

Teagle Peer Effects Project Interview Results

Lewis & Clark, Reed,
and Whitman Colleges
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Interviews

- 10 instructors at each school
- Exploratory one-hour conversations
- Helpful peers/unhelpful or destructive peers
- Successful classes/unsuccessful classes



Summary of results

- Most thought peer effects were important
- Consensus that attitude and personality are more important than raw ability
- Much in common across three schools, but differences in emphasis



Good peers

- Enthusiasm for course
- Well prepared for class
- Intellectual curiosity
- Respect for peers' opinions
- Willingness to speak
- Openness to new ideas
- Cooperative attitude
- Maturity



“Toxic” peers

- Dismissive of fellow students
- Use discussion to “score points”
- Rejection of peer learning
- Active disengagement
- Talk too much
- Divert discussion



Special types of peers

- The quiet student
 - Often have a lot to say
 - Very common
 - Not necessarily a problem
- The nice student
 - Worried about disagreeing with fellow students

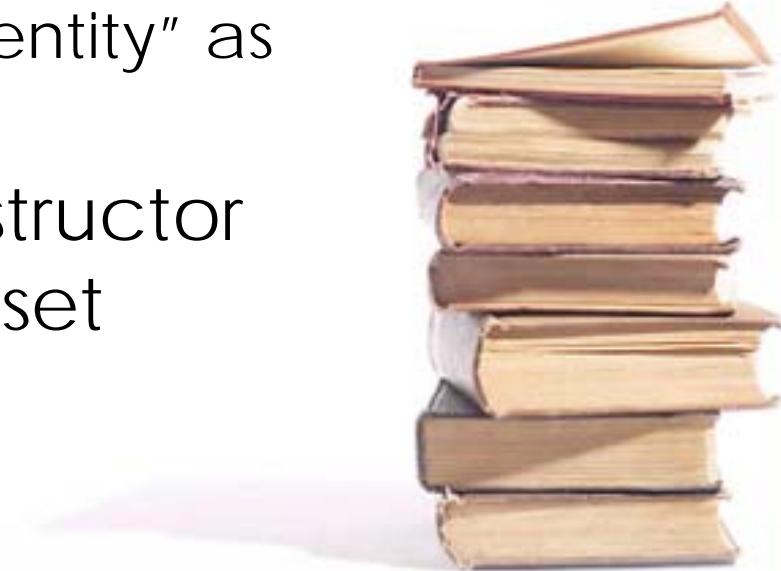


Class composition: The concentric ring model



Middle ring: buy-in or opt-out?

- First-year students
 - Young
 - Experiencing college for first time
 - No established “identity” as college students
- Peer pressure & instructor influence will help set norms
 - Is it “cool to play”



Middle ring: buy-in or opt-out?

- Critical mass of good peers in inner core
 - Models positive academic behavior
- Can succeed despite one toxic peer (ostracism)
- Too many quiet students can be a problem



What we think we've learned

Distribution of personalities and attitudes among class members matters more than their abilities



Open questions

- Did we understand you?
- What are we missing?
- Is this general or specific to discussion-oriented courses?
- Is this general or specific to our three schools?
- Is our definition of “good” an instructor definition or a student one?
- How is grading/evaluation related to peer behavior?

