10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING GROUP WORK

Study Skills – Group Work

Universities encourage teachers to have a variety of strategies within the classroom including group and individual work. But during our daily practice we may find reluctant students and other ones who do not excel in the group because somebody else does the work.

If experiences in groups do not develop good teamwork skills, then maybe it's better not to use groups and have students do assignments individually. However, we cannot give up on group work so fast. There are plenty of advantages and benefits for students who work in groups such as cooperation enhancement, open space for discussion and argumentation, knowledge creation and improvement.

These are 10 recommendations to encourage students to be more receptive towards group work.

1. **Emphasize the importance of teamwork—** Before the groups are formed and the task is set out, you should make clear why this particular assignment is being done in groups. Explain not only the practical reasons such as less work to grade but the opportunity to produce quality work as more people can contribute to enrich the final result.

2. **Teach teamwork skills—** Most students don't come to group work knowing how to function effectively in groups, especially because of the amount required differs from what they did in school. It is important that teachers guide students on how to resolve disagreement and balance task assignment.

3. **Use team-building exercises to build cohesive groups—** Members need the chance to get to know each other, and they should be encouraged to talk about how they would like to work together, express what their strengths and weaknesses are so they can do their best.

4. **Thoughtfully consider group formation—** Most students prefer forming their own groups, and in some cases these groups are more productive. However, working in the same group may not be very effective because of procrastination. There are many ways groups can be formed and many criteria that can be used to assemble groups, evaluate your students' skills and select the best partners they can have.

5. **Make the workload reasonable and the goals clear—** Task and objectives should be clear enough for students to do what is expected without spending a large amount of time understanding what they have to do. Although it is true that in groups each participant must do less; to make every participant actively involved may take more time than originally planned.

6. **Consider roles for group members—** Even though this is not always recommended, sometimes students do not know how to organize roles within the group. This could be a great opportunity for students to challenge themselves to be leaders**.**

7. **Provide some class time for meetings—** It is very hard for students to orchestrate their schedules. Part of what they need to be taught about group work is the importance of coming to meetings with an agenda. Significant amounts of work can be done in short periods of time, provided the group knows what needs to be done next.

8. **Request interim reports and group process feedback—** A chronogram is a helpful tool for both the teacher and the group to control progress, it should be checked on a regular basis with evidence. Ask students what else they could contribute that would make the group function even more effectively.

9. **Require individual members to keep track of their contributions—** The final project should include a report from every member identifying their contribution to the project, so no one gets credit for work done by other people.

10. **Include peer assessment in the evaluation process—** What a student claims to have contributed to the group and its final product can also be verified with peer assessment in which members rate or rank (or both) the contributions of others. Formative peer assessment early in the process can help members redress what the group might identify as problems they are experiencing at this stage.

Reference: Hansen, R.S. (2006). Benefits and problems with student teams: Suggestions for improving team projects. Journal of Education for Business, September/October, 11-19.