomplish. The

types of assessment used should be clear for both the individual and group performance

before starting the assignment.

Face-to-Face Interaction

Face-to-face interaction involves the group sitting close together for dialoging to promote learning (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). In 1985 Slavin stated that cooperation in face-to-face groups is increasingly important in society (Slavin et al., 1985). Bagley (2004) says that 99% of all business communication is accomplished by telephone, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, email, and on rare occasions snail mail. Then why is it important to develop skills in face-to-face communication? Allen Ivey (1995) states that many firings occur because of interpersonal difficulties often due to communication failures which often begin with a message by phone or email. Face-to-face communication remains one of the most powerful individual connections (Bagley, 2004). Eye contact, facial expressions, body movements, space, time, distance, appearance, are all non-verbal clues which influence the way a message is perceived and interpreted by the receiver (Guffey & Loewy, 2011). When communicating face-to-face with someone you are in a relationship, or short-term partnership, with that person (Bender & Tracz, 2008). With good communication skills so important in the workplace and because face-to-face is so powerful, it is important for individuals to learn these skills in order to be successful. Because most learning has a social foundation, Cooperative Learning works (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008) and is the productive setting for learning and practicing productive face-to-face communication skills.

By using face-to-face interaction in Cooperative Learning, the participant becomes active rather than passive. Discussion of ideas and oral summarization are encouraged. Peer assistance clarifies concepts for both helper and the student helped.

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Social skills such as valuing individual differences and being a good listener promote thinking that is broader and more elaborate (Staff Development, 2011).

Engaging Students

Most of us, if not all, have experienced sitting in a class or lecture where active participation was not required. Our mere presence seemed to be all that was necessary in the moment. However, if the information was boring or unrelated to our personal experience, we mentally "checked out" and thought about other things to pass the time. Probably less of us have experienced a learning setting where we had to actively participate and engage with what was happening. Some of us might have been uncomfortable at first, but as we become more accustomed to the interaction, we learned to contribute productively and actually came to enjoy the experience. The enhanced learning became personally meaningful.

Getting an individual to participate at all times means just that – all times. It means that at every minute of the class each student is engaged in thinking about and fulfilling the assignment. An example of engaging all learners would be using Random Call. The facilitator has everyone's name on an individual card or in a drawing to start. Next, the facilitator tells everyone to be sure each person in the group has an answer because the call for responses will be random. Then, give the question or problem. Allow a short time for making sure everyone in the group knows the answer before choosing a name card. Ask that individual to respond. Return the name back, shuffle the cards, and draw again. Do this until you are satisfied that everyone in the room had an answer. Make sure that you demonstrate true random calling in your structure. For very small groups I

have placed individual names on small pieces of paper, folded each one, and put them in a jar. I would return each name and shake the jar before drawing the next name. This would help the random concept across to the group. Using Random Call is one way to engage all the students at the same time and holding each group and individual accountable for the learning. Facilitating the learning so all students actively participate requires the use of a repertoire of structures. Below is a list of structures I have used:

1. **Random Call**: The random calling structure increases individuals' attention, since any individual can be picked at any time. Always try to choose several students each time you use the cards, and everyone will quickly understand that they may be the next person called. No student wants to be embarrassed, so they all formulate some type of response to give in case theirs is the next card drawn. Using **Turn-to-Your-Neighbor, Think-Pair-Share or Square** are great structures to use ensuring everyone has an answer. Use the cards as often as possible, maybe several times each hour. Warm ups are a great was to use the cards so everyone has a random chance of being picked. Use the cards for choosing random teams or groups. They are great for class discussions, since students cannot just be quiet and disappear—every question is answered by several students in succession, who must either build on previous information given or generate a new line of thinking.

2. **K-W-L**: The K-W-L strategy stands for what they <u>Know</u> about the subject, what they <u>Wonder</u> about the subject, and finally, what they Learned about the subject. Using **Turn-to-Your-Neighbor, Think-Pair-Share or Square** are some great ways to think have individuals discuss the answers. Then use **Random Call** for sharing the answers with the whole room to ensure everyone's engagement.

