

Title: **Making Groupwork Work**

Presenter: **Lucy Yeatman**
University of Liverpool

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

1. Describe the links between building a learning community, student well-being and a positive learning environment
2. Identify the risks that can make a student collaborative project a negative experience for the students involved
3. Explain how the jigsaw method can be utilised to break down social barriers
4. Analyse ways in which the jigsaw method can be adapted to problem solving project work with undergraduates
5. Design an enquiry based learning collaborative project for their discipline based on the jigsaw method.

Session Outline

It is easy to embrace the idea that student group work is a good solution to develop communication skills and improve academic performance by enabling peer feedback and peer support. But the reality of group work for students can be stressful and difficult and in some cases a deeply negative experience (Hillyard, Gillespie and Littig 2010). Social class and racial prejudice are not strangers to the classroom and in England and Wales students experience of education is still profoundly affected by class and racial background (Reay 2017 and Kulz 2017) As bell hooks so eloquently describes, many people come to higher education not believing that they 'have no voice, that they have nothing to say that is worthy of being heard'.

I teach undergraduate law students in a law clinic setting where students work in small teams of 5 or 6 to provide legal advice to members of the public who cannot afford a lawyer. My experience has taught me that students often struggle in a group students can be reluctant to work in groups, members of the group sometimes fall out with one another, one or two students can dominate reinforcing class and gender inequalities or the group simply divides up the work so that they can complete the task without actually discussing or collaborating. The jigsaw classroom was developed in the 1970s to tackle problems of racial tension and lack of integration in primary school classrooms (Aronson and Patnoe 2011). I have adapted the jigsaw method to help my students learn collaboratively and build strong relationships over the term. This workshop is therefore designed to discuss some of the reasons why asking students to collaborate can go wrong and to explore ways to designing projects to build strong co-operative student communities.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Short introduction (2 mins)
- An activity using Menti.com to share ideas about the benefits and drawbacks of student groups (10 mins)
- A jigsaw reading activity in small groups to explore reasons why some groups fail to collaborate. (20 mins)
- A brief explanation/presentation of how we have adapted the idea of jigsaw in the Liverpool Law Clinic (10 mins)
- Group activity for participants to design an enquiry based learning project for their discipline which could be delivered using jigsaw groups. (30 mins)
- Presentations of projects designed (15 mins)
- Finishing comments and thank you (3 mins)

References

- Aronson E and Patnoe S, 2011, *Cooperation in the Classroom: The jigsaw method*, 3rd Edition, Pinter and Martin, London
- Hillyard, Gillespie and Littig (2010) *University students' attitudes about learning in small groups after frequent participation* *Active Learning in Higher Education* 11(1) 9 – 20
- hooks, b 2010 *Teaching Critical Thinking, Practical Wisdom* Routledge, NewYork
- Reay,D. 2017, *Miseducation. Inequality, education and the working classes*, Policy Press, Bristol
- Kulz, C. 2017 *Factories for Learning*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.