INSTRUCTOR ROLE IN TEACH ONE ANOTHER

PURPOSE
This tool describes the critical role that instructors play in designing and facilitating experiences for students to teach and learn from one another. As student interactions are structured and managed, learning outcomes can significantly improve.

DESCRIPTION
In many traditional teaching models, experts impart knowledge to students through lectures. Teaching becomes passive and one directional as knowledge is conveyed to the student.

In contrast, the Peer Instruction Model has students teaching and learning from one another. The communication goes in both directions as each individual takes on both the role of student and teacher.

While the diagram above is helpful in illustrating the differences between peer instruction and an expert/novice approach, it can inadvertently imply that you are removed from the instructional process. This is not the case. If you are not involved, then there is the risk that students (who are not experts) will share incorrect or misguided information—leading to the problem of “students swapping ignorance.” These risks can be managed, however, if you properly structure student interaction and stay engaged in the process. Structuring the interaction of student-led learning improves learning outcomes, knowledge retention, and application skills over traditional learning models. Thus the role that you play is critical as the students teach one another.

Elder Bednar has said “A faculty member should be the engineer, the designer, the architect of learning experiences; not just the sage on the stage telling people what he or she thinks they need to know” (Elder David A. Bednar, President’s Q&A, BYU-Idaho, November 16, 2004).

This diagram illustrates the central role that you play in the teach one another process.

You define the learning environment as you design and facilitate experiences for students. Some key elements of your role are:

- **Specify learning outcomes.** Starting with the end in mind provides the framework in designing the class experience and selecting the most beneficial peer instruction tools. Doing so also tells students what they should achieve by the curriculum’s end.

- **Select the appropriate peer instruction tool.** Instructional tools have different strengths. An outcome such as “Identify the relationship between voltage, current, and resistance” may be achieved through a small group activity, while “Define the term voltage” would be better served in a group discussion.

- **Prepare students.** Students need foundational knowledge in order to learn from their interaction. Ensure that critical information and important concepts are assigned to students in advance of peer-instructional activities.

- **Define boundaries and structure.** Keep students focused on the learning activity. The prompt of “Evaluate the role of Brigham Young in the expansion of the United States” can be very broad. Boundaries for a particular activity could be set by limiting the discussion to a specific set of years, a key policy, or a geographic region (e.g. 1776, the Prohibition Act, California, etc.).

- **Create rubrics.** You can design rubrics that help define criteria and standards. These can support student peer evaluation and also help guide group work and instructional planning. In that regard,
simple rubrics can be developed for students to monitor their own progress.

- **Provide appropriate incentives.** Provide students with incentives, either intrinsic and external, but preferably positive. Favorable comments during a discussion are often a more effective motivator than the threat of a bad grade.

- **Monitor progress.** You, as a subject expert, monitor the student’s progress to identify key knowledge gaps while students work. Monitoring can be as simple as listening in on discussions to ensure students are mastering the topics.

- **Determine necessary intervention.** In conjunction with monitoring student progress, plan interventions that will steer students to the correct path of thought or fill knowledge gaps. Intervention is more effective if done so that students discover the correct path or missing knowledge on their own, rather than just be told.

**EXAMPLE**

An instructor is teaching a module on website design and determines through learning outcome that students will be able to create an easy-to-use web interface for a broad demographic of users and identify the common elements of easy-to-use interfaces. Since the criteria “easy to use” is subjective, the instructor decides to use peer instructional methods supported by rubrics.

The instructor then selects several tools to meet his outcomes. The first tool is a **group project** where students actually build an interface after preparing by reading literature on design. He sets **boundaries** on the project by giving the students a specific set of requirements with parameters. He assumes the role of the “client” and monitors the student progress by scheduling design reviews.

The second tool the instructor selects is **peer reviews** by assigning students the role of “critics”. Each day a **team presents** their designs to the “critics” who then provide feedback on the group’s design. The instructor sets the agenda for these peer reviews. If key elements are missed, the instructor **intervenes** as the “client” to redirect the discussion.

At the end of the module, students grade one another’s projects based on the rubric and assign a score that the instructor uses in calculating a final grade and selecting a winning team. Students have taught and learned from each other while the instructor facilitated the learning process.

**TIPS**

- **Learning versus lecturing.** Focus on student learning rather than covering or imparting material. Your intention isn’t to give as much information as possible, but to ensure that students learn what they can in the time given.

- **Be patient.** Be patient with the process and trust that students will accept this approach to learning. Although different from what they are used to, they will eventually understand its benefits.

- **Encourage collaboration.** Develop a culture of collaboration among students. It is through their peers that they will come to best understand.

- **Define class roles.** Help students recognize the instructor and student roles early in the course. Only when they understand the expectations will they be able to best contribute to discussions.

**PITFALLS**

- **Swapping ignorance.** Faculty detachment can create an environment of pooled ignorance.

- **Vague direction.** Unclear outcomes and boundaries cause students to wander. While there may be engagement, there is no meaningful learning.

**KEY ARTICLES**


**OTHER RESOURCES**

- Faculty as Architects of the Learning Experience

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools