Group Assessment

There are eight steps to utilizing the power of cooperative learning groups in assessment.

Step 1: Recognize The Power of Groups For Assessment Purposes

The first step is recognizing the power of groups for improving assessment.

1. Groups help make assessment meaningful by involving students in helping each other learn and improve.

2. Groups provide the framework for involving students in the assessment process by having them assess each other's work.

3. Groups enable teachers to conduct more frequent assessments, as groupmates can continuously monitor each other's behavior.

4. Groups enable teachers to assess a wider variety of outcomes, as groupmates can assess level of reasoning, social skills, attitudes, work habits, and other outcomes teachers usually do not have time to assess.

5. Groups enable teachers to use more modalities in assessing students' work, as group mates can watch student performances, listen to each other's answers, add artwork to their reports, engage in dramatic productions, and so forth.

6. Groups utilize more sources of information in making assessments, as peer and self assessments may supplement teacher assessments.

7. Groups reduce biases in assessment, from relying too heavily on paper-and-pencil measures and on teacher assessments.

8. Groups create support systems for enrichment and remediation. Assessments can be immediately utilized to enrich and provide remediation, thus ensuring that "no student is left behind."

9. Groups enable teachers to assess groups as well as the individual students.

10. Groups reduce evaluation apprehension, thus helping provide a more valid and reliable measure of students' achievements.

Step 2: Structure Effective (Not Ineffective) Groups

The second step is to structure cooperative learning groups (rather than traditional learning groups or pseudo groups) by including positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, appropriate use of social skills, and group processing.

Step 3: Make An Assessment Plan

The third step is to make an assessment plan. Teachers must decide what to assess, what criteria and rubrics to use, how to sequence the instructional tasks and assessment procedures, and when to provide feedback.

Step 4: Use Groups To Assess Individual Performances

The fourth step is to utilize groups in assessing individual performances. The basic purpose of a cooperative group is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. There is a pattern to classroom life, "students learn it in a group, then perform it alone." Students complete assignments in cooperative learning groups and then are tested individually.

Step 5: Assess Group Performances

The fifth step is to assess group performances. Many assignments require groups to produce a single product, such as experiments, field projects, dramatic or musical productions, team sports, and many, many more. Such group products are assessed as a whole. In addition, many instructional procedures require a group product, such as problem-based learning, the case study method, group investigation, and academic controversy. Group projects allow students to be creative and inventive in integrating diverse knowledge and skills, use a variety of medias, use procedures such as the scientific method, formulate their own questions and answers, share their learning and accomplishments with others, and transfer and apply diverse information and skills.

Step 6: Structure Peer Assessment Of Groupmates

One of the most powerful things teachers can do in increasing the validity and reliability of assessment is to have students assess each other. Teachers can only sample student behavior, while groupmates can continuously monitor and assess each other's behavior. Utilizing peers in assessment increases the learning of the assessor, allows for more frequent assessments to take place, allows for the assessment of a wider variety of outcomes, allows for the use of more modalities in assessment, reduces the bias inherent in making reading and writing prerequisites for assessment, allows for the utilization of more sources of information, reduces potential teacher bias in assessment, and creates peer social support systems for remediation and enrichment.

Step 7: Structure Self-Assessment Within Groups

Cooperative learning groups provide the arena in which self-assessment takes place. Self-assessment leads to such outcomes as self-awareness and self-regulation, self-monitoring and appropriate self-presentation, self-understanding, and social sensitivity. By comparing oneself with similar others, students discover the level at which they have mastered material, whether they perceive reality accurately, learn best through visual or auditory

means, have a good or poor sense of humor, or approach problems in an analytical and rational way. Social comparison is used continuously to make assessments of one's opinions, emotions, attitudes, values, attributes, abilities, and performances. Social comparison, however, must take place in a cooperative (not competitive) context. In a competitive context, social comparisons tend to be one-dimensional and evaluative (defining one as a winner or a loser), which leads to contingent self-esteem. In a cooperative context, social comparisons tend to identify the similarities and differences among group members on many dimensions (defining each group member as a unique individual), which lead to unconditional self-esteem. Learning logs and journals are key tools for having students document, assess, and reflect on their learning.

Step 8: Use Groups To Create Assessment Situations

The eighth step is to create group experiences for the specific purpose of assessing targeted student competencies and learning. There are two major methods for doing so: Role-playing and simulations. Students may participate in a role-playing exercise or simulation, reflect on their experience, relate what they learn to the academic material being studied, and diagnose how effectively they performed in the situation. Group experiences are very useful in assessing complex competencies and skills that need to be demonstrated as well as described.

Assigning And Assessing Group Projects

1. Give students a clear description of the project, its purposes, and how it will be conducted.

2. Create a time-line (list the dates for when the project starts, when each part of the project should be completed, when the initial draft is submitted for peer editing and initial teacher reaction, and when the final product is due).

3. Show students samples or models of completed projects. A variety of projects ranging from excellent to poor help students develop a frame of reference on what is and is not an acceptable finished product.

4. Utilize students in developing specific criteria to assess the quality of the completed projects. The criteria may include timeliness, appearance, originality, quality, evidence, reflection, richness of ideas, and presentation. Students develop indicators of excellent, medium, and inadequate products. Students need to understand the components of a good project and then use indicators to guide them in their work.

5. Teach students a rubric (supplied by the teacher) that is standardized for the school, district, or state. Learning a standardized rubric to use in assessing the quality of projects gives students a more sophisticated frame of reference to use in reflecting on their own work.

6. Have students complete the project with help and assistance from faculty. Students are assigned to cooperative learning groups. The required materials, equipment, and other resources are provided. The group completes the project, ensuring that all members have contributed their fair share of the work, can explain its content and how it was conducted, and can explain the results.

7. Have students present their completed projects to some or all of their classmates. Either each group member presents an equal part of the report or else each member presents the entire report to a section of the class. In viewing classmates' projects, students use the rating scale developed and a standardized rubric to assess projects' quality. Each group may wish to revise its report on the basis of the feedback they receive and their response to the reports of the other groups.

8. Have students turn in their projects to be assessed by the faculty. An individual test may be given on the content of the project.

9. Extend the assignment by asking students to apply what they have just learned in a more complex project.

Teachers Role In Assigning Group Projects

Assigning group projects have three distinct phases:

1. Preparation: Preparing students include ensuring they have both the academic and teamwork skills necessary, establishing norms for working together cooperatively, ensuring all materials are prepared, and preparing for formative and summative assessments.

2. Monitoring and supervision: While students are completing the project, the teacher monitors and supervises the project groups. Teachers observe the groups at work, interview the groups or individual group members, collect interim group products and progress reports, collect informal products such as "one-minute papers" (a one-minute opportunity for students to write a response to a particular issue), and have groups process how effectively they are functioning:

3. Assessing the results: After the lesson, collect the group products and assess their quality by using the criteria and rubrics developed before the lesson began. In addition to the group report, the group may be required to present their project to the class or a set of classmates.

Individual Accountability

When assessing groups, it is also possible to assess each individual student. Teachers may observe each group member, give random individual oral examinations, have each student present their group's report to a few classmates, have students teach what they learned to someone else, give each student a problem that can be solved only by applying the knowledge and skills it took to complete the project, give each student an individual test, and assign each student a series of one-minute papers.