

The Buddy System – Reanna Berry

FAQs

What do you mean by ‘buddy system’?

At the core, the buddy system is simply creating opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction in your class.

Why is peer-to-peer interaction important?

Of course the literature provides a robust discussion of sense of community, but if you pause for reflection it is probably easy to recall a time when you asked a co-worker a question instead of asking your boss. The same holds for students. At times, a student may prefer to interact with another student rather than interact with the professor. This type of interaction can increase connections among students (this can be the start of a professional network for students), and also sometimes just discussing class concepts with someone other than the professor helps a student gain understanding.

Does peer-to-peer interaction mean the professor is “bad” or that the professor will be able to put less effort into conducting class?

Of course not! Just because a student can gain benefits from peer-to-peer interaction doesn’t mean that the professor is bad at teaching. Often the benefits are complementary to knowledge and understanding gained from the professor. The professor is critical to ensure effective peer-to-peer interaction. The professor will have to provide guidance to the students as they complete tasks. Sometimes incorporating peer-to-peer interaction requires more effort from the professor compared to courses without such interaction. For example, facilitating group projects.

What is a quick and simple way to incorporate peer-to-peer interaction in my course?

Think-pair-share is a quick way to incorporate peer-to-peer interaction in your course. Simply have the students turn to the person beside them and share for a few moments about a topic or solve a problem together.

What are more advanced ways to incorporate peer-to-peer interaction in my course?

The classic group project is one way.

Another consideration is to form teams for the duration of the semester. The teams can complete several assignments such as presentations or a case study.

Does this actually work?

Not always—of course you can probably think of a group project that was a complete disaster because no one got along.

But there are also success stories where people met during their courses and became long-term study partners (or even business partners!)

The best example the author has witnessed is a 20 year long (and still going) friendship that started when an instructor simply asked each person in the class to introduce themselves to the person beside them, and make a commitment to that person to attend every class.