Resources for teaching group work

Learning activities

Curriculum Services

Study and Learning Centre

# Contents

Beginning of group process

Learning Activity 1 Forming and consolidating groups

Middle of group process

Learning activity 2 Checking on progress

End of group process

Learning activity 3 Teach the task: Reflection on group process

Learning activity 4 Teach the task: Peer assessment

Learning activity 5 Summing up

Learning activity 1: Forming and consolidating groups

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| Description | Forming and consolidating groups |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Timing | At beginning of group process  1 hr 15 mins – 1hr 30 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. identify the roles and responsibilities of each group member 2. outline the procedures for addressing problems and conflicts arising in the group 3. create a group charter including agendas for meetings, roles and responsibilities, timeline for the task, and other information regarding relevant aspects of the group process. 4. describe ways in which group work is relevant to employability |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Explain the importance of group collaboration and the benefits of group work, particularly as it relates to employability. 2. Give the students a handout describing the assessment for the group process: the group charter, checking on progress, the reflection on group collaboration and the peer evaluation. Allow time for the students to read the handout and ask questions about the assessment (10 mins). 3. Assign students to groups through random selection (give students a number or colour and instruct them to form groups consisting of that colour or number) (5 mins). 4. Instruct students to introduce themselves, say what their name means and why they were given that name (or some other ice-breaker). Students then share their experiences of working in a group, and exchange contact details (10 mins). 5. Provide students with the template for the group charter assessment task. Instruct them to make clear notes of the group decisions regarding roles and responsibilities, and problems and solutions the group has agreed to (30 mins). 6. Students report the results of their group discussion (10 mins). 7. Introduce students to RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment Tasks/Group Work tutorial. Go through the sections of the tutorial, including the sample agenda for the first meeting and the blank agenda to be used for future meetings, and the section on roles (10 mins). 8. Inform students when the assessment group charter is due and ask for questions (5 mins). |
| Rationale | This activity supports the pedagogy relating to the significance of the group process for the development of professional communication, collaborative and organisational skills, and problem solving – all essential employability skills. As many students do not already have the skills to form a functional group, it also provides the opportunity to consolidate group identity and cohesion. This occurs through the creation of processes and procedures, the identifying of and roles and responsibilities, and through providing a basic structure for further development of the group. |
| Potential issues | Students may be unfamiliar with group work, particularly if they are international students. The introductory activity of sharing personal stories should facilitate group cohesion and support the development of a group identity. As with any group, some members may not participate. This is something that should be explicitly addressed through the discussion of problems the group may encounter. |
| Handouts/ resources for student | Provide on Blackboard a link to the Group Work tutorial on the RMIT Learning Lab.  Refer students to the assessment tasks for the group process. These should be on Blackboard.  Provide students with a copy of Dwyer, Judith. (2009). *The Business Communication Handbook* (8th ed.). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Australia. Pp: 186-208 (Chapter 6: Work with the Team). |

