

10/26/15

① When doing a group activity, how do you make sure that members of a group are doing a reasonably equal amount of work?

1) I don't know if this is always something that needs to happen in group work. Or rather - it's not ~~always~~ something I can control, and it's not always necessary for each member to do an equal amount of "work". For some things, I care more about ~~an equal amount~~ a distributed amount of understanding rather than work.

Today we did the linear equations graph-to-equation matching. For this type of activity, I don't know if I need everyone matching with equal intensity - but, I do need everyone involved in the mental work of convincing themselves that the graphs match. One way I can check is by pulling up next to a student and asking them to explain an answer that's already been done. After that, I might give him an equation & tell him that ~~group that~~ he should try & match that one.

I can also check on participation by asking questions when groups are done. I try to have a series of summarizing questions to ask group members when they're finished. If one member of the group can't answer, I tell the group to help this person out and make sure they can explain one of the answers, then I walk away and come back when they're ready. The expectation I want to communicate through this is: everyone in the group is responsible for the knowledge of how to do this, even if not everyone participates with the same intensity.

Another situation could be: a student is just not participating, either by being distracted or by being non-compliant. I usually try to talk to the student at their desk and ask if we can do one together - a lot of times, non-participation is just masking the fear & shame

of not knowing how to solve the problem. If I can help them get started, that sometimes is enough to get the student involved.

If they still won't participate, I explain the expectation that everyone be involved, and I explain the specific actions I'm seeing that suggest they're not participating (sometimes this is body language - leaning back, nothing to write with, no eye contact, etc). I let them know they need to participate, then give them a chance to turn it around. If they still don't, I remove them from the group and give them something else to work on, emphasizing that they are no longer part of the class and have lost the privilege of interacting with their peers. Hopefully all of this is enough to get them to be engaged next time.

One last note: All of these comments are for activities whose purpose is more practice or ~~practice~~ to learn something new. If I had a project at the end of a unit meant to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of the material, then I do need a way to make sure students are contributing their own ideas ~~or~~ and working together. I usually do this by avoiding group projects altogether, or by having exchange ~~parts of~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~that~~ ~~is~~ ~~turned~~ ~~in~~ ~~most~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~that~~ ~~is~~ ~~turned~~ ~~in~~ be turned in individually by all members of the group. I need a way to hold individual students accountable, so I usually have every student complete their own set of prompts about the activity.

This page is hard to write about without a specific project in mind. I guess the moral is: if I want students to work together

on something evaluative, then each student of the project/activity needs to include a component that every student does individually. This is really the only way to ~~guarantee~~ measure the involvement of each student.