

# *Implementing Group Work In The Classroom*



**22 April 2014 (Tuesday)**  
**8.30 am – 4.30 pm**  
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# *Learning Outcomes*



At the end of this course, participants should be able to:

1. Identify the various practical guidelines for group work.
2. Identify the types of small group activities.
3. Design an active learning environment by implementing collaborative and co-operative skills.
4. Plan and facilitate an effective group work process.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Specify instructional objectives.*

1

Determine what you want to achieve through the small group activities, both academically (e.g. knowledge of a topic) and socially (e.g. listening skills). The activity should relate closely to the course objectives and class content and must be designed to help students learn, not simply to occupy their time. When deciding whether or not to use group work for a specific task, consider these questions: What is the objective of the activity? How will that objective be furthered by asking students to work in groups? Is the activity challenging or complex enough that it requires group work? Will the project require true collaboration? Is there any reason why the assignment should not be collaborative?

# Designing the Small Group Activity

## *Make the task challenging*

2

Consider giving a relatively easy task early in the term to arouse students' interest in group work and encourage their progress. In most cases, however, collaborative exercises should be stimulating and challenging. By pooling their resources and dealing with differences of opinion that arise, groups of students usually develop a more sophisticated product than they could as individuals.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Assign group tasks that encourage involvement, interdependence, and a fair division of labour.*

3

All group members should feel a sense of personal responsibility for the success of their team mates and realize that their individual success depends on the group's success. Allocate essential resources across the group, so that group members are required to share information (e.g., "Jigsaw" method) or to come up with a consensus; randomly select one person to speak for the group; or assign different roles to the group members so that they are all involved in the process (e.g., recorder, spokesperson, summarizer, checker, sceptic, organizer, observer, timekeeper, conflict resolver, liaison to other groups). Knowing that peers are relying on you is a powerful motivator for group work. Another strategy for promoting interdependence is specifying common rewards for the group, such as a group mark.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

## *Decide on group size*

4

The size you choose will depend on the number of students, the size of the classroom, the variety of voices needed within a group, and the task assigned. Groups of 4-5 tend to balance well the needs for diversity, productivity, active participation, and cohesion. The less skilful the group members, the smaller the groups should be (Gross & Davis, 1993).

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Decide how you will divide students into groups*

5

Division based on proximity or students' choice is quickest, especially for large and cramped classes; however, it means that students end up working together with friends or always with the same people. To vary group composition and increase diversity within groups, randomly assign students to groups by counting off and grouping them according to number; or have them line up according to birthday, height, hair colour, etc., before dividing them; another idea is to distribute candy (e.g., Smarties or hard, coloured candies) and group students according to the flavour they choose. For some group tasks, the diversity within a group (gender, ethnicity, level of preparation) is especially important, and you might want to assign students to groups yourself before class. Continue...

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Decide how you will divide students into groups*

5

...continue. Collect a data card from each student on the first day of class to glean important information about their backgrounds, knowledge, and interests. Alternately, ask students to express a preference (e.g., list three students with whom they would most like to work or two topics they would most like to study), and keep their preferences in mind as you assign groups



# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Allow sufficient time for group work.*

6

Recognize that you will not be able to cover as much material as you could if you lectured for the whole class period. Cut back on the content you wish to present in order to give groups time to work. Estimate the amount of time that subgroups need to complete the activity. Also plan for a plenary session in which groups' results can be presented or general issues and questions can be discussed.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Try to predict students' answers*

7

You won't be able to do this perfectly—expect the unexpected—but by having some idea about what students will come up with, you will be better prepared to answer their questions and tie together the group work during the plenary session.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Demonstrate you are prepared for the group session.*

8

Arrive punctually, have a handout prepared that relates specifically to the task, and carry through on tasks that you promised to do when you last used group work in the classroom (Race, 2000).

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Share your rationale for using group work.*

9

Students must understand the benefits of collaborative learning. If they do not see its value, they might conclude that you are using group work merely to get out of course preparation or lecturing

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Specify instructional objectives.*

10

Determine what you want to achieve through the small group activities, both academically (e.g. knowledge of a topic) and socially (e.g. listening skills). The activity should relate closely to the course objectives and class content and must be designed to help students learn, not simply to occupy their time. When deciding whether or not to use group work for a specific task, consider these questions: What is the objective of the activity? How will that objective be furthered by asking students to work in groups? Is the activity challenging or complex enough that it requires group work? Will the project require true collaboration? Is there any reason why the assignment should not be collaborative?

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Have students form groups before you give them instructions*

11

If you try to give instructions first, students may be too preoccupied with deciding on group membership to listen to you. Or, by the time they have determined their groups, they may have forgotten what they are supposed to do.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Facilitate some form of group cohesion*

12

Students work best together if they know or trust each other, at least to some extent. Even for brief group activities, have students introduce themselves to their group members before attending to their task. For longer periods of group work, consider introducing an ice breaker or an activity designed specifically to build a sense of teamwork.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Explain the task clearly.*

13

This means both telling students exactly what they have to do and describing what the final product of their group work will look like. Explaining the big picture or final goal is important, especially when the group work will take place in steps (such as in Snowballing or Jigsaw). Using visual structures like charts and sequential diagrams is often helpful, as is the use of sentence starters and specific questions. Remember to include time estimations for the activities. Estimate on the low side; students will work most efficiently as the deadline approaches. If necessary, you can increase the time available.



# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Prepare written instructions for the students.*

Either post the instructions on an overhead or PowerPoint slide or, if some of the groups will leave the room, distribute a handout.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Set ground rules for group interaction.*

15

Especially for extended periods of group work, establish how group members should interact with one another, mentioning principles such as respect, active listening, and methods for decision making.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Let students ask questions.*

16

Even if you believe your instructions are crystal-clear, students may very well have legitimate questions about the activity. Give them time to ask questions before they get to work.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Monitor the groups but do not hover.*

17

As students do their work, circulate among the groups and answer any questions raised. Also listen for trends that are emerging from the discussions, so that you can refer to them during the subsequent plenary discussion. However, be unobtrusive and avoid interfering with group functioning; allow time for students to solve their own problems before getting involved. Even consider leaving the room for a short period of time, because your absence can increase students' willingness to share uncertainties and disagreements (Jaques, 2000).

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Expect a lot of your students*

18

Assume that they do know, and can do, a great deal (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Express your confidence in them as you circulate the room.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Be slow to share what you know.*

19

If you come upon a group that is experiencing uncertainty or disagreement, avoid the natural tendency to give the answers or resolve the disagreement. The learning that is accomplished through group work might be slower, but it is generally harder won and thus better. If necessary, clarify your instructions, but let students struggle—within reason—to accomplish the task (Race, 2000).

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Clarify your role as facilitator.*

20

If students criticize you for not contributing enough to their work, consider whether you have communicated clearly enough your role as facilitator.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Provide closure to the group activities.*

21

Group work can succeed or fail based on how you incorporate it into the rest of the class and the course. Students need to see how their work in small groups was useful to them and/or contributed to the development of the topic. Thus, end with a plenary session in which students do group reporting:



# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Model how you want students to participate.*

22

When responding to students' answers, model the respect and sensitivity that you want the students to display towards their classmates. Also readily acknowledge and value opinions different from your own; don't favour clones! And be willing to share your own stories, critique your work, and summarize what has been said.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Connect the ideas raised to course content and objectives.*

23

Recognize that groups might not come up with the ideas you intended them to, so be willing to make your lecture plans flexible. Wherever possible, look for a connection between group conclusions and the course topic. However, be aware that misconceptions or inaccurate responses need to be clarified and corrected either by you or by other students.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Avoid impromptu lectures.*

24

They interrupt the flow of the conversation during the plenary session and, because they are not prepared, tend to be relatively poor lectures (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Don't provide too much closure.*

25

Although the plenary session should wrap up the group work, feel free to leave some questions unanswered for further research or for the next class period. This openness reflects the nature of knowledge.

# Designing the Small Group Activity

*Ask students to reflect on the group work process*

Templates

They may do so either orally or in writing. This reflection helps them discover what they learned and how they functioned in the group. It also gives you a sense of their response to group work.

# Group Work Evaluation

1

Average the scores of each member.

2

Total all group members' scores.

3

Add a group average to the individual scores.

4

Randomly grade one group member's project or examination

# Group Work Evaluation

5

Randomly call on a member of each group to answer questions

6

Convey to all members the lowest individual score

7

Give group grades and adding bonus points based on the achievement of the group (as when each person in the group scores above a certain amount).

