Working in Groups: A few practical ideas

Julian Park, University of Reading and Centre for Bioscience
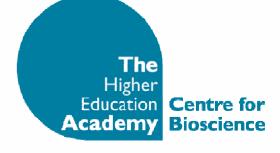

5 minute introduction

45 minutes activities

10 minute discussion

15 minute latitude

The Higher Education Academy Centre for Bioscience

Working in groups

The make-up of groups can have a key bearing on the success of the group work. The formation of groups in itself can itself be turned into an interesting icebreaker, or indeed a learning experience.

A few for starters

Jigsaws *

Playing cards

Identification game*

Birthday months

Contentious likerts*

"The UK should rapidly expand it nuclear energy programme to ensure sustainable energy supplies"

1 (strongly agree)

2 (agree but…)

3 (no strong opinion)

4 (disagree but…)

5. (strongly disagree)

Technique 1 : THINK PAIR SHARE (max 15 min)

Step1: think about the question…..

What do you think are the most important benefits of using group-work in your own teaching context?

Step 2: pair up with somebody who has the same post-it number

Step 3: Share your ideas and try to agree which you feel are the two most important benefits of group-work

Step 4: Pair with another pair to make a four and see if you can reach agreement on **THE** most important benefit of group-work

Step 5: Write this on the whiteboard

Technique 2: TALKING CHIPS (max 15 min)

Step 1: Get into your animal groups!

Step 2: Take 4 chips each

As a group discuss

What are the issues/problems of using group-work as an effective learning experience for all?

Step 3: Each time you contribute to the discussion you must surrender a chip. When your chips are out then so are you and so should be quiet!

Step 4: When all chips are gone then each person writes the issue they think is the most important issue/problem discussed on the whiteboard

Step 5: Use issues/ problems issues highlighted for individual report or oral presentations

Technique 3: ROUND THE TABLE WRITING (max 10 min)

Step 1: Get into your likert groups

Step 2: Get a large sheet of paper and pen. Last person to sit in the group responds in writing to the comment

Some students struggle with group-work because…..

Step 3: He/she reads this out and passes the paper clockwise where next person writes a follow-on comment and reads it out

Step 4: Carry on until time is up

Step 5: Use comments as a basis for discussing methods to overcome the issue/problem

Technique 4: THREE STEP INTERVIEW (max 15 min)

Step 1: Get into your jigsaw groups and split into 2 pairs

Step 2: Ask your partner and viceversa (5 mins)

What is the most effective way you have used group-work in the past (or could do in the future)?

Step 3: Get together with your other pair and summarise your partners response to the above question (be brief 5 mins)

Step 4: Write any new ideas this has engendered for you on the whiteboard

Objectives of session:

1. To talk

2. To expose to new techniques

Use mainly in a formative context

Can enhance the enjoyment of learning

Can enhance the enjoyment of teaching

Quick and dirty group-work can lead on to other things

Its just one piece of equipment in the toolbox