

BEST PRACTICE**Easing Adult Learners' Anxieties Using Collaborative Learning****Jean A. Meyer**Louisiana State University
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Certain skills used by the traditional aged student are lost over time once they leave the classroom, in particular, study and testing skills. By the time a traditional aged student enters their third year of college they have learned to study and pass exams with some degree of success. Once out of the classroom, these skills are replaced with others that are more applicable to jobs. Much like computer skills, study and testing skills are lost, or at the very least, "rusty" if not practiced with some regularity.

When adults reenter the classroom there is seldom time to spend relearning these skills, particularly if the adult learner is returning to a traditional class setting. Within the classroom, adults may feel uncertain about their knowledge or ability to learn. Their anxiety level at taking any kind of test or assessment is heightened with the knowledge that it has been some years since they were required to take a test. This anxiety can be minimized if they are able to build some confidence in their study skills. Collaboration with others can give them the ability to informally check their progress at redeveloping these skills with other students and give them confidence in test taking.

Using collaborative techniques can also lead to making the classroom a "safe" environment for the adult student. As adults enter the classroom for the first time it can be very daunting and discouraging. Students often lose their confidence in their own ability to learn. Collaborative learning gives students an informal environment in which to relate and discuss not only the subject, but also an outlet to discuss their concerns about the class. This can lead to students being able to ask questions and voice concerns not only to the group members but also the instructor, opening lines of discussion about feelings and concerns.

Taking collaborative learning out of the classroom and into the "study hall" is easy by encouraging the formation of study groups. Adult students who never participated in study groups during their traditional aged education find that they are more comfortable using study groups. This is based on my own experience as well as my other nontraditional aged classmates. As nontraditional students working on advanced degrees, we have developed study groups via the Internet as well as face-

to-face in more than four classes together. Three of us never considered using study groups as extensively as we are doing now compared to when we were traditional aged students. At first it was a way for us to feel more comfortable and verify that we were indeed studying the important concepts of the course. As we progressed in our coursework and our confidence grew in our study and testing abilities, we no longer needed the assurance that the study group gave us, but we continued to work together. We have used this collaboration via study groups in classes taught via distance learning as well as in traditional classroom situations. By encouraging study groups, the adult learner is given the opportunity to confirm that they indeed can still learn.