

Puzzled by a Lack of Student Mastery of the Text: Try Jigsaw?

If your students are coming to class without having read the assigned text chapters, consider using the Jigsaw Strategy coupled with weekly double-response homework-check quizzes on No Carbon Required (NCR) paper where students correct their own answers at the very beginning of class. [See *Motivating Students to Read before Lectures: The Double-Response Homework Check*, by Monica Her, Finance, Real Estate and Insurance, *The CELT Letter*, fall 2000, vol. 2, no. 1, at <http://www.csun.edu/~celtact/letter.html>.]

The Jigsaw Strategy

What is Jigsaw? Developed by Elliot Aronson (UC Santa Cruz), Jigsaw is a division-of-labor, group-learning strategy. Each student in a group specializes in one aspect of a learning unit, and teaches it to the others in the group. In the end, all students understand the whole as in a Jigsaw Puzzle that reveals the total picture from assembling the puzzle pieces.

Think of a potluck dinner where everyone divides the labor by bringing one dish, but enjoys eating the whole meal.

Why use Jigsaw? Jigsaw requires students to interact with others, fostering listening skills, speaking skills, and social skills. Moreover, research findings conclude that when we teach something to someone else, our learning is at its highest, so we retain the information best. Teaching requires higher levels of cognition because a teacher must generate examples, analyze and evaluate students' understanding, and create strategies for different learning styles. In addition, Jigsaw reduces the amount of reading required of each student without eliminating content learning. You may remember using a similar strategy to study for exams in graduate school, the age-old study group.

Steps:

1. Classroom arrangement: Moveable chairs and tables are preferred, so students can meet in groups face to face. However, Jigsaw can be done in theatre seating for a short-term turnaround if there is no alternative.
2. Division of material/labor: The instructor assigns and divides the material to be Jigsawed. For instance, a U.S. History professor may use a 33 chapter text and decide that 17 of the chapters will be read by each student (not Jigsawed), and 16 chapters will be Jigsawed in groups of 4 on 4 different occasions. Note that the divisions (in this case chapters) should be independently comprehensible and of similar length and complexity.
3. Directions to students: Students are asked to form groups of 3 to 5, depending upon the content division (I use groups of 4 most of the time). Each student is assigned a part to master independently to determine: (1) key points, and (2) how to teach them. Students meet to teach their portion to group members, followed by an instructor-designed integration task that checks learning of the parts by all.
4. Alternative forms of Jigsaw: Ask students to meet in "expert" groups where all students work to master the same aspect of the unit, then return to original groups to teach their portion. Or ask a group of students to work together to master one topic/chapter to prepare, practice, and present to the total class.

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