

Introduction

The influence of peers is large. Whether we are kids or adults, we will listen more to people we relate to than those we don't. This influence can be positive or negative. This essay aims to investigate both the positive and the negative aspects of the peer group can have on a student. Furthermore, it will look at the option a teacher has to lessen the negative influences and to increase the positive effects the peer group can have on an individual.

Lessoning the negative sides of the peer pressure

The negative sides of peer effects are well known: taking up bad habits such as smoking or other risky behaviour, losing your identity to be part of a group or doing things you are not comfortable with (Oak, 2012). As teachers, we want to create self aware students with positive behaviour that are comfortable with the actions they undertake. This is the opposite of the negative peer effects. Nevertheless, teachers can influence this process by be aware of the possibility things can go wrong and, if we see the first signs of negative effects, act accordingly. This can be by discussing the behaviour at hand or providing some extra support if needed. If we can identify a group of individuals that tend to go down the similar path we can think of separating them from each other and putting them in a more positive environment in which the positive effects of peer pressure can overcome the individual negative effects.

Increasing the positive effects of peer pressure

Although peer effects are often known for their negative effects, they can have a positive influence on students as well. As peers are more diverse in terms of ability level, a positive effects on academic performance seems to be present (Lam). Although this only affects me in a limited manner as a teacher (I have very limited influence on class composition and students are rather early grouped according to their ability), I can make sure working groups are diverse as possible when planning project work. Instead of allowing the students to form their own groups, I can make the groups beforehand ensuring heterogeneity in the various groups. Another, less visible, effect peers can have on individuals is that it can result in a positive atmosphere. This can be influenced by teachers by setting high, achievable standards for our student. These standards can vary for each individual and for each subject that is taught in school. The kid who has French parents (and thus already speaks French) can be challenged by reading a more difficult novel while the student who struggles with will get another challenge.

Conclusion

Peer effects come in many different forms. Whether it is taking up bad habits or creating a positive atmosphere, teachers have an influence on this process. On the one hand they have to watch for early signs of undesired behaviour and discuss this with students while on the other hand aim for great

diversity within, both the classroom as a whole and in groups during project work, and set high challenges for individual students which can differ between subjects.

References

Lam, C. (n.d.). *Estimating various kinds on peer effects on academic performance*. Retrieved from <http://www.albany.edu/economics/research/seminar/files/chungsang.pdf>

Oak, M. (2012). Retrieved from negative and positive effects of peer effects:
<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/negative-and-positive-effects-of-peer-pressure.html>