3. **Four Corners**: This structure gets the whole room out of their seats and makes them move to a specific place. Label four signs or posters with one possible choice for each poster and place a poster in each of the four corners of the room. Give the participants a scenario – example: which poster is most like how you feel today. Ask individuals to move to the corner of their choice. Then ask them to find a partner in their corner and describe to the partner the reasons for their choice. Give 1-2 minutes to explain the reason(s) for their decision. Each partner shares with the other. Then each pair chooses the top two reasons for making the choice that they did. Finally, students will share their reasons with the whole group by writing their reasons on the group poster and signing their initials. Students at each of the four corners form a large group and choose a spokesperson. The spokesperson is responsible for presenting a brief summary of their choice and the rationale behind the decisions to the whole class.

4. **Continuum**: This structure presents two opposite viewpoints where there is no correct answer. Facilitator poses a question with two choices or viewpoints. The opposite ends of the continuum represent each choice. When the signal is given, each individual moves to the spot on the continuum that most closely reflects represents his or her point of view. Participants **Turn-to Your-Neighbor** and explain their choice. Finally, use **Random Call** to have several answers shared with the whole room. Individuals may share they personal response or the one that their partner shared.

5. **Ranking Exercise**: This structure requires individuals or groups to arrange their order of preferences or prioritize three or more different opinions and then share their reasoning. A questions or statement is presented with three or more choices. Individuals rank or prioritize their responses and then **Pair** to explain their reasoning. Then everyone shares with his or her home group before responding to **Random Call** with the whole room.

6. **Either/or Exercise**: This structure requires a forces answer where the participants have to select an opinion with which they most closely identify. Facilitator poses a question with two answers. Allow a set time for individuals to decide an answer. Facilitator designates opposites of the room to represent each answer. Participants move to the side of the room representing the answer they have chosen. Participants **Turn-to-Your-Neighbor** and share the reason for their choice. Use **Random Call** to share several responses with the whole room before ending.

   Other structures: Details on how to execute these structures can be found in "Basic Moves of Teaching: Building on Cooperative Learning (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008).
   1. Three-Minute Pause
   2. Turn-to-Your neighbor and Share
   3. Question and Answer Pairs
   4. Writing Pairs
   5. Think-Pair-Share
   6. Think-Pair-Square
   7. Think-Square-Share
   8. Rally Table
   9. Round Table/ Round Robin
   10. Numbered Heads Together
   11. Jigsaw
   12. Group Jigsaw
   13. Expert Jigsaw

Teaching Factual Knowledge

Learning factual information is foundational to other learning including higher cognitive thinking processes (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Therefore, it is important to teach factual information effectively as the platform for deeper learning. There are four ways of teaching factual information that I want to discuss in this paper; Direct Instruction, Pictorial Representations, Mnemonics, Memory Hooks.

Direct Instruction

While the different educators refer to the components of direct instruction in different terms, for purposes of this paper, I will refer to direct instruction components in three general steps called model, prompt, and practice (Reid, 1985). Built into my practice for Direct Instruction is Mastery Teaching, which insures that learners master the information taught. Mastering a skill takes practice spread out over time and the learner needs to adapt and shape his or her learning until it is mastered (Marzano, 2001). Feedback should provide explanations that help the learner understand why something is accurate or inaccurate. It must be as close to the action as possible because the longer the time between the action and the feedback, the less effective it is. Immediate feedback is best (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Combining Mastery Learning with Direct Instruction provides an effective learning process.

Here is an overview of how I use Direct Instruction/ Mastery Learning in the classroom setting. I do this both within and outside of the Cooperative Learning framework. First, I make sure my expectations are clear and I establish routines for the

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lesson. I establish the purpose for the lesson and tell the student to show mastery of the information. I check for understanding and answer all students' questions before moving to the next phase. Then, I model what I want the students to do; prompt them to be sure they can model it back; and then provide time for them to practice the information. Here is an example of how I use direct instruction to teach how to write a manuscript capital "A." Let us assume the routines and procedures for getting ready for handwriting have already been established. Students know the signals to get ready, know how to get ready in a timely fashion, how they are to respond verbally, and are ready for the direct instruction. (We practiced the routine and procedure several days before moving to an actual lesson.) The practice paper for the students is prepared ahead of time. Below is a sample lesson script:

Me: *We are going to learn to write a capital letter "A." What are we going to write?*
Students: *A capital letter "A."*

(Model)
Me: *To write a capital letter "A" I put my pencil on the top line and slant down to the baseline, then I put my pencil at the top line again and slant down to the baseline like this.* Then I connect the two lines. (I model this with a sample of the actual paper they are using with an overhead or Elmo. I speak as I write.) *Top down, top down, connect, Capital Letter "A." Top down, top down, connect, Capital letter "A."*
Then I write a Capital "A" that does not sit on the line. I ask, "Is this a good Capital Letter "A?"
Students: *No*
Me: *What's wrong with it?*
Students: *Lines*

(They have learned about line, slant, and spacing errors earlier. I do a Capital Letter "A" with an incorrect slant, and spacing problem with the same procedure. I end with writing a correct Capital Letter "A." Now we are ready to move to the Prompt and Model part of the lesson.

