

Effective Small Group Strategies That Foster Greater Learning Outcomes in the Classroom

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Previous research has demonstrated that the traditional lecture method, in which the professor talks and the students passively listen, dominate the college and university classrooms across the US. However, if the objectives of a course are to promote long-term retention of information, to motivate students toward further learning, to allow students to apply information in new settings, or to develop students' thinking skills, then discussion is preferable to lecture (McKeachie et al. 1986). Collaborative learning is one of the most common strategies employed to promote active learning with good reason. Small groups can stimulate critical thinking, expose students to an expanded array of perspectives and provide opportunities for students to develop collaboration skills, both learning from and contributing to the expertise and insights of others. This article will explore the nature of collaborative learning, the empirical research on its use, the common obstacles and barriers that give rise to faculty members' resistance to interactive instructional techniques, effective strategies to enhance learning outcomes and how enlightened faculty can make real the promise of collaborative learning.