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Ten Steps to Successful Group Research Projects

Group Investigation in particular encourages students' initiative and responsibility for their work, as individuals, as members of study groups, and as members of an entire class.

Sharan & Sharan
Cooperative Learning in Social Studies

Step 1

Students and teacher generate a list of research topics based on interest, available resources and connections to the curriculum. Topics are examined for subtopics and attributes.

Step 2

Teacher decides how to form student groups based on selected criteria.

Step 3

Student groups engage in a planning session where they choose a topic, decide on Information Gathering Roles and specify deadlines. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 4

Students conduct research utilizing Information Gathering Roles. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 5

Students take their completed role sheets to the group's planning session where they share information and available resources about the topic. Students select graphic organizers from the Information Processing and Organizing Roles. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 6

Students process and organize information using graphic organizers. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 7

Student groups meet in a preparing session where they discuss their research information, assess group talents, choose a group presentation role, divide up responsibilities and specify a presentation date. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 8

Groups complete the preparations for their presentations. Students and teacher may assess.

Step 9

Groups complete their presentations for the entire class. Teacher assesses.

Step 10

Students complete a final assessment of the entire research project experience.

Step 1

Students and teacher generate a list of research topics based on interest, available resources and connections to the curriculum. Topics are examined for subtopics and attributes.

Think-Pair-Share

When it's time to create a list of possible research topics, it's important that you and your students generate as many topics as possible without any positive or negative feedback about the topic suggestions. This brainstorming session can help produce a topic list far longer and more interesting than any list you could produce alone or get from a textbook.

One way to help facilitate a list making session is to begin by using the Think-Pair-Share method (Lyman, 1987) before you open the session to random suggestions. First, students think of topics on their own. Next, they share their topic suggestions with another student. The pairs refine and expand their list. Finally, student pairs share their suggestions with the entire group and their ideas are put on a master topic list.

Topic Evaluation Sheet

The next step is to evaluate the suggested topics based on the level of student interest, the amount of available research resources and how the topic is or can be related to what students are currently studying.

Using the Topic Evaluation Sheet on page 13, you can choose to do this step yourself. First, ask your students to tell you their level of interest in each topic and record their responses on the sheet. Next, with sheet in hand, ask your librarian to identify which topics can be readily researched in the library. Finally, determine each topic's connection to your curriculum.

However, working together with your students to evaluate topics will not only help generate enthusiasm for your classroom research projects but also allow your students to begin viewing themselves as researchers.

First, create an overhead transparency of the Topic Evaluation Sheet that has the topic sug-

gestions written in the left-hand column. As you discuss the list, record the level of student interest for each topic. Next, ask students to tell you what they think the connections are between each topic and content area. Refine and expand on their connections. Finally, assign topics to groups of students and do a "library sweep." Set a time limit and have student groups go through the library and list as many resources as they can find that pertain to their assigned topics. Return to class and complete the "Resources Available" column of the Topic Evaluation Sheet. (Inform your librarian or media specialist when you plan to do your "sweep"!)

Topic Breakout Sheet

Once the topics have been evaluated based on interest, available resources and curriculum connections, you may decide the preliminary final list of topics, allow your students to decide the list or do a combination of both.

However, this "final" list is only a preliminary list because the topics that survive the Topic Evaluation Sheet review must be broken into subtopics. Consequently, the final step in creating the final topic list is for you and your students to complete the Topic Breakout Sheet on page 17. By completing a breakout sheet for each topic area, you and your students will not only discover and discard topics that are either too broad or too narrow, but you will also be creating some of the information student groups will need during their planning session in Step 3. (Sample Topic Breakout Sheets are available for your review on pages 14-16.)

Finally, when considering topics and subtopics, it's important to note that older student groups are more capable of researching one entire subtopic with all its attributes while younger student groups will do better if their research is limited to one attribute from one specific subtopic.

Once the breakout sheets are completed, the remaining tasks in Step 1 include creating the final topic list, distributing copies of the list to students and posting the list in the classroom. (Keep the breakout sheets for later!)

Topic Evaluation Sheet

Topic	Resources Available	Student Interest	Curriculum Connection	
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art
	Abundant Adequate Minimal	Yes No Somewhat	Lang. Arts Geography Soc. St./ History	Math Science Music/Art