

PIDP 3340

Collaborative Learning in the College Classroom



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Presentation Observations

Assignment Bundling - A Small Step in the Classroom Toward High Performance Teams

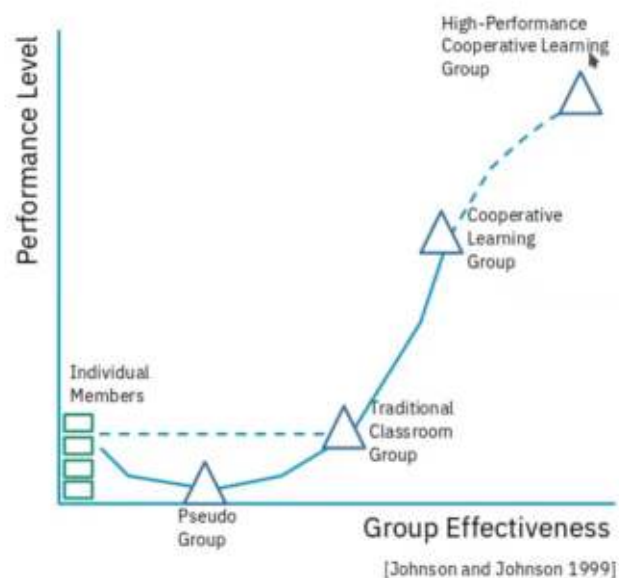
Introduction

The purpose of the assignment is to reflect on the observation of a recorded presentation by another student in the PIDP 3340 course. I chose to reflect on 'Three Types of Learning Teams', which was presented by Gordon Broom on Friday May 30th, 2025.

Gordon's presentation was my first introduction to the group tiers described in "Making Cooperative Learning Work" (Johnson & Johnson 1999), which are:

- Individual Members
- Psuedo Groups
- Cooperative Learning Groups

Here's an image from his presentation that illustrates the group categories described above and their effectiveness.



[Source: (Broom, 2025)]

A Summary

I found much of the summarized script useful (and enjoyed the video). Here are some of the key points

Why Discuss Cooperative Learning Teams

- Cooperative learning groups are more performant than individual members or traditional classroom groups
- Importance of teamwork in industry and improving psychological health
- Collaborative learning is not a zero-sum game and is a big part of indigenization and relationality
- Emphasizes learning in relation to other students and ties everything together

Types of Groups

- Informal groups: ad hoc, task-based, and disbanded quickly
- Formal groups: assigned by instructor, may have some thought put into assignment, and last for a lesson to a term
- Cooperative base groups: formal, assigned by instructor, designed to last for years, and focus on interdependence and long-term relationships

Characteristics of Cooperative Learning Groups

- Heterogeneous experience brings more than the sum of individual parts
- Improves understanding through debate and discussion
- Makes learners process and synthesize information instead of rote memorization
- Fosters motivation, and emotional and social growth

Care and Feeding of Cooperative Learning Groups

- Avoid student-selected groups as they tend to be homogeneous
- Use random or instructor-assigned grouping methods to promote diversity
- Keep group size small (max 6, ideally 4 or less) to encourage interaction and prevent hiding
- Teach cooperative skills: forming, functioning, formulating, and fermenting

Cooperative Skills

- Forming: organizing the group and establishing norms
- Functioning: managing the group's efforts and maintaining effective working relationships
- Formulating: providing mental processes for deeper understanding and stimulating higher quality reasoning strategies
- Fermenting: stimulating reconceptualization, cognitive conflict, and communication of rationales

The Problem of Encouraging Effective Group Formation

One problem stood out in Gordon's presentation. For an instructor, relying on students to form connections with each other late in the course timeline is ineffective, as evidenced by the instructor's anecdote about two students exchanging contact information on the last day of classes before the final.

"This is the last class before the final! They should have done this in week 1!" ~ Gordon Broom

Not only are the students likely to be unaware of the social 21st century skills they need to form effective groups, but they are highly unlikely to form such groups themselves, as evidenced again by the instructor's observations that 'student-formed' groups tend to be homogeneous, when diversity in group composition is more beneficial in terms of high-performance outcomes, at least after the group is familiar enough or incentivized enough to bond effectively.

In short, it is difficult to get students to interact with one another in ways that are conducive to forming gold standard, high performance cooperative groups.

