**Session 5: Using Small Group Learning To Engage Students**

**Objectives**

The goal of this session is to stimulate teacher thinking and collaborative discussion about having students work cooperatively together on assignments and projects in small groups. Teachers experience a small group learning experience for themselves that they can in turn adapt and implement in their classrooms.

**Guiding Questions**

* What are the benefits and potential challenges of small group learning?
* What are the key elements to making small group learning successful and how can we ensure they are present in our lessons?
* How can we adapt strategies to the specific content and students in our classrooms?

**At a Glance**

* Introduction – Benefits of Small Group Learning
* Six Hats/Glasses Collaborative Activity and Debrief

**Facilitator Notes**

This session delves into a topic that many teachers may have had a lot of professional development about as well as both positive and negative experiences of trying to execute properly. Encourage teachers to share ideas, strategies and thoughts on how to make these types of learning successful. If teachers are negative about the idea, then focus their attention to the benefits. Often small learning activities as well as projects require more “up front” time – for teachers to properly plan and prepare, but usually have less-draining executions and follow-up than traditional whole-class instruction.

Additional slides and materials are included at the end of PowerPoint that can be substituted or added as desired.

**Materials**

If possible: Hats or sunglasses in the following colors (a set for each group of teachers) – white, red, yellow, green, purple, blue

Sunglasses available at amazon.com: <https://www.amazon.com/Edge-I-Wear-Sunglasses-certified-Lead-5402RA-SET-8/dp/B00HCNZJGS/>

Handout 5.1 (Six Hat Thinking Directions)

Handout 5.2 (Article for discussion)

Handout 5.3 (Resources for Managing Collaborative Small Group Activities)

Handout 5.4 (Teacher Reflection Questions)

Handout 5.5 (Graphing How Students Spend Their Time in My Classes) – *optional*

**Procedure**

**Set-up:** Teachers should sit at tables in groups of 4 to facilitate quick movement to first activity.

**Introduction (3 minutes)**

Facilitator briefly summarizes benefits of small group learning (Slides 3-4).

**Group Learning Activity (20-25 minutes)**

Facilitator explains the 6 glasses (hat) thinking activity, going over with all participants the role of each of the 6 colored glasses or hats. Then, participants will receive Handout 5.1 and 5.2, and complete the small group activity outlined in Handout 5.1 using the sample article from Handout 5.2 [free feel to substitute a different article].

**Group Learning Debrief (5-10 minutes)**

Discuss with participants the benefits and potential challenges of this activity. A big benefit is the fact that it is a low floor-high ceiling activity, where every student can feel successful. For example, even a student challenged by the terms or facts in the article can have an emotional reaction to the idea presented in the article (red glasses) or have something to wonder about (blue glasses). A potential challenge is being able to get six students to work collectively or how this can apply to different content areas – encourage teachers (or provide some ideas of your own) to think about how to adapt and customize the activity to fit their content and students. Ensure you have time for the teachers to collectively consider how to apply this work to their own teaching.

**Addressing Challenges of Small Group Learning Through Careful Planning and Preparation**

Facilitator refers to take-home handout on managing collaborative small group activities and explains that s/he will briefly highlight some important principles for increasing the odds of success in using small group learning.

Slide 13 emphasizes the need for planning how small group activities address the learning targets for students

Slide 14 emphasizes the need to consider structural dimensions of small group learning (see slide)

Slide 15 gives suggestions for getting students ready for collaborative learning

Slide 16 give suggestions for beginning more simply when new to implementing small group learning and increasing complexity over time

Slide 17 discusses the important teacher roles during small group learning

Slide 18 reminds teachers of small group activities they have experienced in prior sessions of the series that they can use as models in their own classrooms

Slide 19 mentions other available small group activities to try out

Slide 20 (optional) – a drawing to give away the colored glasses used in the activity

**Individual Teacher Reflection Time (5 minutes)**

Facilitator summarizes session briefly and asks teachers to spend a few minutes individually reflecting on questions on Handout 5.4.