Learning activity 2: Checking on progress

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| Description | Checking on progress |
| Task type | Tutorial session |
| Timing | At mid-point through the group project  1 hour |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity students should be able to:  1. identify the achievements of the group to date and outline the factors that have contributed to their progress  2. describe problems that have arisen in the group, the methods the group has used to address those problems, and evaluate the effectiveness of those methods  3. demonstrate knowledge of steps involved in conflict resolution. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. In their groups, students discuss the achievements of the group up to this point in time (mid-way through the project) and the factors that contributed to this success.  2. In the larger group, a representative of each group shares their achievements and describes the major factor contributing to their success.  3. Groups then discuss problems they have encountered and the solutions, if any, they devised to address them. Students then list problems on flip chart paper and identify possible methods of solving those problems.  4. In the whole group, brainstorm possible conflict scenarios in group work. Note them on a white board. Present the students with a task to see what group can come up with the most convincing conflict resolution method as voted by the group as a whole. Students cannot vote for their own scenario.  5. In their groups, students choose one conflict scenario and discuss how they would resolve the conflict in a way that is mutually beneficial to all parties. The groups describe their approach on flip chart paper and blu-tack it to the wall. When completed, all students walk around reading different groups’ methods of conflict resolution for the scenario they have chosen.  6. In the larger group, students vote on the scenario they consider to be the most effective way to resolve a conflict. The group with the most convincing scenario gets chocolates.  5. Conclude the activity by summing up the findings of the groups: what was done well, what needs improvement, how conflict in groups can at times be creative and productive. Refer to the resources. |
| Rationale | One of the challenges of group work is that of resolving conflict and addressing problems as they arise in the group. According to Bruce Tuckman’s model of group dynamics, in the second stage of the group process - ‘storming’ - problems and conflicts often emerge. (See Tuckman, Bruce W & Jensen, Mary Ann C. ‘Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited’. *Group and Organization Studies*, 1977, Vol.2(4), p.419-26.).This learning activity aims to address those problems and provide the opportunity for the group to move forward to the ‘performing’ stage when the group has resolved issues and is working effectively on their project. This activity also develops negotiation skills as students navigate relationships within the team in pursuit of a productive outcome. Negotiation, along with team building, is a significant employability skill developed in group work  (Litchfield, A., Frawley, J & Nettleton, S., ‘Contextualising and integrating into the curriculum the learning and teaching of work-ready professional graduate attributes’. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29:5, 519-534, DOI:10.1080/07294360.2010.502220 |
| Potential issues | Students may be reluctant to address the real issues facing the group and may take a superficial stance towards the task of identifying problems. A list of questions could be prepared to give to students for Step 3 to encourage them to go more deeply into the problems they have faced. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | To prepare the students for this activity, instruct students to access the conflict resolution section of the Learning Lab tutorial for students on ‘Group Work’ before the class. |

Learning activity 3: Teach the assessment task: reflection on group collaboration

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| Description | Teach the Assessment Task: Reflection on Group Process |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. complete successfully the assessment task ‘Reflection on Group Collaboration’ 2. identify the relevance of this assessment task to the development of their employability skills. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Introduce the assessment task, the assessment rubric, and the SLC Tip Sheet ‘Writing an Academic Reflection’. Emphasise the learning outcomes for this activity and for the assessment task (5 mins). 2. Organise students in random groups (ie not in the groups they are in for the group project) (2 mins). 3. Instruct them to discuss the task and the Tip Sheet, paying particular attention to the requirements of the different four sections of the task (DIEP). The goal is for each student to be clear as to how to complete the task and to list any questions they cannot answer in their group (10 mins). 4. Instruct students to report their questions back to the whole group and brainstorm the task’s relevance to employability. Provide answers to their questions, and reiterate employability relevance (18 mins). 5. Conclude by briefly reviewing the task, the assessment rubric & the learning outcomes (5 mins). |
| Rationale | Many students do not know how to write reflectively about their learning. This activity is supported by the pedagogy relating to assessment for learning and to academic reflection. It offers students the opportunity to clarify their questions about the task, increasing their confidence that they know what reflection involves and what the task requires. It also relates the task to their future careers, making graduate attributes explicit in their course. |
| Potential issues | Time may be an issue if there is confusion regarding the task and more time is needed to clarify the requirements. Arrangements may need to be made for further communication with students. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | 1. Upload the description of the assessment task with the assessment rubric and tip sheet on Blackboard in preparation for the class. (The tip sheet on reflective writing is included in these resources but is also available to download from the Learning Lab/Assessment tasks/Reflective journal). 2. For a reference on group theory, refer students to Tuckman, Bruce W and Jensen, Mary Ann C, Stages of Small-Group Development Revisited, *Group & Organization Studies* (pre-1986); Dec 1977; 2, 4 3. If one is available, provide a model of reflective writing that meets the requirements of this task and is off a high standard. Such a model demonstrates the quality of work they should aim to produce and provides students with a challenge. |

