

Appendix H: Teamwork through an Anti-Oppressive Lens developed by M. Tanti

In general, peer discussion from small group work or short in-class activities increases student learning (Johnson and Lawson, 1998; Springer et al, 1999; Crouch and Mazur, 2001; Smith et al, 2009). However, small group work can privilege certain voices and at its worst can do harm to minoritized students (SCTL 2021). Eddy et al. further provide evidence of systemic bias in who benefits from group work (Eddy et al., 2015, 2). To realize the full benefits of group work, students must experience a variety of team roles. Those who participate in group dynamics by only listening or taking notes will store but not integrate information (2015, 2). Those who engage in explaining and talking during group work will form a deeper understanding as they integrate new ideas through constructivist and interactive engagement – building their own mental mode of processing information and building upon the ideas of others (2015, 2). Eddy et al. found that the benefits of group work are unequally experienced due to barriers to equal participation depending on a student’s ethnicity, racialization, nationality (international students vs. nationals), and gender. Some of the limits to participation include the presence of a dominating student, moving too quickly through material for all to contribute, when a student’s contributions are demeaned or ignored, a student’s sense of anxiety or intimidation, and a low perception regarding the value of participating (2015, 3). It is worth noting, for example, that international students were five times more likely than their white counterparts to report a “dominator” in their group (2015, 9). This is consistent with the experience of racialized students. Depending on specific group identities, thirty to fifty percent of racialized students noted the existence of a dominator compared to twenty percent of white students (2015, 9). In addition, students who identified as men were more likely to prefer to take lead roles (2015, 13). These statistics suggest that domination is being largely experienced in group work though not noticed by all members. Levels of anxiety, comfort being oneself, concerns over social comparison and a sense of the value in participating were also differentially experienced depending on group identity. However, the perceived value of the groupwork experience increased as the group’s functionality increased (2015, 12). These findings are important for improving students’ classroom learning experiences and have significant implications for how students might engage with community partners and other collaborators in ECEL projects. Students must have the skills and abilities to both partake in and facilitate a variety of team roles so that they are best prepared to participate in diverse ‘real-world’ teams.

Eddy et al’s study showed that unstructured group dynamics could generate inequity in roles (2015, 14). On the other hand, one can “structure equality” in classroom pedagogy (Davidson, 2015). Some strategies for equitable development of groupwork skills include requiring groups to rotate who talks first in each meeting or who assumes which roles in group activities, having students work in teams of two where equal participation can be more easily structured through “Think.Pair.Share” exercises (see Appendix F), using group discussion prompts to facilitate

group sharing, asking students to reflect on group dynamics in a written reflection midway through a longer assignment, or assigning roles to each group member so that students can gain awareness regarding how they typically participate in groups (Wicket, 2000, Menekse et al 2013, Johnson et al, 1998, Cohen et al, 1999, Kotsopoulos, 2010). Practitioners of Cooperative Learning models note that “putting students into groups to learn is not the same thing as structuring cooperation among students” (Johnson et al, 1991, 18). In Cooperative Learning frameworks, students experience learning as a collaborative process (Tanner et al, 2003, 1). Cooperative learning values social interdependence and promotes cooperation rather than encouraging competition and individual achievement; other students become resources and partners in learning (Tanner et al, 2003, 1-2). For cooperative learning to occur the groupwork must be structured to promote positive interdependence, dedicated in-class face-to-face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small group social skills such as active listening and asking clarifying questions, and group processing through which to discuss how the group work is going (Tanner et al, 2003, 2-4). These qualities allow for skill development and social learning to occur and prepare students for complex social dynamics of workplaces and ‘real-world’ collaborations.

