

A2.2

Inclusion at the University of Worcester



Teach inclusively Being inclusive in Small Group Teaching

What?

Create an environment of trust and respect.

How?

Invite the group to agree ground rules for discussion sessions, such as not talking over each other, and putting mobile phones aside.

Why?

This ensures that students from different educational backgrounds know what behaviour is expected and gives students the opportunity to say what works best for them. Getting students to collectively determine the rules helps engage students. Mobile phones can be a distraction in the classroom and requires protocols for minimizing disruptions.¹ By permitting students to develop the rules themselves, you will improve student engagement and likely observe greater compliance.

Consider the setting.

Think about the accessibility of the room and how it is arranged to facilitate learning activities. Be prepared to request an alternative room and/or to move furniture around where possible. Consider whether for some activities, you can use space outside of the classroom and/or virtual online space.

You need to ensure that students with mobility difficulties and wheelchair users can fully participate with other group members. Students with hearing impairments, attention difficulties and those who don't have English as a first language may find it difficult to understand what is being said if there is too much background noise, so consider providing alternative quiet spaces for smaller group discussions or agreeing appropriate 'rules of engagement' during discussions may be preferable.



What?

Think about how students will take/obtain a record of important points.

How?

Depending on the nature of the session, it may be appropriate to permit personal digital recordings. You could consider taking photos of the white board for sharing with the group or appoint students to take and share generic notes.

Why?

Fostering collaborative learning makes good sense and benefits all students. Understanding and anticipating the specific learning needs of students who are disadvantaged in taking notes or information processing is important for students with disabilities or those for whom English is not their first language.

Plan small-group discussion tasks.

Plan tasks in advance and provide materials to prepare ahead of time.

Ask that a student in the group volunteers to read the task out to the rest of the group.

Encourage students to engage in group discussion.

Plan some questions to ask during the session and encourage group participation in answering.

This provides an opportunity for students to prepare and increases the chance of students contributing. Some students, given adequate time to prepare, may gain more confidence and contribute more in the group discussions.

This helps to ensure that all members understand the task before they start, mitigating against misreading by those with literacy difficulties.

Group discussions provide opportunities for students to better engage with their content, gain a variety of perspectives, and get to know their classmates better.

Some students may say little or nothing during classes and lack the confidence to answer questions posed to them directly and individually, but may find confidence when contributing as part of a group of students. By allowing them to work within a group, it may help students to gain confidence in voicing their ideas and therefore help them grow as critical thinkers.

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What?

Set clear expectations for group work activity.

How?

Explain the purpose of the activity and discuss ground rules.² Make it clear what skills and attributes you are assessing and how this links to the module learning outcomes.

Anticipate any adjustments required to accommodate disabled students.

Why?

Students from some cultural backgrounds may not understand the value of learning with other students and have little experience of it.

If you are clear about this, it is easier to make adjustments for a diverse group of students, if required and to offer additional assistance and guidance in developing any skills that will be assessed.

Assign group members and roles.

Assign groups on a randomised basis, or pair friends and then combine them to form groups.³ but try to ensure a diverse mix of backgrounds and personalities. You may want to use your knowledge of the students to allocate roles such as a chair, a note-taker and a meeting organiser if you think they may struggle to get started on this. Advise that outcomes from meetings should be recorded in writing by a nominated person and circulated, rather than just agreed verbally.

This will maximise opportunities to increase students' global and cultural understanding, as well as their communication skills. Having clear roles from the outset may help to alleviate some of the anxiety about group interaction and dynamics. In diverse groups there is a higher likelihood that some students may dominate and others feel excluded. There may also be cultural reasons why some students find certain dynamics challenging.

Some students may have difficulties taking notes and following conversations where several people are speaking, or may have social anxiety which makes it difficult for them to alert others when clarification is required. They may leave a meeting with an unclear idea or record of the next steps if this is not agreed and clarified in writing.



What?

Monitor progress if groups are working together on a project.

How?

Ask groups for feedback and updates, or monitor their interactions if group work takes place within class time. Ensure students know that they can speak to you about any issues regarding the progress of the group work.

Why?

Early intervention can prevent the group from floundering and wasting time. This will prevent them from feeling isolated and you will be able to help resolve any issues if needed.

Encourage disability disclosure.

Discuss potential issues that may affect communication or participation in group work with disabled students in advance. The Disability and Dyslexia Service (<https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/>) can provide advice on individual cases and has guidance on disclosure here: <https://www2.worc.ac.uk/disabilityanddyslexia/disclosing-a-disability.html>.

Deaf students, for example, may need to see other students' mouths, and may have difficulty with more than one person speaking at once. Students on the autism spectrum may have difficulty with social interaction and require greater structure. It's important to help the student to decide whether or not they want to disclose their disability to the group, and how best to do this.^{4,5,6}

¹ Anshari, M., Almunawar, M.N., Shahrill, M. et al. (2017) 'Smartphones usage in the classrooms: Learning aid or interference?' *Education and Information Technologies* 22: pp3063-3079.

² Scudamore, R. 2013. Engaging home and international students: a guide for new lecturers. [Online]. [Accessed April 2021]. Available from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/engaging-home-and-international-students-guide-new-lecturers>

³ Kelly, P. (2008), 'Achieving desirable group-work outcomes through the group allocation process', *Team Performance Management*, Volume: 14 Issue: 1/2, pp. 22-38.

⁴ Getzel, E.E. and Thoma, C.A. 2008. Experiences of college students with disabilities and the

importance of self-determination in Higher Education settings. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*. 31(2), pp.77-84

⁵ Kerschbaum, S. Eisenman, L. and Jones, J. (2017) [eds] *Negotiating Disability: Disclosure and Higher Education* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. This edited collection has a number of essays which address various aspects of disability disclosure, such as the benefits and challenges of doing so, complicating factors and studen

⁶ Cesarei, A. (2015) Psychological Factors That Foster or Deter the Disclosure of Disability by University Students *Psychological Reports: Disability & Trauma* Volume: 116 issue: 3, page(s): 665-673.

With thanks to Dr Jacqueline Houghton and Jenny Brady of the University of Leeds, and Dr Wendy Miller and Priska Schoenborn of Plymouth University, for allowing us to use and adapt their series of guides:

<https://inclusiveteaching.leeds.ac.uk/>; <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/your-university/teaching-and-learning/inclusivity>.

Weblinks reviewed and updated: April 2021



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