Group Roles

The establishment of group roles is important to students who do not understand the concept of group dynamics. If students are able to define their own roles and successfully demonstrate understanding, then assigning these roles may not be necessary. Personal experience has shown that many times students find themselves unable to actively participate as a group, and therefore the establishment of clearly defined group roles is important. There is also the benefit of allowing students who may for one reason or another fall into the same role every time that they do group activities to be given the opportunity to work outside of this role.

The types of roles given to students vary depending on the subject material being taught and what the goal of the collaboration is. For example, doing a group lab in Chemistry is quite different from developing a presentation on Nazi Germany in World History class. The following list of group roles has been compiled from various sources. Roles that serve the same purpose in the group are shown together. It is perfectly acceptable to turn one job into two or three as long as all of these types of jobs are represented in the group.

It is easy to put popular outspoken leader types into the facilitator or presenter role or the girl with exemplary handwriting into the recorder role, but this should be avoided to ensure that every student has the opportunity to find their strengths and improve on their weaknesses.

Finally, have fun with the names of these roles. A history teacher may use political job descriptions like president (facilitator), secretary (recorder) or speaker of the house (presenter). Collaboration is a widely used business tool and students should be given the opportunity early on to experience group activities.

Group Facilitator/Coordinator/Gate Keeper/Group Chair

This person could be termed the leader of the group. Their assigned goal is to act as facilitator and to make sure that every student has been given the chance to participate. If two members of the group speak at the same time, this person will choose who speaks first. If a student is not participating, they can encourage them by asking them questions and about their opinions. If delegation is necessary, then it is this person’s job to do this.

Note: Some students may be wary of this job because they have a difficult time being in control of others. If you find a student is uncomfortable with this job, split its importance between two individuals.

Timekeeper/Energizer/Standard Setter

This person is in charge of keeping track of time. They are a member of the group who is an active participant, but their main goal is finishing the assignment in the given
amount of time. This student should estimate the amount of time it takes to finish each
task and mark them off as they are completed. If it seems like a certain part of the activity
is taking too much time, they are responsible for getting things moving faster. If the
group has lost focus, the timekeeper needs to bring them back on track. The facilitator
may be leading discussions, but the timekeeper can tell the facilitator to speed up or slow
down.

**Recorder/Summarizer**

This person's job is to record the group's activities while being an active
contributor to the group. They may be asked to create posters, write lab reports, or just
take general notes of the group's proceedings. They may also be asked to summarize what
was accomplished in the group for a better final product.

**Researcher/Runner/Procedural Technician/Information Seeker**

This person's job is to obtain information or supplies from outside the group. If a
word needs defining they will look it up. If equipment is needed they will go elsewhere to
find it. They may use any sources or materials to help their group be successful. This
person must also be an active participant in the group and therefore must obtain
information or supplies quickly and bring them back for immediate use.

**Evaluator/Critic/Group Observer/Checker**

This person is responsible for making sure that every member of the group
participates and completes their assigned tasks. If the final product of the group falls
short of assigned expectations they must be able to give a reason why. They may be
asked to grade other group members. As a critic, this person can make statements such as,
"this part of the task isn’t working as well as it could and maybe it would be improved by
doing ______." This person is in no way a rat or a cop but more like a group member
who wants everyone to do their job and can help the facilitator promote this.

**Presenter/Demonstrator/Speaker**

This person only exists in a group whose final product requires presentation to
other groups. It is this person’s job to represent their group. This person must work
closely with all group members and express the views of the group as a whole, not
personal opinion. If a concept needs demonstrating, this person is responsible for making
sure other groups understand its purpose.

**Unwanted Group Roles**

The following are roles that should be avoided and if seen by the classroom
teacher highly discouraged. Any one of these roles will cause the group dynamic to break
down and cause a standstill in group production.

**Aggressor**

Attacks group members, makes others feel like what this contribute is
unimportant.
Blocker
   Makes work impossible by always changing the topic or distracting group members by causing disruption.

Recognition Seeker
   Always wants to contribute. Talks over other students. Believes their ideas are above and beyond all others.

Self-confessor
   Wants to tell about feelings that are not related to the group goal.

Dominator
   Manipulates other group members. Wants to be in control. The Facilitator role can become this if the student takes their role to the extreme.

Help Seeker
   Wants sympathy from the group.

Special interest pleader
   Wants to assert prejudice by using stereotypes.

References


