

The Situation Room

Engaging students by creating an inclusive and collaborative environment is the key to student success. Collaboration allows students to embrace and appreciate each other's individual learning styles. Activities that encourage the learning process in a safe, nonjudgmental arena allow even the most introverted student to become a participant. As a way to encourage collaboration in my classroom, I created The Situation Room, an activity that allows students to problem solve together.

The Set-Up

To begin, I design poster boards with inviting and colorful trim. I attach a page protector on each board so I can insert different situations depending on what unit we are covering. The students are placed into various groups, depending on the type of dynamics I want for each activity. With each Situation Room activity, I rearrange the groups. This allows for a mixture of different learning styles and thought processes. I play the Twilight Zone theme song to let students know they are entering the Situation Room. Each group then looks at the situation that has been inserted into their page protector. Usually this is a critical thinking scenario based on the subject that has been covered. It can be a textual or visual scenario depending on the course. Group members collaborate and discuss their thoughts with one another.

This Situation Room can be performed several different ways to spark different collaborations, thought processes, and learning styles. Here are the various ways I use the Situation Room:

1. Have groups collaboratively tackle their situation. They can move around the classroom and work with each board for an extended activity.
2. Have group members work independently to solve their situation. Each member of the group writes down what he/she believes to be the answer to the scenario. Once all members have their answer, the group allows each person to state his/her view without interruption. They then come to a

consensus on a viewpoint. Or, they can create a new viewpoint based on each group member's interpretation. This model is good for introverts who like to think and analyze prior to group discussion.

3. Provide each group with a stack of different colored sticky notes. The groups move around the classroom and read each situation board, providing answers on the backside of their sticky notes so that no other group can see their answer. At the end of class, each group's answers are revealed and discussed.

Qualitative Feedback

Four weeks into the term, I evaluate the tools and methods I'm using to determine if they are effective. There is always positive feedback on the Situation Room. Students get excited when they hear the Twilight Zone theme come on. Introverted students appreciate having time to think individually before collaborating with peers. Students also enjoy the group competition when using the colored sticky notes.

Conclusion

One of the goals of the Situation Room is to help students feel comfortable asking questions and digging deeper into course information. Being able to hear how others process and interpret information opens the door for deeper collaborative learning. I have found that students appreciate being grouped with new people. It has brought about new study groups and friendships.

The Situation Room promotes collaboration and critical thought. It reinforces an inclusive atmosphere and highlights various ways to approach concepts. Students have even created scenarios for each other to see who could come up with the best scenario that encompassed the concepts being taught!

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