Strategy: Low-stakes Group Activities

Group work provides many opportunities for students and instructors, and using low-stakes group activities throughout a course can make larger group assignments go more smoothly.

Origin

Barkley, E. (2010). *Student engagement techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.

Cox, P. L. & Friedman, B. A. (2009). The team boat exercise: Enhancing team communication midsemester. *Business Communication Quarterly* 72: 230-236.

Fluckiger, J., Vigil, Y. T., Pasco, R., & Danielson, K. (2010). Formative feedback: Involving students as partners in assessment to enhance learning. *College Teaching* 58: 136-140.

McCann, T. M., Johannessen, L. R., Kahn, E., & Flanagan, J. M. (2006). *Talking in class: Using discussion to enhance teaching and learning*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.

McKinney, K. (n.d.) Ideas for generating discussions on readings or other class material. Retrieved from http://www.cat.ilstu.edu/resources/teachTopics/tips/genDisc.php.

Application

Three-Color Group Quiz: Students can use the opportunity to work together on a quiz to build community as well as identify what they know and need to know.

Using questions to assess learning, have students complete the quiz in three colors of ink:
- Black ink for writing what they as an individual know
- Green ink for writing what members of the group know
- Blue ink for writing knowledge from the textbook or lecture notes

This could also be done by an individual using different colors of ink to identify student knowledge, knowledge using notes/book, knowledge using research, etc.

Three-card Discussion Group: Encourages students to contribute equally to group discussion.

Using a discussion topic or question, give each student three index cards at the beginning of the activity. Have the students arrange desks in a circle and instruct each student that when they contribute to the discussion, they can throw one of their index cards into the center of the circle. The discussion can conclude after all members have used all of their cards.

Team Boat Exercise: After working together on a group project, students can provide each other feedback in a collaborative and low-stakes manner. This could also work well at the midpoint of a more involved project.

As a team, draw a picture of a boat. Everyone on the team must be represented in the picture. Teams should be prepared to explain the rationale behind their drawings to the class.

Discussion questions:
- Why did the team choose to draw a certain type of boat?
- What team roles were represented in the boat drawing?
- How did drawing the boat point out team strengths and weaknesses?
- Was the team's boat a good metaphor for the functioning of the team? Why or why not?
- What did the team learn about itself and team members by drawing the boat?

Pass the Folder Discussion: Students can collaborate in discussion groups.

- Divide class into small groups and give each group a folder.
- Give 5 minutes for each group to choose an issue from the reading to discuss, then 5-10 minutes to discuss it.
- Students should write that issue on the front of their folder and their ideas in the folder, then each group should pass their folder to the next group.
- Give the second group 5-10 minutes to discuss the issue, including recording their ideas in the folder. Challenge them to add unique information about the topic.
- Repeat as you wish.
- During the final time, groups get back the folder they started with and have 10 minutes to read all the responses to the issue on the folder, respond themselves, and share with the larger class.

Send-A-Problem: A modification of the collaborative discussion activity in which a group poses a problem for another group to answer in a similar format to the Pass the Folder activity.

Reflection

- How does this compare to what you are already doing?

- How could low stakes group activities improve student perceptions of group work?

- How will you integrate low stakes group activities into your course?