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## [Students learn more when peer discussions are combined with "clickers"](#)

By [Rajiv Gupta](#) on January 4th, 2009 59 views

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Washington: Researchers at the University of Colorado at Boulder have shown that students learn more when they combine the use of simple audience response devices called clickers and peer discussions in classrooms.

Even though students across the university campus are sharing answers, checking their responses to questions against those of their neighbours, and making adjustments to those answers in hopes of earning a better grade., professors are encouraging the whole activity.

And surprisingly, the students are getting more answers right.

Declining the suggestion of cheating among the students, Associate Professor Tin Tin Su insisted that they were learning from each other in a meaningful way.

Clickers are devices similar to a TV remote control that allow students to record their answers to thought-provoking, multiple-choice questions in class.

Once students answer a question individually, the instructor often asks them to discuss the question and then vote again before revealing the answer.

The study has shown that students usually do better on the question after discussion.

"I was sceptical about whether in-class discussion really led to students' learning. The clickers are a good way to get instant feedback, but do the students really learn from discussion or are they just changing their answers because of peer pressure?" said Su.

Given that no other study had ever determined which of those possibilities was true, Su's team decided to find it out.

"We came up with a method for testing whether the students are actually learning or just being influenced by other students who they think know the right answer," said Michelle Smith, a science teaching fellow with CU's Science Education Initiative and a research associate in MCD biology.

The researchers used pairs of similar clicker questions in lectures during the semester and evaluated student responses. The students answered the first question of the pair individually, and then talked to their neighbours about their answers.

When they were asked to answer a second, similar question individually, about 50 percent of them got the question right on the first try. The researchers said that after talking to neighbours, the number jumped to 68 percent.

According to them, the number jumped again to over 70 percent, much better than the 50 percent of individual correct answers on the first question, when the students individually answered a follow-up question about the same concept.

"There was no influence from the instructor during the clicker question series. We were just giving students the opportunity to talk to each other," said Smith.

"The important point is that none of the students were told what the right answer was. Even when students in a discussion group all got the initial answer wrong, after talking to each other they were able to figure out the correct response, to learn. That was unexpected, and I think that's dramatic," said Su.

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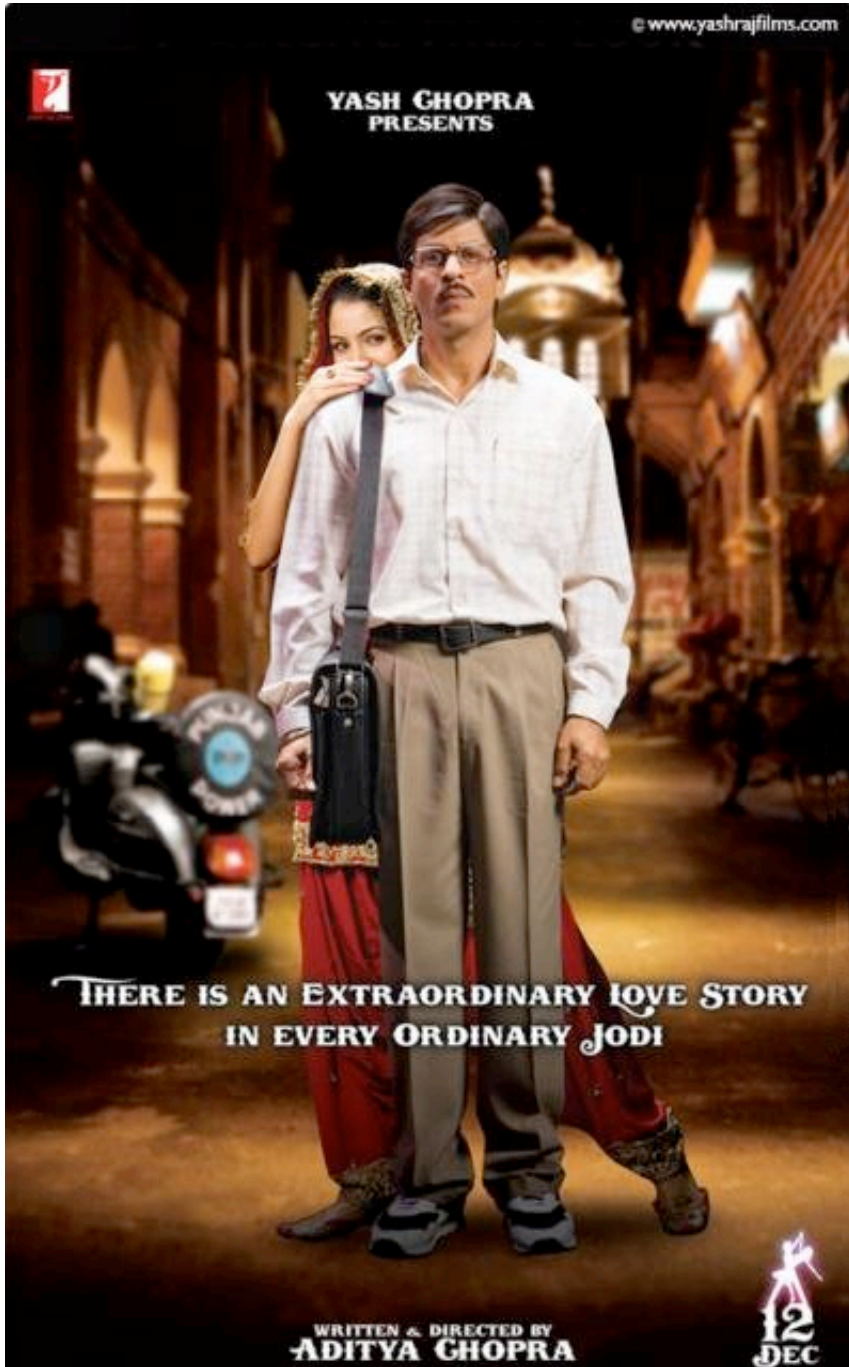
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