Classroom Strategies for Group Management

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I. INTRODUCTION

The following are brief descriptions of strategies for managing groups in a classroom, adapted from the resources referenced. These are just a selection of the many ways to facilitate and build positive group dynamics tools for a more effective student learning experience.

II. ENSURING EQUAL PARTICIPATION WITHIN GROUPS

1) Individual + Group Problem Solving and Reflection, a.k.a. "Think-Pair-Share": Students reflect individually first to enforce participation, then discuss their answer in pairs, then share their thoughts with the small group.

2) Going around the circle: Students share their answers to the question by going around in a circle, each taking the turn to answer them individually.

3) Split up readings or problems among group members: Within a group, assign each member a specific question or reading to answer or analyze and report about to the group.

4) Report-backs from different group members: Each time that the small groups report back on their answers to the larger group, the instructor asks that a new group member shares.

5) Post-it note discussion: Pose a question and ask group members to write their answer on post-it notes and then stick them on a large sheet in the middle of the group. Then ask the group to discuss the various answer that the group members shared.

III. MITIGATING POTENTIAL GROUP CONFLICT [1]

1) Establish Guidelines / Team Charter: Ask groups to form guidelines or team charters at the beginning of a project. These documents should contain agreed-on expectations of how all group members will contribute and behave, and is a proactive plan of how to work as a group and mitigate conflict.

2) Assign roles: Assign group roles to focus interaction within a group. In addition to engaging individual members, group roles encourage individual accountability. Some example roles are:

- *Facilitator*: Ensures that group members stay on task and are engaged.
- *Recorder*: Keeps a record of group thoughts and activities, e.g. during a brainstorming activity.
- *Time-Keeper*: Monitors group progress and manages time utilization to ensure the activity is completed.

3) Use peer evaluations: Similar to guidelines, peer evaluations can encourage individual accountability within a group. Peer evaluations can serve as a survey to catch inter-group conflict early, or incentivize participation by factoring into a participation grade.

4) Give feedback to groups on the inter-group process: Group members may interact positively and negatively, and it's important to highlight both in order to reinforce desired group behavior. For example, if a student is being controlling and ignoring input of others, make it known to the group that you noticed this dynamic, and suggest that the student directly ask the perspective of the other group-members. Likewise, if a student or group is actively using strategies for equal participation, let the group know that you notice and appreciate their positive group culture.

In both cases, the objective is to make the inter-group process explicit in order for students to be aware of positive and negative behaviors. This awareness then enables directed effort to use positive group relationships, which leads to better learning.

IV. MANAGING TIME DURING GROUP WORK [2]

1) Poll the class for additional time: To monitor group progress, ask "Does anyone need more time?" Asking "Is everyone done?" may cause negative pressure to finish, causing groups to not say they need more time.

2) Utilize peer instruction: During problem solving activities, groups that finish before others can be asked to help other groups that are slower to complete the task. This can be useful in lab classes if there is high demand for instructor help.

3) Avoid getting stuck with one group: If a group has many questions, the instructors time can be continuously used to the detriment of other groups that have questions. Instead, offer the group direct guidance on how to proceed then continue to cycle around the room to help other groups. Return to the original group after some time to check on progress.

4) Verify the project scope is appropriate: You or the group may realize that the group's project is too complicated to finish in the alloted time, or too niche to be relevant to the class learning goals. Spend an appropriate amount of time vetting proposals for projects (ex. through project proposals), or monitor projects in progress to ensure the work is feasible for the skill of the group.

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REFERENCES

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[2] C. Hershock and S. Milkova, "Guidelines for Using Groups Effectively", University of Michigan GSI Guidebook, 2018.