Focussing on the student

Using group projects or student learning teams: Some questions to prompt effective practice

The decision to use student learning teams or group projects

Why is a team or group project being used? Will it advance the unit objectives? Will it enhance student learning? Will it affect student and class effort? What is your understanding on how teams work, the potential issues that might arise and how to deal with them?

Constructing the teams

What is the optimum size for the teams? What do individuals bring to a team? How is diversity reflected in the teams? Are the teams self-selected, assigned randomly by the instructor or assigned by the instructor to account for different skill levels? Where there is a minority in the class, should members of this minority group be spread around the groups?

Preparing students for working in teams

Do students know what is expected of them when working collaboratively? Do they know how working in teams might be benefited? Do they understand the resistance to working in teams and the problems that arise in working in teams? Will the students be given information on team building and group processes? Do teams have any autonomy to achieve their aims? Has in-class time been set aside for team work on the project, especially for each team’s first meeting?

Monitoring the team process

How will the teams be monitored? Will there be regular peer feedback on the team process? Will progress reports be required (assessed, not assessed)? How will minimal team conflict be dealt with? What will be the last resort for team failure?

Assessing student learning

How will the project be presented – oral presentation, poster, written submission, other? How will the marks be allocated? Are they to be based upon the number of class meetings attended or the allocated marks? Will there be peer- and self-assessment in addition to instructor assessment? Will there be a mix of intra- and inter-group marks and student-assigned marks? Will the team process and student understanding of team work be assessed? How will successful teams be distinguished from others?

Evaluating the team process

What mechanism is in place to evaluate the team process and give feedback to the students? How will the feedback be incorporated into future team projects?


How students adapt to learning contexts

Deep/surface/achieving approaches

Deep-learning approaches consist of learning style and learning motivation. A surface approach combines a motivation to understand with a rote memory strategy. An achieving orientation focuses on experimentation by applying knowledge to practical situations. A reflective orientation focuses on thinking, by using logic, concepts, analysis and generalisation. A concrete orientation focuses on personal experience through feeling, intuition and open-minded approach. An abstract orientation focuses on applying knowledge to practical situations.

Student perceptions of the teaching-learning nexus

The ability to acquire and the ability to impart are wholly different talents. The former may exist in the most liberal manner and yet a student may be denied the privilege of imparting and communicating. This imitative process can result in errors of grammar and organization. And yet, perhaps surprisingly, students are quite adept at correcting grammatical errors. Furthermore, students’ errors are similar in kind and style without full understanding.

Defining responsibility for learning

Who has the responsibility for learning in any student–teacher relationship? How do they know? Is it based on an implicit understanding of each of how such things work, drawn from previous learning experiences? What have been the effects of these experiences?

Focussing on the student

Using student evaluations to improve teaching

Student evaluations can provide important information for improving teaching but can also be viewed as a form of surveillance. Although student evaluations can show instructors what students think they want, they may not reflect what students really need. Students may want teachers to use more examples, but they may need more challenging material. Students may want teachers to encourage more participation, but they may need more time to think individually. Students may want teachers to use more technology, but they may need more time to think individually.

Crowd control

Crowd control may seem a somewhat inappropriate or unpalatable term to be using in the context of university classrooms and yet the issue is a crucial one. Large classes are a learning situation foreign to most if not all new students. Below are a few ideas that have worked for some teachers to ensure large groups of students can learn together effectively:

Avoid being overwhelmed by large classes

For some teachers, it is far too easy to feel overwhelmed when they are faced with large classes. This feeling of being overwhelmed can work against any attempt to improve teaching and learning. It is important that teachers are aware of the feelings of helplessness and frustration that can arise when faced with large classes. There are some things that can be done to reduce feelings of helplessness and frustration.

Improving student writing

Students are often asked to write essays, assignments, project reports, term papers, theses and theses. In the process of preparing these assignments and projects, students are often asked to write. Students are often asked to write on topics that are not familiar to them. Students are often asked to write on topics that are not familiar to them. Students are often asked to write on topics that are not familiar to them. Students are often asked to write on topics that are not familiar to them. Students are often asked to write on topics that are not familiar to them.

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