(Prompt & Model)

Me: *Now, I want you to trace the letter on your paper with me and speak the words as you write. Put you pencil on the top line. Ready? Go!*

Students: *Top down, top down, connect, Capital Letter "A".*

Me: *Next letter.*

Students: *Top down, top down, connect, Capital Letter "A".*

Me: *Continue until I say stop.*

Students: *Top down, top down, connect, Capital Letter "A".*
                    Top down, top down, connect, Capital Letter "A". (etc.)

                    (When the student complete the first two lines of letters say: "Stop!"

(Prompt and Practice)

At this point the students have dotted letters to follow. I do the same routine with them as I did with tracing the letters. Then they have a beginning dot on the top line to start them. They do a couple of lines the same way as the tracing with me speaking right along with them. Everyone speaks together and goes the same speed.

(Practice)

The last part is where the students have no prompts and they write letters on their own. I say: *"Continue writing Capital Letter "A" using your number 1 voice until I say stop."* I no longer speak with them and watch to see and hear them work. As the first student gets near the end of the paper, I say, *"Stop". Now look for at your letters and check for slant, spacing, and line errors.*
Student practice this letter on their own for the rest of the week in the assigned handwriting. They are required to apply the lesson to all of their daily work.

The students understand that the purpose for handwriting it to demonstrate in their daily activities. Once they show competency for their grade level, which includes form, speed, and spacing, they can receive an Expert Handwriting Certificate and they could stop doing specific handwriting assignments as long as they maintained good handwriting on their daily work. This worked amazing well in my classroom and even though most of them took a large portion of the year to get their Handwriting Expert Certificate,

everyone's handwriting significantly improved in their daily work. The students had

become aware of issues they had not previous thought of and we transferring things like

spacing and lines to letter and words not yet taught. Because I was in a one-room school,

I asked all students to "help" me with the lower grades manuscript lessons by

participating in the Model, Prompt, and Practice part of the lesson. What amazed me was

I saw a marked improvement in those doing cursive before we ever got to the cursive

lessons. The transfer of skills was evident. My students had experienced the transfer of

factual knowledge to higher level thinking skills!

<center>Nonlinguistic Representatives</center>

I will briefly discuss five categories of nonlinguistic representations listed in the

book *Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-based Strategies for Increasing*

Student Achievement (Marzano, 2001). The categories are 1) Graphic organizers, 2)

Physical models, 3) Mental pictures, 4) Pictographs and pictorials, and 5) Kinesthetic

activity. We organize information in two basic ways. One way is with linguistics relating

to meaning or arising from distinctions between the meanings of different words or

symbols (Farlex, 2011). The second way is through imagery, or a set of mental pictures

or images (Farlex, 2011).

Graphic organizers are visual and graphic displays depicting the relationships

between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task. Graphic organizers are also

referred to as knowledge maps, concept maps, story maps, cognitive organizers, advance

organizers, or concept diagrams (Hall & Strangman, 2011). There are many different

forms of Graphic organizers, each one best suited to organizing a particular type of

information. Graphic organizers apply across a range of curriculum subject areas. While

reading is by far the most well studied application, science, social studies, language arts,

and math are also content areas in the research base on graphic organizers. Graphics such

as mapping cause and effect, note taking, comparing and contrasting concepts, organizing

problems and solutions, and relating information to main ideas or themes can be

beneficial to many subject areas (Hall & Strangman, 2011). Green and Henriquez-Green

(2008) present six types of graphic organizers. They are 1) descriptive, 2) time sequence,

3) concept patterns, 40 process/cause affect patterns, 5) episode patterns, and 6)

generalization/principle patterns. There are four basic patterns of knowledge;

hierarchical, conceptual, sequential, and cyclical (Bromley, Vitis, & Modlo, 1995). These

different organizers can portray how facts and knowledge related to these four basic

patterns.

