

Assessing the Ethics of Group Projects

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Group projects constitute a significant part of the academic workload in high school. Used in almost every class, group projects serve not only as a means to consolidate learning into a poster board or presentation, but they also provide students with an opportunity to develop vital skills in cooperation and communication. However, group projects often lead to the unequal sharing of workload, with at least one member not contributing enough during work times. With the assumption that grades are earned on the basis of equitable hard work, this lack of effort highlights a budding unfairness. Are group projects necessary to supplement learning despite some students assuming that others will pick up the slack?

On one hand, group projects contribute to creativity, advanced communication, and career development. Group projects, which gather people from various perspectives, surface new ideas as members are inspired by each other. It builds communication skills as it requires group members to listen actively, articulate sophisticated ideas, and clearly express their opinion. The process of resolving conflict and disputes between members encourages the cultivation of empathy, respect, and a sense of cooperation. These skills are beneficial for interpersonal relationships as well as future career development. In essence, teamwork, proactive communication, and persuasive presentation skills, reflect the importance of group projects.

On the other hand, group projects often lead to the creation of a piece of work that has been unequally contributed to. Scheduling conflicts make it difficult for everyone to find time to collaborate, leading to those with more time and a typically greater commitment to academics taking on the bulk of the work. This can create resentment between members since each member of the group, regardless of their effort, will receive the same grade. Furthermore, if a group member puts all their effort only into their portion of work, and the other members do not end up contributing, the responsible member will suffer the same consequences as those who did poor work or none at all. Receiving the same grade for a group project is not fair to those who did more or less work than they were responsible for.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the teacher's role in avoiding unequal contribution to group projects?
2. Is it fair to give a reduced grade to a member who contributed less in a project? If so, how can members prove this?
3. Unequal distribution of work in group projects is common even in the real world. Should group projects be maintained to help prepare for such situations?