

June, 1996 - Marylou Yam, Nursing

It is well documented in the literature that, when undergraduate students are given the chance to engage in face-to-face dialogue of course material, they are more likely to develop critical thinking skills than by listening to lectures and taking notes. (Cuseo, 1994). In my experience, cooperative learning is an excellent approach to develop critical thinking skills.

With cooperatively structured learning, students are divided into small groups in which each member's participation is necessary for the group's completion of its task. (Schniedewind, 1987). Learners have the chance to interact with one another. A student is responsible not only for her/his learning, but for the learning of the other group members as well.

I use this strategy with adult learners in my *Introduction to Nursing Research* course; however, the technique could be applied to content in other disciplines. Following a formal lecture on examining scientific reports, students critique a research article in self-selected groups. Each group is given a "Guide for Critiquing Research Reports" containing the questions that must be addressed in the critique. In several class periods, students have the opportunity to meet, discuss and edit each other's work. I circulate from group to group while each is meeting, at times serving as an observer and at other times as questioner, prodding members to develop their ideas. The group receives one grade for the assignment.

As they critique the study in their groups, students build their critical thinking skills by questioning, exploring alternatives and another's ideas. In addition, with this learning activity, students have the chance to use each other as peer resources, and they come to appreciate how they can learn from each other.