

Teaching Tip

September 17, 2004

Using the Jigsaw Method to Enhance Group Work

We often hear about the benefits of group work, for example, students need to work in groups/teams when they join the workforce so they should learn how to function in a group while in college...and groups are a resourceful way for students to share ideas, partner to solve problems and help one another. We also hear from faculty and students that group work is sometimes a bust.

Boon or Bust? Certainly group work may not be the answer for every learning situation. But it definitely has its place in the college classroom. This subject is too complex to discuss in this tip. However, here are a few quick tips that may help you realize the potential of group work to enhance student learning:

- Keep groups small and odd in number. Five to seven is a good number to work with. However, groups as small as two can be extremely effective.
- Start with short group activities until you get used to group work and its potential benefits.
- Model how individuals should work in groups. And,
- Make sure that everyone in the group is responsible for solving the problem, interpreting the text, etc. This can be accomplished through the use of such methods as the **Jigsaw**.

Jigsaw Method

The jigsaw method works like this: each person in the group (or each group in a class) contributes a piece for the completion of the jigsaw. Individuals are responsible for contributing ideas or tangibles to solve a problem, understand a text, synthesize an idea, etc.

Here are a couple of examples (variations on these methods are encouraged):

1. Suppose that you are teaching a life science seminar and that you have prepared 3 papers for your 15 students to read. Instead of having all of the students read and be responsible for all three papers, divide the papers up so that 5 read the first paper, 5 the second paper...and so on. Now form groups of 3 in which each article is represented. The idea is that the students in the groups need to synthesize what they have learned from each paper into a response to a question that you ask the group (s). You may even want to vary the question for each group. And here is a variation: each student becomes an 'expert' on their one paper, then the various experts are grouped to share their expertise and synthesize the unifying concepts based on the guiding questions provided by the instructor. Each student would be responsible for reading the understanding the material in one of the papers. The

- 3-4 students that read number one would be grouped together to discuss the main points of the material and then you meet with them briefly to help clarify what you want them to take home as the main points. Similar groups are formed regarding papers 2-4. Then, new groups are formed containing only one person from each paper and each of the new experts is required to explain the main points of their paper to the rest of the group. To pull this all together, the instructor comes up with some questions for these groups to answer that will lead them to the unifying ideas of these papers.
2. Suppose that you are teaching an undergraduate humanities class and you would like your students to research the ways that literacy is promoted in the community. Each member of a group would be responsible for researching a particular community within the community, such as the local church, library, bookstore, and school. Criteria for individual are the same across projects. Individuals collect their own data, develop their own charts, and write their own abstracts. The research would come together as one project (perhaps one paper, a shared data base, multimedia presentation etc) that represents the ideas researched by individuals responsible for each community group.
 3. And, create the smallest of groups. Suppose you have a class of 250 students in your business class and you are tired of asking questions to the entire group and getting the same persons responding. Use the Think (alone), Pair (turn and work with a partner) and Share (polling, open discussion, etc.) method to synthesize answers regarding a conceptual question. This works as a jigsaw when all the answers contribute to the understanding of a particular concept that you are trying to get across.

I have one important note on using the jigsaw method. Make sure that the student's responsibilities are made clear up front (and even in writing) and that these responsibilities are meaningful in ways that the entire project, answer, solution, etc. is enhanced.

*Thanks to the Life Science Learning Community for stimulating my thinking about how to incorporate the Jigsaw method into the college classroom.

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Teaching Tip

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Peer Observations

Observation of a peer's classroom serves a variety of purposes in the academic setting, for example, as part of a process for tenure and promotion and as formative feedback to improve teaching. In the best of worlds, both examples should be common practice in the academic setting—providing a kind of formative feedback that will support the teaching growth of faculty. Sometimes, however, the formalized required observation carried out in departments does not lend itself to the formative feedback that will help faculty improve their teaching.

This focus of this tip is to remind us that any type of peer observation whether it is part of a formalized university process or a more informal process can be organized in such a way as to give valuable feedback to colleagues about their teaching. I have attached 3 different PDF files that contain information that might serve as guidelines for both the observer and those being observed. But let me summarize some points that are detailed in these support documents.

Pre-observation: Always set up an observation so that both the observer and the one being observed can go over important details. The instructor should discuss with the observer her goals for the course and the goals for that particular class meeting. The instructor should share the syllabus, any readings that might be required for the particular class being observed and any activities that might occur in the class meeting. And very importantly, the instructor should let the observer know what they want feedback on.

Observation and Post Observation: The attachments to this tip (See *.PDF Guidelines for Classroom Observation*) cover this topic pretty well. There are some good examples of what to do when observing and what to say when providing feedback. You might also want to look at the *.PDF* document *Effective Teaching Behaviors* that lists 18 different behaviors that you can look for while observing. In addition, Williams State College of Engineering has posted online some of the guidelines (*.PDF* Williams State Engineering Guidelines) they use at the college level to make sure that classroom observations are relevant to the academic mission and to the benefit of the faculty member.

To summarize this tip...observations are indeed useful tools for both the faculty and institution if they are conducted in such a way as to give good formative feedback to the faculty member so that they may continue to grow as a teacher and learner.

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Teaching Tip

November 5, 2004

Student Motivation

When designing and developing a course, faculty often consider such issues as learning outcomes, assessment, and learning activities, but too often forget to think critically about the issue of student motivation. Most faculty understand that motivation is a primary factor in student learning, but understanding what motivates students to learn may be a bit murkier than we previously thought. For example, we know that extrinsic motivation such as grades, awards, academic advancement etc. seems to work—especially with a culture of students who have achieved success and recognition through such rewards. However, the debate about the merits of extrinsic motivation is ongoing. (Cameron & Pierce, 1996)

Interestingly, recent research supports more intrinsic types of motivation as a way to enhance the learning for the diverse group of students that we teach today. (Lambert and McCombs, 1998) *Raymond J. Wlodkowski, argues that in an effort “...to promote equitable learning opportunities for all students, a holistic, culturally responsive pedagogy based on intrinsic motivation is needed.” In essence, he maintains that intrinsic motivation is directly tied to an understanding that individual motivation is inseparable from culture.

I encourage you to read the attached article where Wlodkowski’s research suggests that teachers create a Motivational Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching. In so doing, “...teachers and students can create or enhance:

- *Establishing inclusion*: Creating a learning atmosphere in which students and teachers feel respected and connected to one another
- *Developing attitude*: Creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice
- *Enhancing meaning*: Creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include students’ perspectives and values
- *Engendering competence*: Creating an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value

What Wlodkowski argues for is that “...motivational planning should be integrated with instructional planning.” He gives a good example of how motivational planning can be incorporated into a research course. Enjoy the reading and stay tuned for a spring workshop that will go into this topic in more depth.

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