# Group Work Evaluation

8

Assign individual grades and adding bonus points based upon improvement of group scores over the course of the semester.

9

Parcel out group grades plus individual grades consisting of submitted journals, self-assessments, and/or peer evaluations.

10

Grade the group product and individual contributions based on predetermined learning outcomes



# Group Work Evaluation

11

Give group grades plus grading nonacademic contributions via peer evaluation (i.e., have group members evaluate fellow members on characteristics such as ability to work with others, effort, communication skills, and staying on task).

12

Give group grades and giving nonacademic rewards (e.g., free time or permission to leave early).

# Some Concerns You May Raise

*“One student will do all the work.”*



*Groups just don't work in my discipline or class*

Individual accountability is important, as is interdependence. Both of these characteristics should be assessed in some way. If you follow one of the suggestions given above on assessing students, they will be more likely to make a significant contribution to the group

Teachers have implemented small-group learning in a variety of disciplines, including math (Morrow, 1995), psychology (Mehring, 1995), reading (Larson, 1995), and various sciences (Felder, 1995; Irwin, 1995). Researchers have also concluded that small groups are appropriate for every age group, from elementary students (Slavin, 1988) to college students (Foyle, 1995; Nilson, 1998) and adult learners (Imel, 1996). Small groups have even been successful in various distance-learning courses (Cahoon, 1996).

# Some Concerns You May Raise

*My class is  
too large for  
small groups*

Small groups can be implemented in any size class; however, classes held in large lecture halls may benefit the most from informal small groups. This is because you may have too many students and too little time to assess individual performance. One suggestion would be to ask each group to brainstorm applications of the concept you are teaching, and randomly call on groups to share their results. For more ideas in large classes, refer to Ebert-May, Brewer, and Allred (1997).

# Mistakes You May Do

## Allowing friends to work together

1

A very common error is to allow friends to work together. This could adversely affect group functioning in a couple of ways: first, students may socialize too much and not stay on task; second, sticking with friends shelters students from potential exposure to different cultures and belief systems (Cooper, n.d.).

## Create groups more than 5 members

2

Some instructors create groups of more than five members, and this can be detrimental to success as well. Limiting group size to around five allows everyone to contribute to the work by giving them more time and more opportunity to participate (Cooper, n.d.).

# Mistakes You May Do

## Making group work the central learning activity

Some instructors may even become so enchanted with small group work that it becomes the central learning activity, overshadowing all else.

3

Teaching is an art that incorporates many methods. Before implementing small groups, ask yourself why is it the tool of choice, and do you know of another method that is just as beneficial for your purpose? When planning your lessons, use a variety of teaching methods to stimulate your students and make your course more interesting.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 1. Think – Pair - Share



Follow these steps to implement the pair-share technique:

1. Pose a question that requires higher-order thinking (e.g., analysis, synthesis, or evaluation).
2. Give students time to reflect and write their thoughts.
3. Have students share their thoughts with a partner.
4. Have students then pair with another two-member group and share responses.
5. Ask students to share their individual reflections and the group's reflections with the class.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 2. Numbered Heads Together



The following outlines the “numbered heads” scenario:

1. Students are assigned in groups, and each group member counts off (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.).
2. The instructor poses a question that requires higher order thinking skills.
3. Group members discuss the question and agree on an answer, while making sure everyone in the group understands the concept.
4. The instructor calls out a number, and that member of each group is the spokesperson who reports to the class.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 3. STAD (Student Teams Achievement Divisions)



