

FACILITATING GROUP WORK

A guide to good practice

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Why Group Work?

Group work can promote collaboration amongst students; learning at a deeper level, better information retention, and the achieve of higher grades;

It can promote the life skills and graduate attributes including: such as teamwork, project management, responsibility, negotiation, leadership, communication, self-awareness and reflection.

Group work is central to Enquiry and Project Based Learning (EBL/PBL) where both authentic activities and 'learning in context' are consistent with the principles of constructivist and social constructivist based pedagogy

We have identified three key stages of group work: group formation, group management, and assesment.

Group Selection

A fundamental decision is whether groups should be allowed to self-select, or whether the lecturer should assign students to groups, randomly or actively.

In randomly assigned groups, all students are recognised as equally valuable and encouraged to contribute and students can often begin their work smoothly and efficiently. On the other hand, randomly assigned groups may lead to a lack of balance in the groups

Where the lecturer plays an active role in selection an inclusive balance can be achieved across academic ability, gender, and cultural diversity.

An group size ranges from three to five students is suitable for most assignments.

Group Preperation

It is important to establish expectations within groups to enable their effective functioning. Mechanisms such as *Team Policy Agreements* and *Team Expectations Agreements* can be used to set clear expectations at the onset of group work.

Team Policy Agreements provide guidance on effective team functioning; team roles and responsibilities; procedures surrounding assignment submission; and approaches for addressing uncooperative group members.

Team Expectations Agreements seek to unite the group with a shared set of realistic expectations produced by the members.

Don't assume students are born with the skills required for teamwork. Lecturers should take steps to facilitate students' development of such skills.

Managing Groups

"It is a rare student team that doesn't eventually run into problems with one or more of its members. The most common problems involve team members who refuse to do their share of the work but try to get the same grades as their more responsible teammates....." (Oakley et al., 2004)

Several strategies are proposed the literature to address this 'free-rider' issue:

Warnings: Often this opportunity for all parties to air grievances can be enough to resolve issues. Non-performing students are issued a warning.

Penalties: If a warning is ineffective marks can be reduced for that individual.

Expulsion: In situations where disruptive team members refuse to actively engage the offending team member can be expelled.

Assessment

Fair and effective assessment strategies and methods represents a major challenge for group work. Anxiety over assessment often focuses on how assessment process deals with the unequal contribution of group members in any given project.

Lecturers can choose assessment strategies that align with learning outcomes across three areas: Person, Process, Product - what we call the "3Ps"

Assessing the person focuses on individual knowledge or performance; assessing the the process is concerned with interpersonal and teamwork skills and assessing the the product is based on the outcome or artefact produced by the group as a whole.

Methods for assigning differential marks across individual students within groups, recognising the contributions of those involved, are equitable and encourage more responsible student learning behaviour (Gibbs, 2009). The approach adopted should be driven by the nature of the task and the specific skills and experience you want your students to develop

Considering the assessment of group work, educators should ask themselves: Is product or process the main emphasis? Will a group or individual mark be awarded? Will the assessment be primarily tutor or student graded, or both?

Use the grid to the right to follow the three step process from assessment strategies to methods to selecting a combination of methods that suit any individual situation.

First, consider an assessment strategy from the options below

Person strategies

Where individual contribution & development is the priority. While there is no issues with free-rider with this strategy, it does not promote collaboration.

and/or

A Process strategy

Affords students the opportunity to learn constructive criticism, responsibility, and diplomacy. Increases student's sense of participation, but instructor's guidance on appropriate behaviour, peer-marking, and a plan for troubleshooting conflict/free-rider situations may be required depending on the assessment method/s selected

and/or

A Product strategy

Focuses on the end product (e.g. report, presentation, exam) and is very straight forward to apply. Encourages free-riders, as it does not recognise individual contributions.

Then, consider assessment methods.

Person based methods

Individual exam or assignment, subsequent to group process: Marks are allocated to individuals based on their performance in a subsequent individual assignment/exam based solely on subject matter of group activity.

Individual task based grade: Marks are awarded to individual students for a task they performed for the group project.

Self assessment: Students evaluate their own contribution by reference to pre-set criteria, and award themselves a mark which is moderated by lecturer.

and/or

Process based methods

Group Average Grade based on individual parts: Each member submits an individual report on their individual group task. Final grade is the average grade for all work.

Group mark adjusted for individual viva performance: Each student enters their viva with a group based mark, but leaves with that grade plus/minus up to 20% based on answering questions on the subject matter of the group task.

Group mark with peer adjusted individual grade: Lecturer awards shared group grade, which is adjusted by peer assessment.

Students decide grade from pool of marks: Lecturer awards pool of marks and lets the group decide how to distribute them.

Assessment of team citizenship: Group members assess each other's team citizenship skills.

and/or

A Product based method

Single Group Grade: All members receive the same grade based on one group submission.

Finally, select and/or combine assessment method(s).

Example A:

100% Individual Task base-grade

Example B

10% Private Peer Assessment.

90% Single Group Grade