<div align="center">Mnemonics</div>

Mnemonics is a system to develop or improve the memory (Farlex, 2011). There

are at least three distinct methods for teaching mnemonics: keyword, pegword, and letter

strategies (Center, 2008). The keyword strategy links new information to keywords

already encoded to memory, the pegword strategy uses rhyming words to represent

numbers or order, and letter strategies involves the use of acronyms and acrostics.

Mnemonics can be teacher created or student created. It is probably most beneficial when

students learn to create their own mnemonics. Three generalizations underlie the use of

mnemonics; you can remember anything when it is associated with something you

already know, you need to be actively involved to remember, and you must practice it a

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certain number of practices which are about the same for 95% of us (Bloom, 1982; Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). The use of mnemonic methods can lighten the load of retention making it easier to recall factual information.

Six processes are important to remember when developing mnemonics for remembering facts (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008; Joyce, et al., 2003). A mnemonic that helps us easily remember the six processes for developing mnemonics is the word ALASKA (spelled ALASKR). Since we already know the word Alaska, we can use the letters in Alaska to associate each of the six processes. "A" stand for awareness or attention. The more you focus on what you are learning, the better you will remember. "L" is for link using words or images to remind you. An example in music is "Every Good Boy Does Fine" which helps us recall the names of the notes that sit on the line in the treble clef. The second "A" means association with actions, rhymes, rhythms, sounds, pictures, or smells. "S" represents the use of substitute words with which to associate the items you need to remember. Some call them Memory Hooks and the system can be quite elaborate and effective (Trudeau, 1995). The "K" (substituted for the third "A") represents using something novel or ridiculous to help the memory. To make things even more effective and easier to recall if you can associate some strong emotion with your creation, it will be the "glue" that holds everything together in your mind (Trudeau, 1995). The more elaborate the method for memorizing, the more efficiently and effectively one recalls the material (Joyce, et al., 2003).

Establishing a climate in the classroom for mnemonics can be easy and fun. I used Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory tapes in my one-room school every morning after worship and Bible. There were eight tapes in all so we did one tape per week for eight

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weeks. On day one, we listened to the thirty-minute presentation and the rest of the week we practiced what he taught on that tape. Soon the students were applying the skills in their daily lessons and by the end of the eight weeks, the students were impressing their parents and school board members with their great memories.

I will never forget one activity we did. There was a student in every grade through the eighth grade with the exceptions of third grade and seventh grade. I wrote a list of six facts on the board fifteen minutes before dismissal and told the students to use their memory hooks to remember these facts for a quiz in the morning. When it came time for our memory practice the next morning, I did not give the quiz right away. The board was eased the night before and most of the students did not seem too concerned. However, my little first grade girl keep asking when we could take the quiz. Finally, I told everyone to get out a piece of paper and write done all six facts from yesterday in the order written on the board. After a few minutes, I asked how many students got them all. (You have to understand these students were very comfortable in their learning environment – no shame in missing something – it was part of the process.) Almost all of the students raised their hands indicating a perfect score. I did notice that my fifth grade boy did not raise his hand, however, I said nothing and the others did not seem to notice. I asked for volunteers to share why they thought they got the score. Several shared and then my first grade girl had to share. She said that before she left the classroom the day before, she put each of the each of the six items on her memory hooks. When she got in the car to go home, she went over them in her mind one more time. She said she went over them two more time that afternoon and then once just before she fell asleep. In the morning she repeated them to herself as she was getting a shower and she knew them all. That was

why she could hardly wait to sake the quiz! At that, my sixth grade boy had to speak. He said, "I can't believe a first grade girl beat me! I did not bother to do the memory hooks because I thought I could just remember them – there were only six. I missed two of them because I did not bother to use the skills I have learned. From now I will use the memory hooks!" What an enlightening and delightful lesson on using our memories we all shared that day!

Staff Development

Every time about half way through the Building Learning Communities class (sometimes called Summer Institute), the discussion of on-going support for the teachers begins spontaneously with the participants. The need for continual support and feedback becomes evident to the participants and they verbalize their concerns. How would they actually put this into practice without ongoing support once they returned to their individual classrooms?