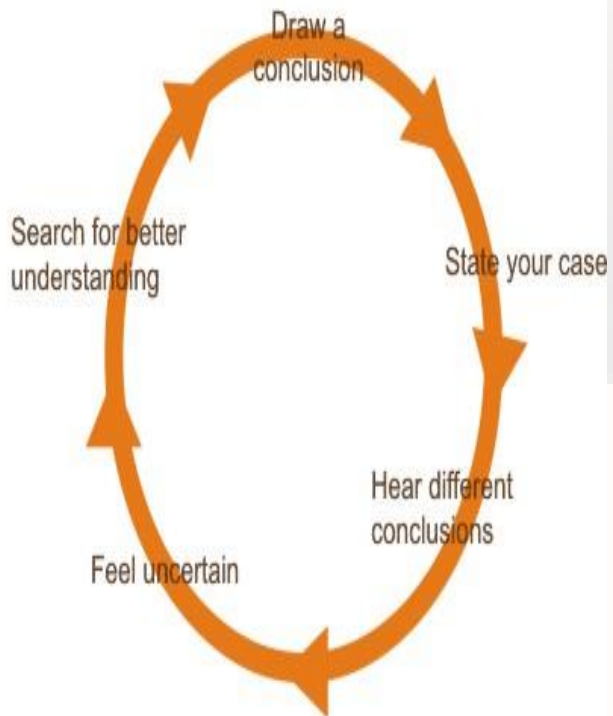
1. After a video, lecture, demonstration, or other teaching, students are divided into small groups.
2. Each group is given a worksheet to complete that reinforces the concepts learned.
3. When members are done, the instructor questions the group or randomly picks one student to question.



# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 4. Constructive Controversy

Figure 1: The Constructive Controversy Cycle



For this simple but effective structure, do the following:

1. Divide learners into groups of four.
2. Then, assign pairs in each group to research opposing sides.
3. Provide time in class for this research.
4. Students regroup so each pair can present its arguments to the other.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 5. Roundtable

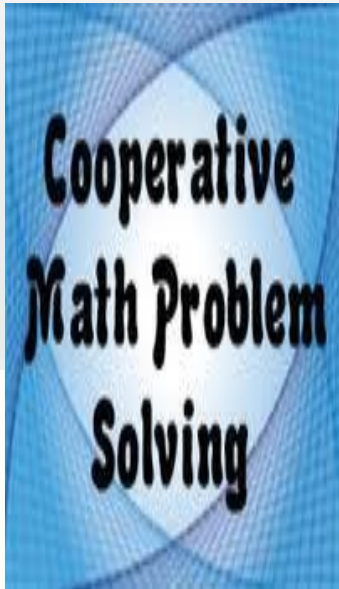


As a sequential group process, this structure adds variety to your group sessions:

1. Break the class into small groups.
2. Provide each group with paper and pen or pencil.
3. Pose a question that has more than one correct answer.
4. After taking two minutes for analysis, the first group member writes his or her responses and passes the materials to the person on the left.
5. Repeat the above step until all members have an opportunity to write something or time is called; students can pass if they choose.
6. Finally, relate the question to the lesson and either ask students to share their answers with the class or discuss each group member's answer.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 6. Send-A-Problem



1. After assigning groups, provides cards to each student.
2. Each student composes a question on the card.
3. Each student asks the question to the group.
4. When all members agree on the answer, it's written on the back of the card. If no consensus is reached, revise the question and try again.
5. The stack of cards is passed on to another group.
6. Each member then takes a card from the new stack and reads the question.
7. Group members discuss each question, and if an answer is agreed upon, they turn the card over to compare their answer to the original answer; if the answers don't match, the groups write alternative answers on the back of the card.
8. After each question is asked, the stack is passed to another group.
9. At the end of the task, the stack is given back to the original group to discuss any alternative answers and field questions from the class.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 7. Team Expectations



This activity is for small groups working over a longer period:

1. The instructor constructs a form and gives it to each student.
2. Students write what desirable behaviors they expect of each individual, each pair, and the entire group.
3. The group comes together to discuss the answers and negotiate a group list based upon each individual list.
4. Students use these lists to monitor progress as well as evaluate peers at the end of the project.

# EXAMPLE OF GROUP WORK STRUCTURES

## 7. PBL 5 Ladders Group work



This activity is used when using Problem Based Learning approach :

- L1. Introduction to case scenario / problem – idea generation and assigning of tasks
- L2. Self directed learning – finding of facts and learning issues
- L3. Group meeting – reporting and peer teaching.
- L4. Solution Presentation – in a form of parallel presentation, presentation between two groups, forum, role playing, video presentation or other forms of presentations.
- L5. Exercise and reflections



Teacher  
Centered

To

Student  
Centered



Student-centered learning has its foundation in social constructivist theories. This perspective contends that learning occurs as knowledge is negotiated among learners, often facilitated by a more knowledgeable group member and that students need to be active, intentional learners.

**Your next step:**

**How are you going to transform your role from left to right?**



**GOOD LUCK  
AND  
THANK YOU!**