

**COLLABORATING WITH STUDENTS IN INSTRUCTION AND DECISION-MAKING:
THE UNTAPPED AND ALWAYS AVAILABLE RESOURCE**

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Collaboration with students in the design, delivery, and evaluation of instruction and decision-making involves students working in cooperative learning groups, as tutors and partners in partner learning (e.g., reciprocal teaching), and as co-teachers with their teachers.

Collaboration with students means involving students as decision makers and problem solvers, as designers of their own learning and being self-determined in planning for their own futures.

Collaboration with students means engaging students as mediators of conflict and controversy and advocates for themselves and others. Collaboration with students means fostering self-discipline and student learning and use of responsible behavior.

There are multiple rationales for collaborating with students in instruction and decision-making. Namely, it (a) facilitates 21st century goals of education; (b) is an example of democratic schooling; (c) increases self determination of students; (d) increases academic and social competence of students; (e) facilitates school reform efforts; and (e) represents an untapped resource in times of limited fiscal and human resources.

What Are Theoretical Frameworks for Collaborating and Teaching with Students?

First, from a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theoretical perspective (Vygotsky, 1987), what children can do with the assistance of others is more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone. Further, cognitive psychologists have verified that when students become reciprocal teachers of one another (i.e., both students alternate being the teacher who coaches the comprehension skills they are learning), reading comprehension scores of poor readers increase (Palinscar & Brown, 1984).

What is the Research Base for Teaching with Students?

Educational researchers have identified one variation of student instructional collaboration - cooperative group learning - as one of the top nine best educational practices correlated with

increasing student achievement on standardized tests (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001). Many positive social, communication, and academic achievement outcomes have been reported in the research on peer tutoring, partner learning, reciprocal teaching, and cooperative group learning – four variations of students serving as collaborators in instruction. For example, when students with disabilities have served as reciprocal tutors/tutees, they have shown higher achievement as compared to when they were only recipients of tutoring (Elbaum, Moody, Vaughn, Schumm, & Hughes, 2001). They also experience increased self-esteem as a result of being in the teacher role (Elbaum et al., 2001). Additionally, when children serve in teaching roles, they are increasing their own mastery of the content as well as learning valuable communication skills.

With regard to peer tutoring, it is critical that all students (e.g., students with learning differences and special educational needs) learn to serve as tutors and have the opportunity to learn as tutees from their peers. This is especially important for students who are considered gifted or talented, lest they become typecast as tutors only. They too can benefit from being tutored and receiving a challenging education filled with diverse activities and opportunities. Tutoring other students can be one exciting and challenging component of their day.

As an adult, we invite you to reflect on your own personal experiences as a youth and student. To what extent did you participate in experiences that allowed you to take on collaborative instructional and creative decision-making roles? Reflect on the 15 questions in the Student Collaboration Quiz. How might your experiences as a student have influenced your teaching practices and the collaborative opportunities you make available to students today? Finally, think about how the collaborative experiences suggested in the quiz might facilitate student growth in academic, communication, and social/emotional domains?

STUDENT COLLABORATION QUIZ

Directions: Please circle the rating that best fits your own experience as a student.

1. How often were you expected to support the academic and social learning of other students as well as be accountable for your own learning by working in cooperative groups?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
2. Were you, as a student, given the opportunity and training to serve as an instructor for a peer?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
3. Were you, as a student, given the opportunity to receive instruction from a trained peer?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
4. How often were you involved in a discussion of the teaching act with an instructor?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
5. Were you, as a student given the opportunity to co-teach a class with an adult?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
6. How often were you taught creative problem solving strategies and given an opportunity to employ them to solve academic or behavioral challenges?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
7. How often were you asked to evaluate your own learning?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
8. How often were you given the opportunity to assist in determining the educational outcomes for you and your classmates?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
9. How often were you given the opportunity to advocate for the educational interests of a classmate or asked to assist in determining modifications and accommodations to curriculum?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
10. How often were you asked to provide your teachers with feedback as to the effectiveness and appropriateness of their instruction and classroom management?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
11. Were you, as a student, given the opportunity and training to serve as a mediator of conflict between peers?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
12. How often were you, as a student, encouraged to bring a support person to a difficult meeting to provide you with moral support?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
13. How often were you provided the opportunity to lead or facilitate meetings addressing your academic progress and/or future (e.g., Developing Personal Learning Plans, Student-Parent-Teacher Conferences, an IEP meeting)?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often
14. How often did you participate as an equal with teachers, administrators, and community members on school committees (e.g., curriculum committee, discipline committee, hiring committee, school board)?
Never Rarely Sometimes Often Very Often

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