Group learning activities
Strategies for small classes

October 2008

Small group learning (also called team learning) provides an opportunity for students to experience learning along with other students. It means that tasks too large for one person can be tackled and the load shared.

Working as a group, the students take the responsibility for their own learning and organisation, they will research many of the resources they require and, as a group, develop the final product for submission. They also develop a range of skills applicable to the workplace, such as conducting meetings, negotiating tasks, group problem solving, resolving conflicts, etc.

Some suggested group activities are outlined below.

Group projects
A complex project or problem is presented which requires students to work with others. Consider joint or group assessment strategies.

In such activities, the importance of the group or team aspects has to be emphasised. This is best done through the assessment criteria.

There is often difficulty in determining the level of contribution within each group. Some combination of credit for individual and as well as group contributions may therefore be needed within the assessment strategy. A degree of self or peer assessment may also be built into the criteria.

Reflection on the group process skills and the processes to share ideas and resolve conflicts may also be useful aspects to assess.

Students may also present findings from a group project or investigation and answer questions from an audience of their peers to justify and clarify the ideas presented.

'1-3-6 Consensus'
A group technique which can be used to gather ideas and thinking on an issue or problem, with the aim being to come to a consensus. It gives the individuals a chance to gather their own thoughts before going into a group situation.

1. Problem or issue is presented or identified.
2. Students work on the problem individually at first, to clarify their own thinking.
3. Students come together in a group of three to compare their ideas and come to a consensus.
4. Two groups of three then join to form a group of six, share their ideas and again form a consensus.
5. Each group of six shares with the whole class with a view to reaching an overall consensus.
Jig-saw

The jig-saw technique encourages higher order cognitive and interpersonal skills and may be used effectively group problem solving situations.

1. A collection of references or resources about a topic of interest is presented to the students.
2. The students begin in 'home groups' of about 4-6 depending on the size of the resource task.
3. The task is divided up into sections and each group member is allocated the task of becoming the 'expert' for a section.
4. The group members split up and each goes to the relevant 'expert group' with the members from the other groups.
5. The members of each expert group research and discuss the issues concerning their topic.
6. The home groups reconvene and each expert shares what had been learned with the other group members.