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Webb, Noreen M.; Nemer, Kariane Mari; Ing, Marsha

Small-group reflections: parallels between teacher discourse and student behavior in peer-directed groups.

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Prior research on small-group collaboration identifies several behaviors that significantly predict student learning, such as exchanging explanations and applying help received. Previous reports focus on student behavior to understand why many students do not engage in behaviors predictive of learning, leaving unexplored how teachers may influence small-group interaction. Consequently, the article describes established teacher practices and examines whether and how students reproduce teacher discourse in the context of a semester-long program of cooperative learning in four middle school mathematics classrooms. The article illustrates changes that emerged and factors that made change difficult. The research concludes that student behavior largely mirrored the discourse modeled by and the expectations communicated by teachers. Teachers tended to give unlabeled calculations, procedures, or answers instead of labeled explanations. Teachers often instructed using a recitation approach in which they assumed primary responsibility for solving the problem, having students only provide answers to discrete steps. Finally, teachers rarely encouraged students to verbalize their thinking or to ask questions. Students adopting the role of help-giver showed behavior very similar to that of the teacher: doing most of the work, providing mostly low-level help, and infrequently monitoring other students' level of understanding. The relatively passive behavior of students needing help corresponded to expectations communicated by the teacher about the learner as a fairly passive recipient of the teacher's transmitted knowledge. (orig.)

Classification: C60 C70 D40