Practical Strategies for Implementing Group Work

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WHAT GROUP PROJECTS ARE SUPPOSED TO TEACH YOU

WHAT GROUP PROJECTS TAUGHT ME

Source: https://redd.it/177d9s
Outline of the Workshop

1. What do we mean by group work?
2. Why use group work?
3. Key concepts relating to group work
4. How to implement group work well?
5. How to deal with common issues?
What is Teaching, Anyway?

Why Use Group Work in Class?

1. Independent think for 2 mins

2. In groups: share list, consolidate, record 3-5 items on board

3. Gallery walk: What do you observe?
Deeper/Better Learning:
1. Active learning helps students learn information better, retain it longer
2. Allows for quick feedback on their thinking
3. Student talk promotes academic language proficiency
4. Students learn how to articulate ideas to each other helps students, clarify/sharpen their own thinking, critique and evaluate the reasoning of others
5. Students can tackle more challenging/interesting/authentic problems: problems that require different ways of thinking, creativity, etc.

"Soft-skills"/Affective Gains:
6. Learning how to work on a team is an important skill for life and employment
7. Students learn not to rely exclusively on teacher for learning and become more autonomous learners
8. Promote inclusion, diversity, harmony, and a culture of interdependence: students learn how to respect others’ perspectives, how to disagree and resolve differences, how to delegate, how to take responsibility for the learning of others
9. Students learn how to take risks and develop more self-confidence that they are capable too
10. Students get to know each other, can create opportunities for collaboration that extend outside of class
11. Can be fun for students, which can lead to increase in engagement

Gains for Instructor:
12. If resources are limited (e.g. computers or white boards), then students have to share
13. Gives instructors more chance to interact with students
14. Group work can be challenging to do well and can be fun--keeps things fresh and interesting
15. If groups turn in products instead of individuals, then there could be less grading
Cooperative learning has gained increasing acceptance in classrooms here and abroad as a strategy for producing learning gains, the development of higher order thinking, prosocial behavior, interracial acceptance, and as a way to manage academic heterogeneity in classrooms with a wide range of achievement in basic skills. Theoretically, small groups offer special opportunities for active learning and substantive conversation (Nystrand, 1986) that are essential for authentic achievement, a goal recommended in the current drive to restructure schools (Newmann, 1991). Small groups have also been widely recommended as a means to achieve equity (Oakes & Lipton, 1990).
As with other instructional choices we make, the decision to use group work must be **purposeful**.

The design, structure and parameters of the group work should **align** with those purposes.
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

- Physiological
- Emotional / Intellectual Safety
- Belonging to Group / Classroom / CoP
- Esteem
- Self-Concept as a Learner
Status

Status = A student’s perception of her/his academic capability and social standing relative to others in the group
Group-Worthy Tasks

1. are open-ended and require complex problem solving
2. have multiple entry points and ways to show competence
3. involve intellectually important content
4. require positive interdependence and individual accountability
5. have clear criteria for the evaluation of the group’s product

Lotan, Rachel A. "Group-worthy tasks." Educational Leadership 60.6 (2003): 72-75
“Exploratory talk is hesitant and incomplete because it enables the speaker to try out ideas, to hear how they sound, to see what others make of them, to arrange information and ideas into different patterns… [In] presentational talk, the speaker’s attention is primarily focused on adjusting language, content and manner to the needs of an audience, and in exploratory talk the speaker is more concerned with sorting out his or her own thoughts.”

How to Form Groups?

- Group size

- Durability of group assignments

- Process used for group composition
  - Student selected
  - Instructor selected (e.g. homogeneous or heterogeneous ability)
  - Random assignment
“Lou et al. (1996) also analyzed 20 independent findings from 12 studies that directly compared homogeneous ability grouping with heterogeneous ability grouping. They found a slight superiority of homogeneous grouping but the superiority was not uniform across study findings: Low-ability students performed best in heterogeneous groups, medium-ability students performed best in homogeneous groups, and high-ability students performed equally well in either type of group.”

“Although often met with resistance in the beginning, within three to four weeks of implementation, [the visibly random grouping approach] … led to a number of easily observable changes within the classroom:

• Students become agreeable to work in any group they are placed in.
• There is an elimination of social barriers within the classroom.
• Mobility of knowledge between students increases.
• Reliance on the teacher for answers decreases.
• Reliance on co-constructed intra- and inter-group answers increases.
• Engagement in classroom tasks increase.
• Students become more enthusiastic about mathematics class.”

How to Assess Group Work?

- Individual and/or group accountability?
- Should group also depend on group functionality?


