



Student Perceptions of Engagement via Cooperative Discussion Groups

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Introduction

- A complete restructuring of Ag-Ed curriculum at Ohio State occurred to purposely intertwine pedagogy, content, and philosophy across all courses.
 - To accommodate this, instructors implemented **Cooperative Discussion Groups (CDGs)**, a discussion method that blended elements of whole class discussion and cooperative learning groups.
- Whole Class Discussion (WCD) is the most traditional method of discussion found in the classroom and has shown to increase critical thinking, reflection on beliefs, and engagement in course content (Dancer & Kamvounias, 2005; Wade, 1994)
- Challenges to WCD includes student fears of facing criticism, not having enough time to gather thoughts, and even of their ideas being unworthy (Wade, 1994)
- Alternatively, Cooperative Learning, or the use of small groups to meet a common learning goal, has shown many positive effects in students, including:
 - Increase in efforts to achieve & student psychological health (Johnson et al., 1998)
 - Increased motivation (Fernandez-Rio et al. 2017; Tombak & Altun, 2016)
 - More equal participation (Lange et al., 2016)
- CDGs allow instructors to mitigate barriers created by WCD and capitalize on benefits of cooperative learning

How It Works

<p>Group Structure</p> <p>Adapted from previous recommendations in cooperative learning (Johnson et al., 1998)</p> <p>Students randomly assigned to groups of four on first day of class</p> <p>Four group roles, rotated every 3 weeks.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Moderator – Facilitate group discussion Recorder – Take notes in class Reporter – Edit notes from recorder and post online Delegate – Share group thoughts with whole class 	<p>Description of Course</p> <p>Junior level agriscience education course 28 students</p> <p>Large focus on experiential learning and youth development</p>	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Case study with multiple data sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra credit journal prompts ($n = 11$) Interviews based on selected responses ($n = 4$)
<p>Graded Portion of Course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDG's accounted for 20% of students' final grade 150 Points total <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 submissions x 10 pts = 120 pts 4 peer reviews x 5 pts = 20 pts 4 self reviews x 2.5 pts = 10 pts 		

Results to Date

Theme 1: Overall Success

- Students did not feel comfortable with groups at beginning of semester
- Student comfort and confidence grew through the semester for all participants
- Most felt the groups helped with their understanding of course material



Theme 2: Collaboration In Roles

- Students particularly liked how roles were established and appreciated having them
- Students felt that group roles guided expectations and distributed work evenly
- Students felt that their groups were a safe place to debate, without fear of judgement



Theme 3: Understanding of Material

- Students felt that the CDGs allowed them to dive deeper into content, bounce ideas, and even build on ideas as a group
- Students felt CDG activities empowered them to develop their own ideas, and helped with individual assignments



Theme 4: Comparison of CDG vs WCD

- Students felt CDGs worked better, were more efficient, and were less intimidating than WCD
- This led to greater comfort in voicing thoughts, receiving feedback, and asking questions
- Students felt they had more of a voice when working within CDGs



Theme 5: CDGs as a Method

- Students consistently reflected on how they could use CDGs in their future classrooms
- Particularly, CDGs allowed a deeper chance to learn about their peers' high school experiences
- Helped forge relationships and facilitate networking with classmates



Future Plans/ Advice to Others

- Students often were concerned about time needed for activities
- Instruct groups to sit together at beginning of class on days with CDGs
- Provide specific time lengths for activities (also include reminders)
- Students noted that they enjoyed when student-centered methods (like case studies) were used when they were in CDGs

References



Password: Cooperative

Costs/Resources Needed

No immediate costs, but the following should be addressed *before* facilitating CDGs:

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1) How groups will be established | 5) Rotation schedule for group roles |
| 2) Group roles and responsibilities | 6) Procedures for transitioning |
| 3) Student expectations | 7) Activities to be completed in groups |
| 4) How/if CDGs will be assessed | 8) Estimate of time for each activity |



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