



Classroom Groups for Fun and Profit

EWU Faculty Commons Brown Bag



What have been some of your experiences—good and bad—with group- or team-based pedagogy?

In what follows, I'll not talk about the casual use of small groups—asking students to “turn to the student next to you and talk about X” or perform ad hoc exercises together in a way that doesn't significantly alter the design or grading of the course.

Instead, I'll talk about **cooperative learning** and **team-based** learning.

Four elements need separate consideration based on your philosophy of teaching

- **Students understand the method** (metacognitive awareness)
- **Group design** (balance of skills, background, and maturity levels)
- **Assignment design** (accountability; how to inspire, reinforce, and test student learning *while at the same time* advancing group cohesion?)
- **Assessment** (including self-assessment, peer assessment, and the instructor's assessment of each student and the group as a whole)

Students Understand the Method

- More than casual use requires an explanation of group design, assignment design, and assessment design at the beginning of the class.
- This should be brief and aimed at the student's level of comprehension.



Group Design

- Factors to consider: number of students; background in the course content; key skills; attitude toward group learning.
- How large should groups be? At least 5; preferably 6 or 7
- Groups should form through self-selection; group members deserve to observe fairness in attempting to create groups with equal diversity and skills.
 - **Artifact 2: HONS 102 Opening Day Survey**

The Menace of "Social Loafing"

TABLE 3.1
Forces that Promote Social Loafing

(Uneven Contributions in Group Discussions)

- ❑ Some individuals naturally resist participation (shyness).
 - ❑ Some individuals prefer to dominate discussions.
 - ❑ Members may believe they lack the content knowledge required for making a meaningful contribution.
 - ❑ Members may not be committed to the success of the group.*
 - ❑ Members may be concerned about appearing to be disagreeable or overly aggressive.*
 - ❑ The task may be inappropriate for groups because it:
 - ◆ can be completed by one or two members working alone.
 - ◆ does not require members to reach an agreement.
- * These are especially important problems with new groups.



"McFly! I told you to do my group work for me!"

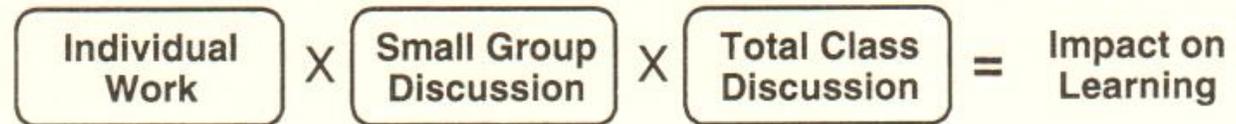
From Michaelsen, et al, *Team-Based Learning*

Fighting “Social Loafing” through Assignment Design

1. Group (and pre-group) work must promote a high level of individual accountability for members.
2. Members must be brought into close physical proximity.
3. Assignments must motivate a great deal of discussion among members.
4. Members must receive immediate, unambiguous, and meaningful feedback.
5. There must be explicit rewards for exemplary team performance.
 - The easiest way to do this is to include “group performance” as part of the final grade.

Scaffolding Projects

FIGURE 3.2
Essential Principles for Designing and Implementing Effective Group Assignments



To obtain the maximum impact on learning, assignments at each stage should be characterized by “3 S’s”:

- **Same problem**—Individuals/groups should work on the same problem, case, or question.
- **Specific choice**—Individuals/groups should be required to use course concepts to make a specific choice.
- **Simultaneously report**—If possible, individuals/groups should report their choices simultaneously.

From Michaelsen, et al, *Team-Based Learning*

Cooperative Learning Assignments

- In my annual Winter section of HONS 102, I form permanent teams based on sorting students into “Reading Groups” roughly equal in skills and diverse in interests and background.
- Seven times during the quarter, the students read a major text/section of a text. Students fulfill individual writing assignments on their own.
- Students sign up for a particular role (discussion leader, creative connector, devil’s advocate, symbologist, reporter) for each major text. Students must occupy each role at least once.
- Students are graded on their reporting out and participation in discussion in their teams, and must turn in a written component to the instructor.

Assessment

EXHIBIT B.1 Peer Evaluation Form (Michaelsen)

Peer Evaluation Name _____ Team # _____

Please assign scores that reflect how you really feel about the extent to which the other members of your team contributed to your learning and/or your team's performance. This will be your only opportunity to reward the members of your team who worked hard on your behalf. **(Note: If you give everyone pretty much the same score you will be hurting those who did the most and helping those who did the least.)**

Instructions: In the space below please rate each of the **other** members of your team. Each member's peer evaluation score will be the average of the points they receive from the other members of the team. To complete the evaluation you should: 1) List the name of each member of your team in the alphabetical order of their last names and, 2) assign an average of ten points to the **other** members of your team (Thus, for example, you should assign a total of 50 points in a six-member team; 60 points in a seven-member team; etc.) and, 3) differentiate some in your ratings; for example, you must give at least one score of 11 or higher (maximum = 15) and one score of 9 or lower.

Team Members	Scores	Team Members	Scores
1) _____	5) _____	_____	_____
2) _____	6) _____	_____	_____
3) _____	7) _____	_____	_____
4) _____	8) _____	_____	_____

Additional Feedback: In the space below would you also briefly describe your reasons for your highest and lowest ratings. These comments -- but not information about who provided them -- will be used to provide feedback to students who would like to receive it.

Reason(s) for your highest rating(s). (Use back if necessary.)

- Members' individual contributions evaluated and rewarded
- Collaborative behavior is evaluate and rewarded
- Members can anticipate external evaluation of group performance
- Reward system promotes shared goals and fates

From Michaelsen, et al, *Team-Based Learning*

TABLE 3.3
A Checklist for Effective Group Activities

PRIOR TO Group Discussions

- Are group members working on the same assignment and required to make a specific choice, individually and in writing?** (Note: This individual accountability is especially important in newly formed groups.)

During Discussions WITHIN Groups

- Are groups required to share members' individual choices and agree (i.e., reach a group consensus) on a specific choice?**
- Will the discussion focus on "Why?" (and/or "How?")**
- Will the groups' choice(s) be represented in a form that enables immediate and direct comparisons with other groups?***

During Discussions BETWEEN Groups

- Are group decisions reported simultaneously?***
- Do group "reports" focus attention on absolutely key issues?***
- Are groups given the opportunity to digest and reflect on the entire set of "reports"* before total class discussion begins?**
- Will the discussion focus on "Why?" (and/or "How?")**

The more "Yes" answers, the better. If the answer to all eight questions is "Yes," the assignment will effectively promote both learning and group development.



THE END