The purpose of professional training and development is to improve what is happening in the workplace, transferring the skill and knowledge learned from the training. Rarely does any administration put in place a support system to make this happen, however, for the transfer to occur at a rate higher than 5%, a social support system must be established that meet the teachers' personal, social, and professional needs (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Research says that without a follow-up support system in place for teachers, the transfer of training is unlikely (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

One of the joys of working in the Carolina Conference is the teacher study groups begun by Rita Henriquez-Green (Roark) in 1990. In 1998, I became the Associate

Superintendent of Education for the Carolina Conference following her leadership. The Teacher Study Groups she established had become part of the Carolina culture for teachers and it was a privilege and a joy to continue what she had begun. Carolina teachers who took this class had a support structure in place to help them transfer their learning to their classrooms. Teachers from other conferences would voice their opinion that Carolina Conference teachers were very fortunate to have teacher study groups.

A Teacher Study Group

Teacher study groups are small groups of teachers who regularly meet together to learn and implement new teaching strategies. Henriquez- Roark, (1995) says teacher study groups promote specific change in individuals. Teachers grow professionally as a result in participating in study groups. They use study groups to plan, share new ideas, and solve problems. The teachers expanded their teaching repertoire. There is more emphasis on curriculum and instruction because they are not afraid to borrow from their peers or share ideas. They are accountable to each other and feel they are becoming better teachers.

Additional professional benefits include an individual increase in reading, more sharing of ideas, and trying each other's ideas, with an openness to share challenges and problems. Teacher study groups provide a forum where teachers process their thinking for support and guidance, which facilitated more communication between peers, which fostered a better ability to see things from the other person's point of view. Some teachers even experienced a change in their personal conceptual beliefs and discovered leadership qualities (Henriquez-Roark, 1995).
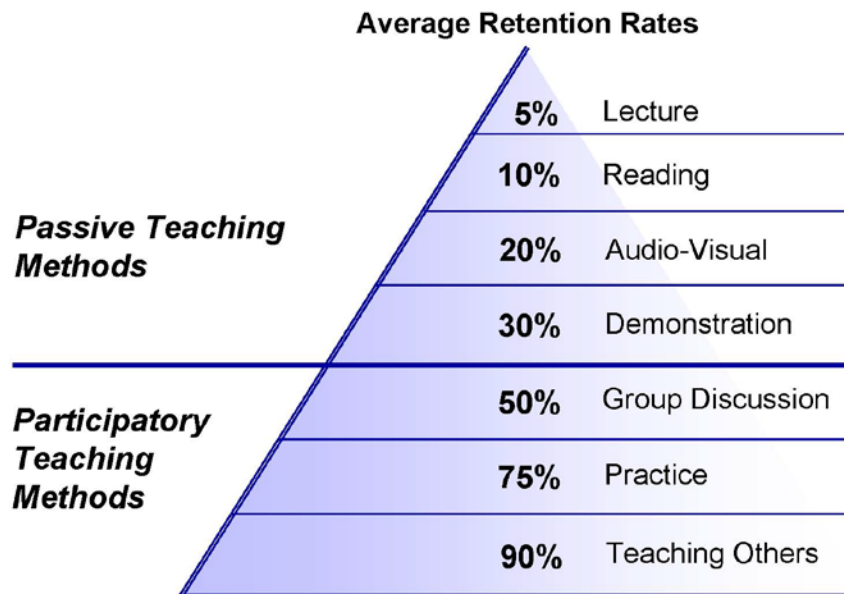
Study groups also provided the ongoing support needed to for that transfer of skills into the workplace. Demonstrations, coaching, and feedback along with individual accountability, bridged the support between the workshop and the workplace (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Here teachers could get help and clarifications as they experimented with the new skill in their teaching. The study group was also a setting where a new innovation could be modeled and practiced using the same structure as in the workshop. The study group is the critical "missing piece of the puzzle" for ensuring transfer of training into the classroom (Martin, Psychology Department).

Murphy's model is a student-driven approach to staff development. These Whole-Faculty Study Groups facilitate a deeper understanding of academic content. They help implement district wide initiatives in curriculum, instruction, and technology. They integrate and give coherence to a school's instructional programs and practices. Whole-Faculty Study Groups target school wide instructional needs, study research on teaching and learning, and monitor the impact or effects of instructional initiatives on students. Student work is examined with colleagues and there is reflection on current teaching practices (Murphy, 1995). Whole-Faculty Study Groups is a vehicle for implementing an innovation in an entire school/system at the same time, at the same level, for the same purpose (Lick & Murphy, 2007).

