Pedagogical Benefits of Collaborative Learning

“Research shows that students who participate in successful group projects, collaborative learning and cooperative learning exhibit a higher level of academic achievement, better critical thinking skills, a deeper understanding of learned material, and more positive and supportive relationships with peers.” (Astin, 1993; Cooper et al., 1990; Goodsell et al., 1992; McKeachie, 1986)

Good group work will increase:

*Diversity  Students of different backgrounds and skill sets are paired together and work towards a common goal

*Social awareness  Students work with classmates whose histories are different from their own

Students take responsibility for each other’s learning

*Critical thinking  Students are empowered in their learning. Groups examine topics together, drawing on each member’s knowledge.

By pooling resources, groups cover “basic” content quickly. Groups have more time to “delve deep” into critical concepts.

*Constructive controversy  Students are encouraged to actively disagree with/challenge each other for the benefit of the team.

*Conflict resolution (not win/lose)  Students learn to act as mediators in order to come to effective group decisions

“The nature of my office hours changed considerably ... with fewer students coming in to ask ‘How do you do Problem 3?’ and more groups coming in for help in resolving debates about open-ended problems. I inferred with considerable satisfaction that the students had begun to count on one another to resolve straightforward questions instead of looking to me as the source of all wisdom.”

--Richard M. Felder, Department of Chemical Engineering, East Carolina University (1994).