

Capstones across disciplines RESOURCES

Teaching ideas – group work activities

The organisation of group work remains one of the most complex tasks in curriculum design. In practice, many or all of the types of group engagement may be combined in a single learning experience depending on the learning outcomes desired. Below are a few ideas we found for learning activities that engage students with one another.

Each represents a structured approach to achieving specific learning outcomes, and can be read in conjunction with the 'Typology: Group work' resource.

<i>Collaborative</i>	Group Investigation: The standard framework for collaborative work. Students work together on a given theme or requirement. Initial agreement must be reached on exactly what area they will pursue, the methods they will use, the group process that will be followed, and the individual/collective responsibilities and goals. Time must be allowed for group cohesion to develop. Aligns most closely to the independent project method (see resource 'Typology: Projects by level'), but may also be used in smaller group tasks.
<i>Collaborative/Cooperative</i>	Collective Controversies: Subgroups from teams are formed, and take opposing sides of an issue or topic to pursue. Each subgroup presents their outcomes to the group. Groups then take the alternate position to either further research the topic and to refine the argument. The team then comes together again to formulate the final response as a critical review encompassing a range of perspectives.
<i>Collaborative/Consultative</i>	Cross-consultancy: For this to be effective, each group would need the same or a similar brief project/assignment. Students work collaboratively, but periodically, a member leaves to join another team, both providing insights from their own experiences and collecting information about the team process. This member then returns to their own team and acts as a consultant with expertise in alternate methods being pursued elsewhere. This role can be rotated.

<i>Collaborative/Supportive</i>	<p>The panel:</p> <p>Students initially take individual perspectives to make a decision. They then progressively make larger groups and at each stage consensus must be reached. It is important that this process includes real negotiation of views and informed debate, with each group supporting the learning of the others, until agreement on major points of reference can be reached. This is sometimes referred to as the 'pyramid'.</p>
<i>Collaborative/Discursive</i>	<p>The Board:</p> <p>Students take individual or small group perspectives as interest groups. A panel is formed and each group lobbies the panel to make a decision that best suits their perspective. Progressively adjusted proposals are presented to accommodate the needs of the whole group, until agreement can be reached on the outcomes.</p>
<i>Cooperative</i>	<p>Whole of class cooperative:</p> <p>The entire class divides a thematic topic into subtopics or tasks that need to be completed to provide a full understanding. Groups are then formed that will take responsibility for each topic. Within the groups, students take on specific smaller concepts or perspectives, and each student takes responsibility for the pursuit of one. Students explore these topics and create their own reports, which are presented within the group. The group then works together briefly to collate and summarise the outcomes (for example, see Kagan, 1985).</p>
<i>Cooperative/Consultative</i>	<p>Consultant training:</p> <p>Similar to the Jigsaw method (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011; see also http://www.jigsaw.org/overview.htm) Each student within a group is given responsibility for a particular area, divided by topic, perspective, or skill. They then move into other groups defined by their individual responsibility, and those groups share resources. The team member returns to their group to provide expertise In their area to the whole project, and support for others through teaching other team members or presenting within their expert group to the whole class. They may then move back to their expert groups to share their consultancy experiences and identify further learning or process issues to be addressed.</p>

<i>Cooperative/Supportive</i>	Anthologies: Student groups divide a topic and each member creates a bibliography. These resources are made available to the group, and collated. Students then take a part of the bibliography to review and annotate. Again, this is shared and collated. Finally, students take a portion of the annotations to create a critical review of the sources, putting together a final open-access resource for the class. At each stage, students are expected to share knowledge and work to the group goals.
<i>Supportive</i>	Peer Coaching: Working in pairs, one member attempts to solve a problem while the other member serves as coach—observing and providing feedback on each step involved in the problem-solving process (for example, see Millis & Cottell, 1998). Can build on the Jigsaw approach.

References

- Aronson, E., & Patnoe, S. (2011). *Cooperation in the classroom: The jigsaw method* (3rd ed.). London: Pinter & Martin.
- Kagan, S. (1994). *Kagan cooperative learning*. 2nd ed. San Clemente, CA: Kagan Publishing.
- Millis, B. J., & Cottell, P. G. (1998). *Cooperative learning for higher education faculty*, American Council on Education, Series on Higher Education. The Oryx Press, Phoenix.

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