Using Group Learning

Lecture 7
Chapter 6

Objectives

• Use group (cooperative) instruction effectively.

Note this . . .

• Do not depend on groups for all your content-development work.
• Whole-class presentations, demonstrations, and discussions will continue to be essential formats for delivering and applying content.
• Seatwork and classwork exercises will continue to be important formats for consolidating individual student learning through practice.
• Group learning activities can, however, add a very useful methodology to more traditional instructional approaches.
Defining Features of Groups

• The vary somewhat, depending on the particular application
• Common elements include:
  – group goals or task interdependence
  – some degree of individual accountability
  – good group interaction processes.

Use of Groups

• Some teachers use groups as the primary means of instruction and using projects to deliver much of their academic content.

• Other teachers use groups primarily as a supplement to whole-class and individual instruction relying on groups during the classwork portion of lessons to provide short practice activities.

To promote the effectiveness of groups... 

• Teach students how to work in groups
• Practice the role of facilitator
• Carefully choose and pace academic activities
• Promote interdependence along with individual responsibility within a group context.
Strategies and Routines That Support Cooperative Learning

• Room Arrangement
  – It will be necessary to move from whole-class seating arrangements to small groups. Plan ahead
    • Mark on the floor with masking or colored plastic tape the location of tables or desks in each arrangement.
  – Then when it is time to make the transition, teach students how to move to groups just as you would teach them any other classroom procedure.

– You can begin group activities with pairs of students, rather than larger groups, but seating arrangements can still accommodate larger numbers
  • For example, when using table groups of four, divide the larger groups into pairs.

– Some teachers place a small box or bin in the middle of each table or group of desks for materials to be used by everyone in the group.
  • This eliminates the need for borrowing these supplies from other students, and it reduces the need for trips to out-of-group storage areas.

Talk and Movement Procedures

• When you begin using groups, the increased noise level may bother you.
  – You will get used to it
• To prevent excessive noise, discuss this issue with the class and develop some guidelines.
  – Use "six-inch" or "twelve-inch" voices.
  – Speak quietly enough so students in nearby groups can't hear or aren't distracted.
  – "Whisper voices" does not work well, because groups usually can't work efficiently and conduct discussions while whispering.
  – If noise is excessive, use a group attention signal to restore it to an acceptable level.
Movement

• Should not be a major problem if students are already seated in their groups,
  – provide a guideline such as “Stay with your group” or “Take care of out-of-group business promptly” to limit unnecessary wandering and visiting.

• Some movement will be necessary for students obtaining materials.
  – Assigning a “materials manager” or “supply sergeant” role in each group will help take care of such business efficiently.

Group Attention Signals

• Efficient signals for group attention require some overt response:
  – When teaching middle school students, you can give a verbal signal such as:
    • “Raise a hand if you can hear me.”
    • “Fold your hands if you can hear me.”
    • “Eyes to the front, please.”
    • “Clap if you can hear me.”

• Because you are interrupting the students, capturing their attention will not be instantaneous; you may find it useful to pace the transition by counting down:
  – “Five, four, three, two, one...” and then begin the next activity promptly.
Promoting Interdependence within the Group

- Each student can contributing a unique component to the group’s product.
- Each student chooses a specific part of a topic to teach to the rest of the students in the group.
- In groups of two, students work as drill partners to help each other learn.
- You can assign different roles to students (e.g., reader, checker, recorder, and materials manager) to ensure that each student makes a contribution to the group’s activity.

Group assignments (e.g., projects, reports, performances, constructions, or oral group presentations) can be given a group grade, recognition, or points.

Individual Accountability

- Require that individual students perform an identifiable portion of the group assignment.
- Ask groups to turn in a list of each student’s contribution to the final product.
- Use peer evaluation of group members’ participation and contributions.
- Ask students to record observations in individual notebooks that you will collect and grade at various times.
• Have students turn in individual work—even if it is just individual class notes—along with the group’s product.
• Require students to keep a daily record of their individual work in spiral notebooks.
• Let students know that when their group reports to the class, each student should be ready to explain its work. Better yet, require that each student be responsible for some part of the group presentation.
• Have selected students report individually on their group work.
• Give students a quiz based on the group assignment.

You can also foster individual responsibility

• When you set expectations:
  – Stress to students that even though they are working on a group assignment, each of them is responsible for learning the material.
  – Tell students that it is important for the members of a group to help each other understand what they are learning, and for each person to contribute.
  – Finally, when you monitor student work in groups, note participation by individual students.

Monitoring Student Work and Behavior

• Good monitoring of group work is essential and typically requires you to walk among the groups, scanning the rest of the class from time to time.
• Try not to spend too much time with a single group at the expense of keeping abreast of the activities of the rest.
• Circulate among the groups and note individual student performance, and also collect the individual assignments and check them.

• Note the degree to which students provide explanations and demonstrations for each other instead of only giving answers or ignoring peer questions.

• To encourage quality interaction, ask students to be sure that everyone in the group can explain the ideas or concepts.

Interventions for Groups

• The most common interventions are simple ones -- easy to use and brief.
  – Individual students and groups who are off-task may be verbally or nonverbally redirected to the task.
  – Students who persist in inappropriate behaviors can be given a short time-out (such as one or two minutes initially), or sent to work alone for a longer time if they don't respond to milder interventions.

Procedures and Routines

• Don't assume that because students follow the rules during whole-class and seatwork activities, they will automatically do so during group work.

• Be prepared to specify your expectations for talk and movement during group work
  – for example, "Keep talk within your group only".

• Teach a group attention signal so that you can refocus class attention as needed
Forming Groups

- When assigning students to larger groups, a main consideration is to represent in each group a range of achievement in the subject.
- A second concern is often to place a leader in each group.
- Try to avoid grouping students together who don't get along or who are argumentative.
  - Such a student often works best in a group with someone who has good leadership abilities, including social skills.

Initial Group Tasks

- Start off with simple, straightforward tasks.
  - Students who don't have much experience working in groups will need to develop their skills in uncomplicated tasks rather than in complex projects.
- You can develop a number of simple, easy-to-implement activities for beginning group work.

- Turn to your partner.
- Ask students to explain something or compare answers to a problem or exercise. As the students gain experience, this format can be used for problem solving.
- Drill partners.
- Use this for practicing material that must be memorized.
- Reading buddies.
- Asking students to summarize or make up a question for the partner.
- Checking.
- Students compare answers and resolve discrepancies. Each must be able to explain the answer.
- Reviewers.
- Students review for a quiz or test, or prepare for an oral report by working together to develop questions or by asking and answering each other's questions.
Teaching Group Skills

- Decide on a set of basic skills that your students should acquire.
  - One such set might include listening, explaining, asking for help, encouraging, and sharing.
- A good way to begin the teaching process is to have a whole-class discussion about what is needed to work cooperatively with others.
- Eventually, of course, the discussion needs to address concrete behaviors that constitute good listening, explaining, and so forth.
- Signs can be posted listing desired group behaviors.

Using Group and Individual Rewards

- Use of rewards can direct student attention to important behaviors and make it more likely that students will employ them.
- Group rewards can strengthen cohesiveness through a common goal and the shared positive affect that results when the group succeeds.
- Extrinsic rewards should be a supplement to other more natural consequences of student accomplishment, such as recognition, positive feedback, other forms of praise, and the satisfaction that accompanies learning and goal attainment.

Hasta La Vista, Baby!

John Connor, Terminator 2: Judgment Day