

March 2011

Peer Learning: a pooling of knowledge or what?

By Rob Brynjolfson



I once invited a fellow student to join a group Bible study. The response was interesting. He sneered and said, "Why would I do that - so we can get together and pool our ignorance?" I got a good picture of his attitude to his peers, and to his philosophy of education.

The Leadership Institute is deeply committed to peer learning. Peer learning is used more and more frequently in training and education - but it is often not defined, and its value is often not explained. Peer learning may even meet real resistance – because people assume that no significant learning can ever happen among peers. Are we "dumbing down" education and over-valuing a "pooling of ignorance?" To answer this question we need to analyze several factors.

Quality learning is always community orientated. Educators tell us that the best learning happens in community, because learning is about accumulating knowledge, and its useful implementation. True, those skilled and disciplined enough to learn on their own can accumulate an amazing knowledge base, but it still needs to be rounded, squared and shaped through interaction with others. How else can we make sure that our learning is broad and complete rather than narrow minded? This is especially true in the very important area of affective learning – spiritual growth, character formation and attitude adjustment.

Adult learners like inclusive learning strategies that recognize existing understanding and experiences – because adult learners bring their own unique and valuable understandings gained through their own lives. Adult learners are not empty glasses waiting to be filled. There is always previous content. Far from pooling ignorance, frequently what is pooled is wisdom – intuitive knowledge based on life experience.

Peer learning increases retention. When peers share their life experiences and wisdom while interacting with new content, material or understanding, they retain more. Adult learners want to know why they should learn something and what the immediate application will be. When peers interact and ask questions about the suitability or applicability of new content, conclusions will be valued and this new content will be retained.

Peer learning facilitates the contextualization of content and processes. The greatest challenge in the Leadership Institute is about the dynamics of teaching cross-cultural leadership. The expectation that our subject matter experts will also be highly sensitive to the cross-cultural implications of teaching their courses is simply unrealistic. Few people could possibly match these requirements. However, through peer interaction, we begin to contextualize course content, improving the learning experience for students and assisting facilitators as they adapt to a very challenging teaching assignment.

In the context of our Alliances and associations we can especially value peer learning because we see how those with more experience can assist others who are new to the job. When an Alliance is challenged to build unity, address the service needs of a diverse membership or position itself to speak as the trusted voice on behalf of its constituency, other Alliance leaders can share from their own experiences and create an amazing learning experience. Leaders discover they are not alone. Others have forged ahead and can offer advice. Leaders commit to praying for each other as they face similar challenges. Innovations can be explored. Resources are shared. And the end result is that our Alliances are strengthened. We support peer learning, in fact, because the strongest asset of the World Evangelical Alliance is found in the wealth of personnel, volunteers, previous and present leadership found in our effective Alliances around the world.

Imagine News:

March 26 - course start date:

The Effective Public Engagement course is scheduled to start March 26, 2011, and interest is strong. The application process requires time and those interested in this course should complete their application as soon as possible.

Online application now available:

The WEA-LI online application form is now available and can be found at: <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/training/apply/>. Those requiring a form to be filled in by hand or off-line can download the PDF form at: http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/weali_form.pdf

Online payment process now available:

Application fees and tuition installments can be paid online by credit card or using PayPal. These may be accessed by clicking [here](#)



IMAGINE is published monthly
ten editions a year.

74 Trinity Place Suite 1400, New York, NY 10006-2122

www.worldevangelicals.org

More than we can imagine! · Eph. 3:20

