

**Jeff Golub, Editor.**

**FOCUS ON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING.**

**Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988.**

**170 pp.**

Studies in schools and universities show that students who share their knowledge and who work together to perfect their writing, show results that support skills and abilities that the new pedagogy values. Therefore, more and more classroom teachers have chosen to change their teaching so that they use collaborative, or group learning situations, where students work together to prepare topics, write projects, or simply revise text. In other words, they encourage individual students to learn from the expertise of other members of the group, allowing for final products that benefit from the efforts of many minds.

Teaching in groups, however, sometimes proves difficult for teachers who have never attempted this new pedagogy. For some teachers, the idea of relinquishing control of the classroom to the students is, in itself, frightening. Others, however, desire the change, but have no knowledge of what to do. Thus, a book such as *Focus on Collaborative Learning*, edited by Jeff Golub, proves to be valuable to the classroom teacher. This text introduces a practical attempt to guide teachers who need advice and ideas for their classrooms. Golub and his committee offer a variety of suggestions for collaborative activities in all age groups.

The editors have subdivided the articles for easy reference under the headings of "Developing Collaborative Learning Skills," "Collaborative Learning and Literature Study," "Collaboration in Writing, Revising and Editing," and "Additional Collaborative Learning Activities." Articles address techniques of writing and editing in groups, and presenting poetry and drama, among other subjects. Though the book has no index, chapter headings are clear and self-explanatory. Each chapter's own reference list replaces a comprehensive bibliography, a deletion that might annoy some users. Some activities prove to be excellent, others less so, yet a creative educator could glean ideas from all. Each chapter explains the rationale for a particular collaborative writing activity in language arts, offering practical applications, and discusses the potential result of the activity. Most of all, because each activity has been used in a classroom environment already, the writers can address strengths and weaknesses of each activity.

In the first section, six educators introduce general guidelines to develop collaborative skills. Dana Herreman's article, "None of Us is as Smart as All of Us," leads off the text with a vehement argument in favour of group learning. She contends that "group process is the life process," and offers suggestions as to how teachers can create learners who can function in

groups. Richard Whitworth agrees that the process of teaching students how to learn can be a long, painful, but rewarding task. In the next article, Caryl Sills discusses the use of computers in collaborative learning. Later, Tom Morton draws on his experience in British Columbia, and Kathleen Booher prepares a guide for teachers of writing.

Once the book has convinced all teachers that collaborative activities play a valuable role in student learning, the editors focus the articles toward specific skills. Therefore, the next set of articles deals with the teaching of literature. Easley and Barbara Schoen each look at collaborative learning in university literature courses. Adele Fiderer examines Grade 5 students who discuss books with each other, in what she calls "collaborative talk." Finally, Muriel Ridland deals with the specific skill of studying poetry in groups.

Since writing activities lend themselves naturally to collaborative activities, the next section of the text concerns itself with many issues. Margaret Flemming, in the first article, says that "[i]n the 'real world' outside the schools, writers often collaborate," thus supplying a rationale for introducing the method. Sharon Tsujimoto begins collaborative activities in her junior classes of grades 2-5. Mary Simpson-Esper focuses specifically on the problem of monitoring individual students, while Edgar Thompson, and in another article, Jeffrey Copeman and Earl Lomax deal with ways to create effective writing groups. Other writers focus on specific types of collaborative writing: Corrine Alonso on the group paper; Marie Foley on response groups; and Kirsten Barford Levinsohn and John Kendall on writing partnerships that cross the boundaries of elementary and secondary schools.

The text ends with a section that covers a variety of miscellaneous collaborative tasks. Douglas Meyers uses groups to write television commercials. Virginia McCormick finds a new way to practice writing research papers. Phyllis Taufen explores a technique of creative writing with groups and cubes. Donald Bear and Deborah Lohman use balloons. Finally, Carole Cox allows her young students to write scripts in groups.

Because of the variety of approaches, I believe that this text can provide a strong base for language arts teachers who wish to use collaborative learning activities in their classrooms. Teachers can read, find new ideas, or adapt old ones in the process of making their classrooms more group oriented. Such a practical guide with a strong theoretical base can prove an invaluable tool for teachers.

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