Facilitating Cooperative Work: How to Assess Active Learning Experiences

Description:
During cooperative work, students work together on problems and develop both teamwork skills and subject matter competence. The role of the instructor is to evaluate the group dynamic and develop strategies to promote active learning for all team members. Are you challenging the brightest students without leaving behind under-prepared ones?

Learning Outcomes:
- Identify purposes of cooperative work in the classroom
- Discuss research-based evidence about the effectiveness of group-work for student learning
- Create solutions for common challenges to effective group problem-solving
- Develop a strategy for evaluating student learning during cooperative work in your discipline

Example Agenda:
(may be tailored to your course needs and meeting time)

* = indicates active learning/group participation activities

1. Large Group Discussion (10 min)
Facilitator introduces learning outcomes, purposes for group work in the classroom, and evidence that supports efficacy of group work in improving student learning (using 5-6 slides or slide handouts).

2. Small Group Discussion* (10 min)
- Scenario: your TAs are shown a potential group work assignment that has been developed for your class.
- In groups of two, TAs discuss ideal roles for each group member that divide the responsibility equally and ensure that learning goals are met.
- One person from each pair shares their ideas with the class.

3. Presentation on Role Assignment (5 min)
Facilitator shares 2-3 slides discussing roles put forth by Felder, Oakley, and others in the literature, and the benefits to assigning rotating roles in groups.

4. Case Study Discussion* (20 min)
- TAs break up into groups of 3-5.
- Each member of the group is assigned a role: Reporter, Recorder, Leader, Timekeeper*, Clarifier* (*if necessary).

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Each group examines a case study that presents challenges to a successful group work assignment (e.g., the loafer, the lone wolf, the all-introvert group, or disparate levels of skill).

Groups discuss their case studies and answer provided questions.

Each group has **one minute** to present their findings to the class.

Each person jots down on notecard something that worked well in their group and something that didn’t work well (using titles rather than names to retain anonymity), and hands in to facilitator.

**5. Presentation on Group Work Evaluation Methods (5 min)**
Facilitator presents 2-3 slides connecting the evaluation participants did of their own group work experience to the idea of informal/classroom assessment, and hands out: “Group Work: How to Evaluate It.” Contrast informal assessment (notecards) with more formal assessment (assignment grading rubric).

**6. Formal Assessment of Group Work* (15 min)**
TAs again form groups of 3-5 and revisit the original think-pair-share assignment. TAs design a classroom evaluation for group work that will reveal if: a) students understood key concepts/met subject matter learning objectives; b) students worked effectively as a team.

**7. Wrap up (5 min)**
Facilitator concludes session by connecting participant experiences in this workshop with other important concepts in group-work facilitation. (Self-selected vs. instructor-assigned groups, informal assessment, assigning roles for effective teamwork, providing clear instructions and expectations up front).