

Teaching Tip Tuesday

HIP: Collaborative Projects

High Impact Educational Practices (HIPs) are those that lead to achievement of deep learning, promote significant engagement gains, and have a positive differential impact on historically underserved student populations (Kuh, 2008). As educators, we strive to incorporate HIPs in our courses to improve the learning experience for our students. Collaborative projects and assignments are HIPs that may be used to support student achievement of learning outcomes. They allow learners to solve specific problems by working in dynamic social groups. The social component helps them to refine their understanding by listening to and considering the perspectives of peers from diverse backgrounds.

Below are tips for making your collaborative assignments more effective.

Key Considerations in Implementing Collaborations

- **Be transparent about the goals of the exercise, how it serves learning outcomes, and how you'll be scoring it.** Because students often view group work as adding needless complexity to an assignment they feel they could complete alone, it is important to be fully transparent about why you have planned a team activity. Explain what you want them to get out of working with others, and how this will improve their achievement of learning outcomes. Finally, be clear about how they will be scored.
- **Stress authentic skills.** Collaborations help to build essential work skills like active listening to peers, making implicit knowledge explicit, reflecting on one's knowledge gaps and the validity of one's arguments, social responsibility, and compromise negotiation.
- **Good collaborations don't just happen. They must be built.** Collaboration is more effective when there is a team mentality rather than an individual mentality. It's good practice to begin collaborations with team-building exercises.
- **Not synonymous with cooperative learning.** Learning things as individuals, then coming together to share learning is collective learning. The key elements that shift the experience to a collaborative one are sharing and negotiating to reach decisions and conclusions together.
- **Team construction of ground-rules for the collaboration promotes buy-in.** By working as a team to produce agreed upon rules for how to assign responsibilities, how to work together, how to monitor project progress, and how to engage socially, all group members become invested in the collaboration process.
- **Considering scheduling availability during team construction reduces time conflicts.** Especially in asynchronous on-line environments, learners in a team may not all be able to meet at the same times. Consider this when constructing teams. Have learners choose their own teams based on times they have available for collaborative work.
- **Provide guidance in advance for dealing with technical issues and conflicts.** Collaborative work often carries cognitive load overhead. Working in a group is difficult enough without having to invent solutions to every problem that arises. Even in the best teams, conflicts occur. Anticipate these obstacles and provide protocols that guide teams through ways of addressing the inevitable difficulties—from assumptions that all member have access to the same technology to the team member who checks out before project completion.

Kuh, G. D. (2008). Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*, 14(3), 28-29.
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