Teamwork Best Practices

Success is often what you do with Plan B!

Most human undertakings require teamwork—from constructing the pyramids to making dinner: Group projects aren't going anywhere. We should consider reminding our students of that fact when the inevitable groan erupts from our declaring "Group Project"!

As Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

Group Work Best practices
Katie Crowder

Description of Strategy

Create interdependence: complex problems oblige students to depend on one another. They create shared goals and assign roles.

Teams schedule times for shared activities: planning strategies; breaking down and assigning tasks; group research; resolving conflicts.

Embed individual accountability. Self-reporting is only so effective with group work, so students might implement quizzes and write-ups to track individual progress.

Student Skills Needed

Interpersonal skills really go without saying. Success will always start with individual student's ability to work independently, but collaboration is key here. Students must also be able to take responsibility for their learning and show initiative when group cooperation lags (perhaps the most difficult skill to learn).

Tools Needed

Contract and Forms are an excellent way to keep track of progress and participation. Groups can produce *Team Contracts*, *Self Evaluation, Peer* and *Group Assessment* forms.

Production Tools: Use SLACK for easier communication and sharing documents; Drop Box and Basecamp are also useful tools. Rubrics keep outcomes on track as well.

Instructor's Role

We get the ball rolling. We must prepare students to work collaboratively by providing them with guidelines and strategies for effective teamwork.

Design and structure the task so as to get them oriented. This includes scheduling in-class time for groups to check-in with their team. *Learning Goals*, *Objectives*, and *Standards* need to be clearly understood. Students need the necessary skills to identify and use appropriate resources. Group dynamics need to be discussed so that students understand that group check-ins and discussions are vital activities for group success.

4 Steps for Monitoring and Processing Group Work
LaMoya Burks

Management Tools Needed

Specific Roles clearly defined and understood are vital tools for group cohesion.

A *Facilitator* keeps the group on task and distributes work.

Reporters summarize the group's activities.

A *Timekeeper* keeps everyone apprized of deadlines.

A *Devil's Advocate* can be helpful if the project obliges students to argue for a debatable position.

Innovators are tasked with contributing alternative perspectives.

Runners collect and bring to meetings any physical materials the project may need.

Description of Strategy

Remember students are learning a new skill, so provide adequate time for them to build trust. Remind them that problems are a part of group work: they can see them as opportunities for growth.

Student Skills Needed

Consider having students create and fill out a skills-set rubric, so individual group members are clear on what tasks would be best for each individual. A grid for spaces might ask for the following:

- Educational Background / Academic Major
- General Knowledge of Course Content
- Specialized Knowledge (web construction etc.)
- Skills (writing, presenting, drawing, acting)

> Be fast, be first, but never alone. Nothing replaces the value of teamwork.

Instructor's Role

Instructors should aim to encourage students to set improvement goals. Procedures may include: setting specific behavioral goals for the next session- "I" focus, in discussion time ask each group to decide in agreement regarding a statement such as "Our group could do better on social skills by…."

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Forming Groups
Arielle Turner

Description of Strategy

Use a hybrid approach when grouping students. Allow students some involvement (but reserve veto power). Limit number of students and—for example—try to vary skill sets, such as ensuring an age-rage, or having each student represent a different major.

Train your team and you won't need to tell them how to do their job.

Student Skills Needed

Interpersonal communications skills for group cohesiveness include a willingness to identify individual strengths *and* weaknesses. Students must also be able to effectively communicate with their instructor, both as individuals and as a team.

Tools Needed

These might include Questionnaires to assess individual compatibility and *Norming sessions* to clarify who is responsible for what. Groups might also use *Contracts* outlining responsibilities, and *Rewards* for recognizing team progress.

Instructor's Role

The instructor develops the questionnaire, ensuring that all students adhere to the to the rules in order to establish effective and cohesive groups.

The instructor has a very active role in this method, as the criteria must be selected, students must be put into the groups based on those criteria, and the instructor must then identify the roles for the groups.

Small Group Engaged Learning Activities
Jessica Craig
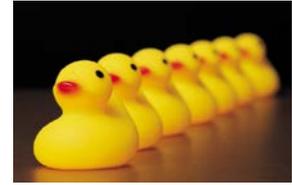
Think-Pair-Share

Description: Instructor poses a question requiring analysis, evaluation, or synthesis. Students think through and write down their response before sharing with their partner or group. Disagreements oblige students to explain their reasoning and (try to) reach a consensus. Then responses are shared with the entire class.

Student skills: Students new to one another will range in abilities, as extroverts will have an easier time; ergo, this activity might be best with groups that already know one another. Students will also need the ability to reflect and engage with the material to produce quality answers.

Tools: Tools required will be paper and pencil/pen. If the instructor would like to assess how the students do, the question could be a multiple choice question and the students could use clickers or mobile apps like REEF to submit both their individual and group answers.

Instructor roles: The instructor will need to deliver the material requiring students to engage in analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation of the topic. The instructor should clearly explain the instructions for the activity and then walk around the classroom while the students answer it, listening for how the students are defending their response. At the activity's conclusion, the instructor may be required to moderate between a variety of responses and help the students arrive at the   best answer.

It takes two flints to make a fire!

Problem-solving activities

Description: The problem should be difficult enough that the answer is not immediately obvious and could have multiple answers. The instructor can provide either multiple-choice responses or leave it open-ended. The idea is that the course material is introduced through problems, not lecture. After the

students have arrived at a solution, then the instructor leads a whole-class discussion.

Student skills: Students need some understanding of the material through reading required materials. They also need to be able to use critical thinking to apply what they have learned to the problem at hand. They will need to be able to verbally defend their reasoning both to their fellow group members and to their classmates.

Tools: This activity also requires little more than paper & pencil. However, if the instructor chooses to use multiple-choice answers, then REEF or some other form of clicker technology can be used to record students' answers.

Instructor roles: The instructor will need to assign adequate materials for complex problem solving Tips for this include:
- Writing a situation where the students' factual knowledge is useful but might be insufficient to solve the problem definitively;
- Be specific in terms of what the students should do (i.e. evaluate/judge something, analyze a situation, interpret something, etc.).
- Pick the format of students' actions (i.e. will they compare, sort, rank, score, or choose the best course of action).

The instructor then circulates, answering procedural questions without interfering with the activity's objective. Finally, they will facilitate a class-wide