Group Work: Key Principles

Training Event
18 November, 2010
Welcome!

- Some things we will cover are:
  - Why bother?
  - Supporting educational theories
  - When do students learn best
  - Challenges and solutions
  - Code of conduct/learning agreements/assessing group work
First, however: Think, Pair, Share

- Think of own experience of group work and when it worked well OR when it did not (left side; right side)

- Now pair up with person next to you

- Share ideas; try to agree on one/two most effective strategies
  - 5 minutes; record on board provided.
Why Bother? Collect ideas
Supporting Theories

• Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI)

• Intelligence is not a fixed entity

• Traditionally we have identified only two main intelligences

• How do we explain this?

• What other intelligences are there?
Multiple Intelligences

- Gardner has identified the following:
  - Linguistic intelligence
  - Logical-mathematical intelligence
  - Musical intelligence
  - Naturalistic intelligence
  - Inter-personal intelligence
  - Intra-personal intelligence
  - Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
  - Spatial intelligence
- And the ninth one is?
... the theory validates educators' everyday experience: students think and learn in many different ways. It also provides educators with a conceptual framework for organizing and reflecting on curriculum assessment and pedagogical practices. In turn, this reflection has led many educators to develop new approaches that might better meet the needs of the range of learners in their classrooms.’

MI and assessment

- What are the implications of MI theory for assessment?
  
  1.
  
  2.
  
  3.
A key question:

- How and when do students learn best?

- Students learn best when:
Definition of a Group

- A group is defined as ‘…two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships.’ (Forsyth, 2006, pp. 2-3).

- This definition brings together the three elements of a group:
  1. the number of individuals involved;
  2. the connection between them and
  3. the relationships that develop.
Advantages:

- We should see these in terms of the development of graduate qualities/employability skills.

- What are these qualities?

- Your ideas????

- Are there qualities/attributes only group work can develop?

- See Graduate Qualities Handout
Challenges

• Getting the ‘right’ mix: what will work best? LATER

• Defining and allocating roles: often overlooked.

• Roles include: ??????

• Time management: completing a large task in a short time is very problematic

• Organising targets from class to class: students need to see this in overview format (so does the teacher): by end of week 1 …
Challenges cntd.

• Getting the best out of a presentation (why is this so often tagged on, so ineffectively, to the last five minutes?)

• Relocating to the next class may be better.

• One of the reasons we don’t do this is because we see group work as a ‘one-off’ rather than part of a planned continuum

• Do we use GW because we feel it is something we should use?

• Other factors that will promote best practices are:
Operating Guidelines

- Explain to students the nature and value of the activity: graduateness/meeting learning outcomes/group work and development of negotiating skills etc.

- Explain that GW is an effective pedagogy: team work etc.

- Keep the group size small - four is generally considered the ideal; three also has advantages.

- Unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise, aim for heterogeneous groups -
Heterogeneity

- To ensure heterogeneity, form teacher-composed groups - aim for heterogeneous grouping, deliberately mixing students based on achievement level, gender, ethnicity, academic interests, learning styles, or any other relevant factors. There is a very good learning styles self-assessment tool at the following:

How else might groups be formed?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- Perhaps there are greater advantages in using the above?
- Different strategies for different circumstances?
4 Stages: See handout, p. 4

- **Forming**
  - This is a comfortable stage to be in.

- **Storming**
  - Minor confrontations arise: who will do what etc.?

- **Norming**
  - Members should now understand each other better. Norms are established.

- **Performing**: members are comfortable with each other. They function more as a group.
At Forming Stage:

- Provide students with a Code or Learning Agreement
- See p. 8 of Handout
- Also at an early stage, provide guidelines on time management and other key tasks.
- Seek agreement...p. 3 of Handout
Evaluating effort

- Let them know that their participation will be evaluated (this is optional for tutors)
- Students generally find this a good strategy in ensuring that all pull their weight
- The fact that some do not, is a criticism often raised against group work
- See page 7 guidelines
Operating Guidelines cntd.

- Keep groups together long enough to establish positive working relationships - students need time to become acquainted, to identify one another’s strengths, and to learn to support and coach one another.

- Promote individual accountability - students must be individually responsible for their own academic achievements.
Assessing group work

• First, ensure that each person has been given an equally responsible task to undertake.

• If there are 4 causes and consequences of X, each person could take one cause and one consequence each.

• Secondly, clarify that each task or element will contribute to the final report or presentation.

• Thirdly, emphasise the value of peer feedback, assessment and support throughout the process.
Other factors:

- Fourthly, emphasise shared ownership in regard to aspects such as proof-reading, giving feedback to each other, identifying special talents.

- It is very important that ability and interest should determine who does what.

- An individual’s prior experiences should be utilised where possible.
Fifthly, clarify how marks will be awarded.

Here are some alternatives: each person’s contribution is separately assessed and it is this mark that is given.

If a poster or presentation, it may be a single group mark only that is awarded.

Or, work out the average mark for the group and give this to each person.

Or, add the group average to the individual’s separate mark and give the overall average.
Common Problems: p. 5 Handout

- Dominating participants
- Reluctant participants
- Storming
- One person doing everything
- Ignoring others