COOPERATIVE GROUPING STRATEGIES

Planned Groups:

Grouping strategies can be used to create groups with equal or unequal numbers of participants depending on the needs of the teacher. These grouping strategies should be planned in advance to correlate with the number of students in the class.

Thematic Groups: Relating to content or learner interest areas and reinforcing multiple intelligences

Cars

Hot Wheels or Tonka toys make excellent grouping manipulatives and appeal to those who possess Bodily Intelligence! Learners randomly select from a predetermined number of objects.

Suggestions for grouping include:
Color of Vehicle
Type of Vehicle (i.e. sportscar, pickup, van, SUV, emergency vehicle, etc.)
Function (civic service, construction, family)
Model (Ford, Chevrolet, Jeep, Volkswagon, etc. OR foreign vs. domestic)
Physical Characteristics (sun roof, hatchback, # of doors)

Puzzles

You can use pieces from professionally crafted puzzles or you can create your own puzzles that relate to the lesson content. This strategy will appeal to/strengthen the Logical/Analytical and Visual/Spatial Intelligences.

Suggestions include:
Jigsaw puzzles (with appropriate number of pieces to assemble)
Photographs/Xerox copies mounted to cardboard and cut into various pieces (laminate to reuse)
Comic strips (mount to cardboard and cut into various pieces; laminate to reuse)

Flowers

Fresh flowers laminated via cold process make nice manipulatives as do color photographs of flowers and can strengthen the Naturalist Intelligence.

Suggestions for grouping include:
Type of Flower (rose, iris, pansy, daffodil, zinnia, daisy, vinca, impatiens, tulip, etc.)
Color of Flower
Stage of Bloom (bud, full bloom, etc.)

Content Review

Check for understanding of previously delivered content by writing questions and answers on index cards. Students must mingle as a large group to find the person(s) with the corresponding card(s). This strategy strengthens the verbal/linguistic intelligence and allows the teacher to identify key areas that will need to be retaught prior to formal assessment.

Leaves

Similar to flowers, laminated leaves make nice manipulatives and can enhance the Naturalist Intelligence.

Suggestions for grouping include:
Leaf Type (tree, flowering plant, fern, non-flowering plant, etc.)
Tree Leaves (Oak, Pecan, Maple, etc. - there are also variations within some species)
Non-Flowering Plants (palm, rhododendron, airplane, etc.)
Flowering Plants (see Flowers for types)
Seasonal Leaves (spring, autumn)

Participant Information
Collect participant information at the beginning of the semester and group students according to hobbies, interests, or preferences (i.e. favorite color, food, sport, hobby, etc.)

Class Roster Groups

Rotating Assignments

You can assign equal numbers of students by task (Tasks A, B, C, D, E, F, etc.) and then select one student from each task group to create groups (A, B, C, D, E, F). Groups can be created with 3, 4, 5, 6 or more learners respectively depending upon the number of tasks each group must perform and the number of learners in the class.

Random Assignments

Instructors can make group assignments prior to the beginning of class by randomly selecting student names from the class roster. Group sizes can vary according to the nature of the group work to be accomplished and according to the number of learners in the large group.

Alphabetical Groups

Family group names are an easy but overused method of grouping learners. An alternative strategy involves arranging students alphabetically based on the last letter of the first name. This option prevents the cultural domination that can occur when using the traditional method of alphabetical grouping.

Number Groups

The most classic example of this method involves "counting off" learners into 1's, 2's, 3's, 4's, or A's, B's, C's, D's, etc. Another method involves assigning each learner a number and then creating even/odd groupings, number range groups (1-4, 5-8, 9-12, etc.), or random number groupings.

Variations on Number Groups
Items students can select from grab bags include:
Card Decks/Uno Cards
Geometric Shapes
Pieces of Candy
Colored Strips of Paper
Colored Toothpicks

Spontaneous Groups

Oftentimes groups will need to be created on short notice to best facilitate learning of the course content. The following are strategies for "spur of the moment" group creation.

Friendship Groups
Allow learners to arrange themselves into groups.

Geographical Groups
Assign learners into groups according to where they are located in the classroom. Another option for secondary students could be making group assignments based on regional location of residence so that scheduling study meetings outside of the traditional school day is easier on the group members.

Common Personal Characteristics:
Birth Month/Astrological Sign
Height (ranges or similarities)
Hair color/length/style
Eye color
Shoe size
Glasses/No Glasses
Watch/No Watch
Same color of socks
Similar shoe types

Electronic Resources for Grouping Strategies

Boyle, Colleen (2001, May). Grouping Strategies
Harvard Education Letter (1998, January/February). Classroom Grouping Terms
Kizlik, Bob (ND). Ability and Instructional Grouping Information
Margerum-Leys, Jon (1999). Grouping of Students
National Middle School Association (ND). Research summary #6: Heterogeneous grouping
Steele, Kimberly (2001.) Tips for Grouping Students
The Teacher's Desk (1997). Forming Cooperative Groups Using Puzzles
Valentino, Catherine (2000). Flexible Grouping