Microaggressions are one way that the contributions of various group members can be unintentionally excluded or devalued in groupwork and team settings (STLC).^[1] Thus, learning about manifestations of implicit bias is an important part of creating inclusive environments and team settings. The goal of teaching teamwork skills through an anti-oppression framework is to foster openness to ongoing personal development as it relates to issues of equity and inclusion, so all students get the most out of their learning experiences and are equipped for the realities of diverse workplace and community settings. There are a variety of ways to build relationships between groupmates with purposeful time and activities that encourage students to build connections, teach students to share “air-time,” foster inquisitive dialogue through the use of “inquisitive language” rather than language that debates or attacks, and permit “the historically invisible to be made visible” (SCTL). To build these skills into groupwork exercises would be to teach teamwork through an anti-oppression lens. While at present no such tool exists for teaching team work intentionally through an anti-oppression framework, Cooperative Learning frameworks closely align with anti-oppression strategies (See “The Classroom Conference” below for sample Cooperative Learning exercises).

^[1] A microaggression is an everyday exchange that cues a sense of subordination based on any one of a number of social identities, including: race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, nationality, religion, and disability (SCTL)

The Classroom Conference

This is a kind of jigsaw exercise. It is great to use with particularly long or dense articles or a chapter on the course reading list. It allows students to see the reading from a variety of perspectives and to learn from one another about aspects of the texts they may not have

noticed or considered important. They will also experiment with a variety of team roles that they may not normally choose for themselves and get to see how others behave in these roles.

1. Assign sections of a course reading to groups of 3-5 students. The group must become the class experts on that section of the reading. This could be a few paragraphs, a few pages or a subsection of a reading.
2. Instruct students to each do a close reading of the section individually, highlighting interesting sentences, words and passages, looking up definitions for new words and encyclopedia summaries for new concepts that might be referenced, identifying contrasting ideas and any patterns or repetitions in the section. They then come together to decide on the most important of these to share as their “conference presentation” to the class. In an imaginary or “classroom” conference you will hold, they are taking up the role of expert panelist on this section of the reading.
3. On the day of the conference, the class will be structured like the roundtable learning sessions held at many academic conferences. 1-2 students will be designated as expert speakers to stay at their roundtable and present their section to panel attendees/classmates, 1-2 students will move around the room, attending the other speaker tables and taking notes on the other sections of the course reading to share back with their group.
4. At the tables, the presenter/panelist students present their findings (summary of key terms, ideas, learning from the reading) in 5-6 minutes. Then attendees/classmates have the opportunity to ask clarifying questions to ensure they have comprehensive notes to take back to their group on that section. The notes taken from their classmate/experts will be the only notes students have on this reading. Thus, the assignment builds in a productive interdependence that is the basis for co-operative learning.
5. Notetaker students move around the room, taking notes on the various sections while speaker/expert students present their material to “sessions” of new classmate/attendees (likely 3-4 times). The roundtables are timed and given about 20 minutes each before rotating. For the speaker/experts, having to articulate the same material in different ways for different audiences and respond to different clarifying questions encourages integration of materials. Notetakers will also get presenting experience and the opportunity to answer clarifying questions when they present back their notes to their home group. The group members will form their reading/study notes based on this information from the “sessions” they did not attend.

This exercise usually requires one dedicated class for the classroom conference. The instructor does not lecture but will circulate around the room, listening in on sessions and clarifying or prompting where needed. The group notes can be a source of participation marks. It is quite

amazing to see how students rise to this challenge and enjoy being put in the position of expert: this goes for panelists and notetakers alike.

Jigsaw Groups² are an informal cooperative learning group structure that can be used in both labs and discussions of papers or readings. The goal of the jigsaw discussion is for students to share their expertise and to gather information from peers who have completed a different task. For example, in a science class rather than having all students read all articles on multiple organisms going through a particular developmental stage, each student would be assigned readings highlighting findings in one organism i.e., fruit fly, nematode worm, zebrafish, or mouse. After completing the readings, students would be assigned to jigsaw groups that would bring together four students, each of whom had completed readings on one organism, with the requirement that each student report to the others in an effort to identify common features. A similar approach can be taken in laboratory courses in which different groups of students have pursued different investigations on a related topic. Students can hone their expertise on a single methodology or topic, then jigsaw with two or three students who have developed expertise in other techniques, thus promoting mutual teaching and learning among students.

² Adapted from Tanner et al, "Cooperative Learning in the Science Classroom"