



Increasing the Effectiveness of Student Groups in the PBL Classroom

ITUE January 2007 Workshop

Main Focus of this Session

- Taking proactive steps to mitigate problems in student groups
- Assumption: students are involved in standing groups, not ad hoc groups

Ways to Wreck a Group

- List 5 Behaviors that can wreck a group
 - Differing Backgrounds—countries, languages, region
 - Differing Priorities of Group Members
 - Slackers
 - Time Conflicts



Addressing Differing Backgrounds

- Instructor-selected vs. Student-selected groups?
- Strive for heterogeneity across
 - Gender
 - Country of origin
 - Major
 - Expertise
- Avoid the “fifth wheel” syndrome
- Allow students to opt-out within a certain amount of time

Completing the Grid

- Take ten minutes to complete the provided grid.
- After each student completes the grid, pass the sheets around for the other group members to complete.
- Quickly discuss your answers to the questions and why you answered the way you did.

In Groups, I Tend to Be a....

- Leader
- Worker
- Planner
- Mediator
- Entertainer

Purposes of “Completing the Grid”?

- Spurs discussion:
 - What is my role?
 - Do we have 5 leaders? Entertainers?
- Allows groups to learn about their group members
 - How do I contact you?
 - Differing priorities (Leader vs. Entertainer)
 - Reduces depersonalization
 - Focuses on similarities in group members' backgrounds, instead of the differences

Code of Conduct Exercise

- Mitigates the pressure caused by slackers:
 - cognitive dissonance
 - Addresses time conflicts from the beginning
 - May also allow insight into differing priorities
- Facilitates assessing performance later

Social Event

- Process
 - All group members must get together for one hour
 - The location must be on “neutral ground”
 - You will be graded on how much fun you have
- Purposes
 - Create a rapport and group identity
 - Can have the opposite effect if someone misses

Evaluating Performance

- What methods have you used in the past?
 - Zero-sum or point allocation
 - Likert Scales
 - Others?
- What are their advantages?
Disadvantages?

Evaluating Performance, cont.

- Focus questions on:
 - Attitude
 - Preparation for and participation in meetings
 - Meeting deadlines
 - Attendance
 - Initiative
- Provide scale at start of the semester
- Be clear as to how the evaluations will be used. If they are confidential, how will you handle lowering a student's grade?

Final Suggestions

- If you decide to use standing groups, consider incorporating lessons on how effective groups function
- Dedicate class time for group scheduling and activity