Study groups are powerful because they help meet personal and social needs along with professional needs (Martin, Psychology Department). Study groups also provide the support structure for teachers to practice moving from passive teaching methods to participatory teaching methods. This increases the teacher's learning and ability to transfer the new strategy or structure into their teaching in their own classroom

and thus increase the level, which their students retain the information they learn. The Learning Pyramid (Dictionary.com, 2011) shows average rates of retention for different methods of teaching.

The Learning Pyramid*

Average Retention Rates

Passive Teaching Methods

- 5% Lecture
- 10% Reading
- 20% Audio-Visual
- 30% Demonstration

Participatory Teaching Methods

- 50% Group Discussion
- 75% Practice
- 90% Teaching Others

*Adapted from National Training Laboratories. Bethel, Maine

Summary

Producing a productive learning environment does not happen by chance. It requires training and skill to understand how to facilitate such an environment. Effective methods for using structures, strategies, and techniques involves learning through modeling, prompting, practice, and feedback (Green & Henriquez-Green, 2008). Because Cooperative Learning has the strongest research for effectiveness (Ellis, 2005),

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and because people are social by nature (Kido, 2010), the correct use of Cooperative

Learning is critical for a productive learning environment. It increases both the learning

of academics and the acquiring of social skills (Fisher & Fisher, 2001).

Besides understanding Cooperative Learning and its practices, it is important to

know the appropriate skills needed for teaching different kinds of instruction. Skills in the

basic moves of teaching include understanding Cooperative Learning concepts and

practices; building healthy, productive learning environments; getting students to engage

and respond; using effective approaches to teaching factual knowledge; and teaching

conceptual knowledge and higher order thinking skills (Green & Henriquez-Green,

2008).

Conducting workshops, seminars, training classes for teachers to learn these skills

can be a good beginning in helping teachers learn a repertoire of teaching strategies,

structure, and techniques. However, these programs are not enough to ensure that

teachers can transfer knowledge to their workplace. On-going Staff Development through

teacher study groups are a critical piece for aiding in the transfer of skills to the

classroom instruction (Martin, Psychology Department). Study groups help meet

professional needs along with personal and social needs providing a structure for safe

learning and practice (Martin, Psychology Department).When this piece of the staff

development picture is missing, only 5 - 15% of teachers will actually transfer their new

learning into their classroom practices (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Personal Observation

This class changed my teaching and the environment of my classroom dramatically. I had previously focused on the different learning styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1978), seeking to help my students understand and learn through their best learning style. Now, I could broaden my perspective incorporating my new repertoire of skills into a cooperative setting. This added a new dimension to my teaching and brought excitement both to my students and to myself. My teaching became more intentional and I could articulate to others the reason why I might use a certain strategy, structure, or technique the way I did. Learning became integrated into layers of meaning for the students. The activities occurred in a fun and productive environment. The room buzzed most days with the excitement and joy of learning. Perhaps one of the best compliments I ever received during that time in my teaching was delivered in the cloak of a complaint. During a parent/teacher conference, I asked the parents if they had any particular concerns. After a few seconds the mother said, "I really can't think of any. However, you know I come over to the school and spend several hours a week on the computer. A lot of learning is going on and the kids are very busy having so much fun they don't know they are learning." "Then she said, "I am not sure this is good. Shouldn't they be aware they are really learning, not having fun?" Of course, I was delighted with her concern!

As an associate superintendent, I have the opportunity to use these methods to help my teachers grow professionally. I understand the critical role of teacher study groups in improving instruction in the classroom. I continually think about ways to use the things I learned in this class to improve the staff development program for my teachers.

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This class has also changed my metacognition, thinking about my thinking, affecting the way I see people interacting in the world. It has added another dimension to my understanding of why people might misunderstand each other and I agree more strongly than ever with Deborah Tanner when she said that it is a wonder that we communicate as well as we do (Tannen, 1998). Learning the skills taught in this class has given me better tools to use in understanding, communicating, and teaching others. I am grateful for the enriching experience this experience has brought into my professional and personal life. I believe the principles and skills I have learned are transferrable to many areas in the business world where people are required to learn new things. I especially cherish these skills in the world we now live. The market place is changing so rapidly that new information and skills are continually learned. Having skill in facilitating an effective and successful learning experience is more important now than ever!

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