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Working Groups as Classroom Management Style

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Working Groups as Classroom Management Style

The practice and the need it addresses

Improving student confidence, satisfaction, and participation

There is a need at UNLV to improve student retention across disciplines, which can be done by improving students' confidence in their performance, improving their satisfaction with classes and their major selections, and providing welcoming and open spaces for participation and inclusion. To be "Different, Daring, and Diverse," students need space to work out ideas with their peers, aided by the supervision and guidance of faculty members.



Working groups is a classroom management style that engages students in small group and pair work during class time. Reserving class time (15-20 minutes) to start homework, work on problem sets, discuss readings, or engage in course concepts leads to positive educational effects.

Evidence this practice benefits UNLV Students

Spring 2017 pilot studies

BIOL 453 – Immunology: 15 minute homework time in pairs and small groups at the end of each class.

Students in the working groups class were more likely to self-report:

- **Enjoyment** of the class
- Greater **interest** in science
- Feeling more **comfortable** in class
- **Positive perceptions** of the course

Female students in the working groups class **reported increased perceived self-competence in science.**

COM 409 – The Rhetorical Tradition: 15-20 minutes discussion about that day's assigned readings

Students in the working groups class were more likely to self-report:

- Increased **confidence** sharing their opinions
- Greater ability to **pay attention**
- Increased ability to **think for themselves**
- Feeling **less likely to fall behind** in class
- A **strong sense of community** with their classmates

All differences were statistically significant at the $p=0.05$ level (less than a 5% probability that these results are due to chance).

Resources and where to find them

Campus workshops and online resources

UNLV's Instructional Development and Research program will be offering two sessions about working groups in the spring 2018 semester. In **January**, the program will host a panel discussing the benefits of working groups. In **March**, the program will offer a workshop to help faculty employ working groups in their classrooms.

"Working groups" goes by other names. ReadWriteThink.org has lesson plans for implementing "Literature Circles" and FacultyFocus.org has articles on "Reading Circles" and "Problem-Based Learning." Interested faculty can also reach out to emma.bloomfield@unlv.edu for more information.

Working groups				
	Summarizer	Theorizer	Quoter	Researcher
Group 1	Pierre, Rachel P.	Avery	Daisy	Mikey
Group 2	Edgar	Brianna, Sierra	Kristen	Emily
Group 3	Wendell, Julian	Farwa	Burgandy	Rachel G.
Group 4	Susan	Carrie	Kimberly, Garrett	Amanda
Group 5	Kelsie, Hilary	Alyssa	Emma	Raindy
Group 6	Justin	Alondra	Pat	Shelby, Robert

PPT slide showing daily sorted working groups used in COM 409. Students saw this posted at the front of the room upon entering the classroom, so they knew where to sit and who was in their group.

How other UNLV teachers might adopt this practice

Classrooms of any size, in any discipline can adopt this practice

Working groups is a classroom management style that can work in any classroom, in any discipline, of any size. Because the technique involves small group work, it provides an opportunity for everyone, even in large enrollment courses, to participate in discussion. Both BIOL 453 and COM 409 used working groups for 15-20 minutes each class, showing that the management style can be easily incorporated without consuming all, or even the bulk, of class time.

A STEM class can implement working groups similar to BIOL 453 by giving students time to help each other (peer instruction) with homework and, importantly, connect with the instructor to clarify concepts and check comprehension of the day's material before leaving the classroom.

A humanities class can implement working groups similar to COM 409 by allowing students to discuss that day's readings in small groups before sharing ideas with the full class. This provides students a low stakes environment to work out their understandings with peers before sharing out, thus building confidence and fostering a classroom community.