Learning activity 4: Teach the assessment task: peer assessment

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| Description | Teach the peer assessment task |
| Task type | Tutorial activity |
| Time | 30 minutes |
| Level | (Dependent on course) |
| Class size | (Dependent on course) |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity, students should be able to:   1. demonstrate ability to assess peers and give constructive feedback 2. identify elements of group work that contribute to a productive and positive collaboration. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Introduce the peer assessment form, making clear reference to the instructions (5 mins). 2. Link to the RMIT Learning Lab/Assessment Tasks/Group Work/Giving Feedback. Instruct students to link to it also (2 mins). 3. Instruct students to read and discuss the ‘Giving Feedback’ section of the tutorial. Allow time for questions (15 mins). 4. Instruct students regarding submission of the evaluations (3 mins) 5. Conclude by briefly reviewing the task, the criteria & the learning outcomes (5 mins). |
| Rationale | This activity supports the pedagogy relating to using assessment for learning and to peer assessment. It offers students the opportunity to reflect on how individual contributions impact on the overall productivity of the group, developing understanding of group dynamics. It also allows them to clarify the task, and practise giving feedback, an important skill in group work. |
| Potential issues | Students may be unfamiliar with peer and self assessment and may be resistant to the idea of evaluating performance of other students, requiring discussion of the rationale and learning outcomes. |
| Handouts/ resources for students | Upload the peer assessment form and instructions on Blackboard in preparation for the class.  Provide on Blackboard a link to the Group Work tutorial section ‘Giving Feedback’ on the RMIT Learning Lab. |

Learning activity 5: Summing up

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| Description | Summing up |
| Task type | Tutorial |
| Timing | End of semester  45 minutes |
| Level |  |
| Class size |  |
| Learning outcomes | At the end of this activity students will be able to:  1. critically evaluate the performance of their group in regard to the group process (not product)  2. identify the achievements of their group in terms of effective collaboration, conflict resolution and professional communication  3. demonstrate a metacognitive awareness of the skills they have learned through the group work process and the relevance of those skills to their employability. |
| Method / Instructions | 1. Present students with the learning outcomes for this activity, emphasising the relevance of the group work for their professional development and for utilising when writing their resumes for jobs (10 mins).  2. Students are mixed randomly in groups that are not their project groups. Each person in the group gives a critical review or summing up of their experience of their project group’s process: the ability to communicate effectively and professionally, collaborate on tasks, and resolve conflict. The group discusses similarities and differences in their experiences (15 mins).  3. Using flip chart paper, students make a list on the left hand side of the skills they have developed as a result of the group process. On the right side they briefly describe the scenario through which each skill was developed. Finally, they discuss ways in which these skills could be useful in their professions (15 mins).  4. In the larger group, students share their lists and scenarios.  5. Identify for students ways in which they could use these skills in CVs and interviews for jobs.  6. Take time to sum up the students’ group process experience, congratulate them on their achievements, and encourage them to celebrate their successes with a group social event (5 mins). |
| Rationale | In this activity, students reflect on the value of their entire experience of the group work process and relate it to their future professions. The ‘review and reflect’ dimension provides a powerful metacognitive learning experience. They should now not only have developed their group skills but also be aware that they have these skills and can now consciously develop them further. This ‘adjourning’ stage of the group process is especially significant for promoting such learning. |
| Potential issues | Lack of in-depth student engagement in the discussion is always a potential issue. However, the presentation of the learning outcomes and the relevance of the activity should encourage students to engage. Further strategies to use can be found on the RMIT website on inclusive teaching practices  http://www1.rmit.edu.au/teaching/inclusive |
| Handouts/ resources for students | Phillip Garside, 2005, *The Secrets of Getting a Job*, Hyland House, Flemington, Victoria, Australia. |