

Artifact 3-1

During my observations I had the opportunity to see grouping strategies used in a variety of ways by different teachers. In one classroom, the ability to work in groups on an assignment was used as a tool of classroom management. The teacher, at the beginning of the assignment, told her students that they were to quietly work alone for 15 minutes and then they would be permitted to form small groups to review their answers and discuss difficulties they may be having. . The teacher explained to me that she would allow them to work together for the last 5-10 minutes as it would help focus them. She mentioned that in this class (9th grade) the attention span of the majority of the students was low. They enjoyed working together and being able to talk, so by giving them that “out” at the end of the assignment it increased their behavior and focus on the first half of the assignment. The students did not create their own groups but worked as a group based on the seating arrangement of the classroom. It is important to point out here that the classroom seating, in effect, was also a type of grouping strategy. The teacher informed me that at the beginning of the year the students started off with assigned seating based off of their names. After the first and second quarter she rotated the seating around. For the third quarter she allowed students to pick their own seats with the stipulation that they had to sit next to someone that they hadn't already sat with and that they weren't close friends with. The result of these different seating assignments was a classroom in which all the students had worked with each other over the year and while they may not all have been close friends, they were comfortable and friendly with each other.

The second teacher that I observed using grouping strategies had a much different teaching pedagogy. His classroom management was much less instructional and more hands-off. He gave packets with the work the students were supposed to complete, then allowed them to complete it however they wished. This resulted in some students being alone, some students being in large groups and some students being in small groups. From my observations, the groups were not heterogeneously divided. It was fairly easy for me to observe common themes for many of the groups that formed. These included similar cultures, races, and athletic ability. One of the students who did not group suffered from a physical disability and his demeanor towards his classmates was aloof and introverted. Another solo student seemed more focused on completing the assignment and less interest in talking or working with other students. Interestingly enough both of these students ended up working together by the end of the class.

While teachers utilize grouping strategies within the classroom for instructional purposes it is important to remember that students already form groups on their own outside of the classroom. Without any teacher direction the groups that may form will not necessarily be equitable. According to Snowman, group heterogeneity is one of the most important aspects of cooperative learning (2011, p. 472). This heterogeneity can work towards improving the relationships between classmates of different cultural backgrounds, an important aspect in the shift towards multicultural curriculum transformation (Clark, 2002, p. 43).

I think the most important thing about cooperative learning structures is creating an emotional and socially safe classroom environment. From the start of the year, developing positive student interaction and interpersonal development will create a classroom that can work together. This

will promote interdependence, accountability, and friendly competition within the classroom (Snowman, 2011, pp. 472-473).

As a biology teacher I will have the opportunity to assign regular group based activities for lab assignments. I plan to utilize a mix of small teams (2 students), large groups (half class), and small groups (3-4), for different activities. Some assignments will put the focus on completion of tasks, some will encourage group competition, and some will provide student collaborative learning (2011, p. 479). Regardless of size, will be given specific roles, have individual accountability, and have clear goals to achieve ("Cop. & Col. Learning," 2004).

Responses to other students

Hi Allison,

I think in many ways, Science classes lean towards better collaborative grouping than humanities or math courses. The interaction in most lab activities helps engage students and keep them interested in the material at hand. This leads to a more cohesive group environment as opposed to one where students are distracted and the focus shifts from the educational task to a more social interaction. To take the role-assignment idea one step further, I think that it is also important to rotate those responsibilities throughout the year, I know a lot of times students tend to pick the same roles for themselves as they may be more comfortable in one. Rotating those roles helps them develop additional skillsets as well as confidence.

Hi Dawn,

Even as a student I have always believed that students, especially 11/12 graders, should be focused more on group development than individual achievement. The motivation of your peers, as well as the experience gained from working with them, can lead to a huge growth in confidence. The face to face interaction leads to experience in many highly important life skills such as conflict resolution, peer motivation, criticism development, and humility. Regardless of the specific role a student has in the group they all benefit from the overall experience. I am also a firm believer that working face to face with people to complete a project can go a long way to creating friendships and bonds between students with different interests, social, cultural and/or economic backgrounds.

Clark, C. (2002). Effective Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Across Disciplines. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4(3), 37-46. doi: 10.1207/S15327892MCP0403_7

Cooperative and Collaborative Learning: Implementation. (2004). Concept to Classroom. Retrieved July 3, 2014, from <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/coopcollab/implementation.html>

Snowman, J. (2011). *Psychology applied to teaching* (13th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.