One reason could be that forcing group behavior, in which asking or demanding that 'storming' [read rivaling] group participants support one another and cooperate is only by convention acceptable on sport teams and paid work teams (example: law enforcement partnerships, paramedics). For an instructor to enforce or demand supportive cooperation from classroom participants could be viewed as unorthodox and possibly even risky, in terms of job security.

So the question seems to be how to solve the problem of incentivizing students to connect with one another and collaborate and cooperate in ways that can increase the probability of formation of high-performance gold-standard groups among graduates, class participants, etc...

A Solution: Assignment Bundling

There are likely many answers to such a question. One should expect, for example, at the ivy league level, academic culture – right through from fraternities and clubs to 'secret societies' – encourages behaviors that lead to high-performance gold-standard groups. Such institutional cultural level solutions, however, which in many cases are the result of interwoven influences over centuries of historical happenstance, might be too expansive or culturally distinct for the college instructor level. Incentive alignment is possibly something that is more practical, in terms of implementation.

What I propose, I'm going to call 'assignment bundling.' 'Assignment bundling' involves grouping sets of assignments and assigning them to groups with specific criteria that promote participation and collaboration.

For example, and forgive me if the example is lacking as I'm imagining this on the spot, students could be assigned a bundle of 9 assignments, each with 3 parts. The criteria could state that after completing the first part of any assignment, the student must exchange the second part of his or her assignment with another student in his group; and after completing the second part, do the same with the third; such that, by the time the assignment bundle is completed, each student has completed only 1 part of each assignment, and had to trade, at different time intervals, 6 assignment parts. To make the bundle even more interesting (and effective), the final grouping of assignment parts controlled by each student could be relevant in some mildly challenging way that is perhaps related to course material. The instructor, then, could evaluate the collective work against a secret key, awarding full marks only if the students correctly arranged the assignment parts.

The intuition is that a thoughtfully designed mildly puzzling 'assignment bundle' might incentivize students to work together cooperatively in a way that both optimizes the achievement of learning outcomes and promotes interactively, intermittently, and across a variety of different student groupings (more bundles of

different groups), higher performance group behavior. Furthermore, the positive effects of such a strategy could be enhanced and leveraged if the students were made aware of the external goals of the strategy with appropriate course/project material.

An Implementation

Assignment bundling might sound confusing, or anyway unorthodox – and that is fine, since I’ve just made it up in my head – but, I’m sure there many instructors who could create similar assignments or implement similar strategies that achieve more or less the same effect, which is to incentivize students to group together and then work together cooperatively to solve a puzzle, while completing course related assignments, in a fun and challenging way that achieves the objective of ‘nudging’ students to behave in ways that lean toward high-performance group behavior. ‘Assignment bundling’, may sound like a curriculum writers dream, but it could be one way to achieve that objective. I for one, if I teach, will certainly be considering it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Gordon Broom’s presentation, titled “Three Types of Learning Teams”, emphasizes the significance of cooperative learning for high-performance outcomes. Through a summary of the presentation and an analysis of the challenges of encouraging effective group formation, this paper identifies the need for innovative strategies to promote collaborative learning.

The proposed “assignment bundling” approach offers a potential solution, leveraging the power of cooperative learning to achieve both course-related learning outcomes and the development of high-performance group behavior.

By implementing such strategies, instructors can create a learning environment that fosters the skills and behaviors necessary for success in today’s collaborative workplaces. Ultimately, this reflection underscores the value of continued exploration and innovation in teaching practices to support the development of high-performance groups among students.

References

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/243775553_Making_cooperative_learning_work/]

Broom, Gordon J. 2025. “Three Types of Cooperative Learning Teams.” <https://camosun-ca.zoom.us/rec/share/rHFXbN44sAnflAdXmRJ2ZCVR4ud8p62wdNSE1uyKyybYwi-ocl-HPHt1umvvET5i.1mVcjXaSlwc0-ZQW?pwd=EVNfaB03KRzAEVDMZwynm8JhYZGPOB06>.

AI Models Used in Report

The ideas, structure, writing, and editing in this paper were performed by the author. Various AI models were used in collecting data, verifying data, and formatting various arguments.

- GPT 4.1 Mini (2025-04-14)
- Llama 3.1 8B
- Meta Llama 4 Maverick
- Meta Llama 4 Scout
- Mixtral
- Qwen 2.5 72B a22b
- Qwen 14B