Best Practice for Virtual Group Work

- Use group quiz to motivate student to complete the assigned readings
  Example: In an introductory sociology class, students took quizzes on their assigned reading on that day. The quizzes consisted of three to five open-ended questions. After individual students answered the questions, they joined in their groups designated by the instructor to discuss their answers. Then they modified their answers in individual quizzes. Finally, one quiz was randomly selected from each group and a group grade was assigned to everyone in the group. The study found out that group quizzes motivated students to complete the assigned readings before the class. They also developed positive attitudes toward the course materials and their peers. (Slusser & Erickson, 2006)

- Form paired group if your course enrollment is not large.
  Example: Evidence from a literature class showed that students working in pairs had better performance than students working in small groups with three or more members. The instructor reported that students in paired group work learned the mutual respect and collaboration as well. (Knight, 2007)

- Assign roles in group work; if possible, give the roles that need extra work some incentive
  Example: In a study done in a financial accounting class at the U.S. Air Force Academy, students were assigned into small groups with four to six members. Each group chose a leader by themselves. The leaders were responsible for group collaboration and performance. At the same time, group leaders were given extra points for their leadership work. Results showed that groups with incentivized leaders had significantly better performance and efficiency than the control groups. (Ferrante, Green & Forster, 2006)

- Ensure the verbal immediacy in virtual group work
  Verbal immediacy is the verbal behaviors that bring students and instructors close to lessen the psychological distance over the Internet. It includes:
  - initializing discussions
  - asking questions
  - addressing students by name
  - using inclusive pronouns
  - responding quickly
  - encouraging student participation and engagement
  Studies have found out that verbal immediacy is positively related with students’ attendance, learning attitudes and perceived learning. (Baker & Rynearson, 2006)

- Define group etiquette at the beginning of the group work
  Sample (Shea, 1994, p. 35-45):
  1. “Remember the human.
     Remember there is a real person communicating with you and only say things online that you would say to them in person.
  2. Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life.
     Be ethical. Breaking the law is bad netiquette.
  3. Know where you are in cyberspace
     Netiquette varies from domain to domain. What is acceptable in one area may not be in another.
4. Respect other people’s time and bandwidth.
   Ensure the time people will spend reading your postings is not wasted. Do not send repetitive
   information that would use up bandwidth.

5. Make yourself look good online.
   Know what you are talking about and make sense. Make sure your notes are clear and logical.
   Spelling and grammar are important for clarity of messages. Only use appropriate vocabulary
   and avoid profanity.

   Don’t be afraid to share what you know. If you have posed questions that you received
   excellent answers for, compile the responses and share them with the group.

7. Help keep flame wars under control.
   Flaming is expressing an opinion with (typically negative) emotion. Flaming is acceptable
   provided it does not turn into a flame war where two or three people direct angry messages at
   one another and control the content of the discussion.

8. Respect other people’s privacy.
   Do not read other people’s email.

9. Don’t abuse your power.
   Knowing more than others or having more user rights than others does not give you the right
   to take advantage of others.

10. Be forgiving of other people’s mistakes.
    If it is a minor error you may choose to ignore it. If you decide to inform someone of their
    mistake, point it out politely and privately.

References

presented at the 2006 EDUCAUSE Conference, Dallas, Texas.

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