

STUDENT REFLECTIONS ON GROUP WORK TO ENCOURAGE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This research uses Transformative Learning approaches to understand how students' preconceived notions on a topic and attitudes toward group work affect and their engagement in the subject matter. The concept of sustainable development can evoke strong emotional reactions and differing opinions from students, so peer-based, student teamwork learning models could promote a more well-rounded learning experience to help students better understand sustainable development around the world. Therefore, this study uses cooperative, collaborative, and transformative group learning models (Moore, 2005). Seventy students from an introduction level Regional Geography of the World Course, with differences in age, gender and ethnicity, participated in the study. At the beginning of the course, students completed surveys to assess their knowledge and interest in different world regions, and their attitudes toward the importance of sustainable development. Students were then asked to select a country and examine two sustainable development topics, within that country. Next, students were grouped in teams to present their findings (Fink, 2004). Upon completion of their group presentations, students reflected on the experience in an interview lead by undergraduate student research assistants, or by writing a reflection essay (Mezirow, 1997; Fouberg, 2013; Cranton, 2016). These reflections were analyzed to identify factors that influenced students' perceptions toward different world regions and sustainable development in those regions, as well their self-awareness of the role of group work in the learning process.

The presentation begins with an explication of the influence of transformative group learning models on the research project design. Presenters will share the results from the analysis of students' perceptions on the role of group work in the learning process and factors that influenced their attitudes toward the subject matter. Next, the undergraduate student researchers will present on their role in the project and their personal transformative learning experience. Finally, the audience will form small groups to think about how their students' preconceived notions about the subject matter and their feelings toward group work can hinder engagement. The presentation will end with a discussion of strategies to increase student engagement, mindfulness and improve student experiences with group work.

SELECT REFERENCES

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