



My Reflection on Semester-long Big Project Vs. Small In-Class Activities for Teamwork

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Here is a comparison of what I have done in the past semesters when the teams in my ASTR1346 (Introductory Astronomy) class did semester-long projects against this semester (Spring 2022) when teams are instead focused on small in-class activities.

Lift the flaps if you are interested in learning more!!

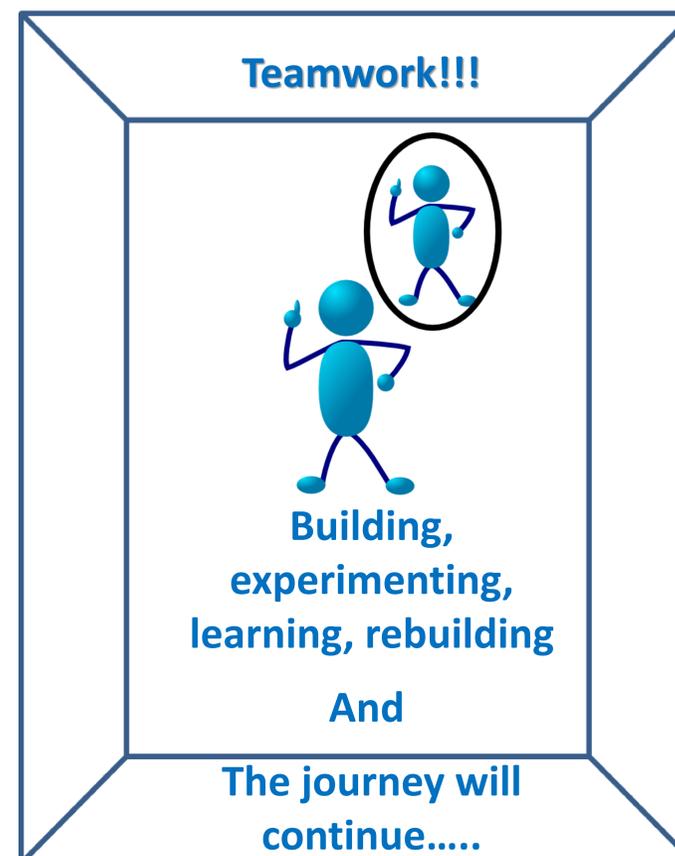
Goals	
Primary goals are similar in both methodologies, except the last one that is highlighted.	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase students' engagement and collaboration To enhance leadership potential in students To help students build community To help students think critically and creatively To help students gain new knowledge and information from resources outside the textbook and then bring it to the classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase students' engagement and collaboration To enhance leadership potential in students To help students build community To help students think critically and creatively To help students strengthen the knowledge of course material within the realm of the textbook.

Formation of Teams	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
I have used both randomly and strategically formed teams in different semesters in the past.	This semester I formed the teams strategically by mixing the students based on their performance in the first exam. Divided the class of total 40 students into eight teams (5 members in each).

Methodology and Focus	
The biggest difference is in the methodology.	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
Each team chose and worked on different topic outside the classroom. Presented their product during the end of the semester presentations.	This semester teams are working together in the class to do the assigned small activities (e.g., worksheets, think-group-share, summaries, quickwrites etc.) and a few small out-of-class activities (e.g., preparing exam reviews) sprinkled here and there.
The focus was the quality of the product (powerpoint, video, report, or act).	The focus is on building community by working together in the class. There are no end of the semester presentations.

My Reflection

In a zeal to create coherent teams,
To avoid bursting at the seams,
I backed off from projects that are long,
to smaller activities that do not prolong.
If you think that was easy, you are wrong.
The path is difficult but worth a plunge.
I met with success despite many a challenge.
Students input and feedback is the real source.
Their motivation to learn, work together,
And building community will be a driving force.



Challenges	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group dynamics Students' lack of interest Effective assessment of the process Lake of constant communication among students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group dynamics Students' lack of interest Effective assessment Students not showing up (This has been a biggest challenge this post-pandemic semester.)

Time Consumption	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
Students spend several hours outside the class time. Less consumption of instructor's time.	I am spending lot of my time this semester in creating the activities and modifying the lecture material on weekly basis. There is not extra time consumption of students.

Survey Results	
Semester-long Big Project	In-Class Small Activities
Most of the survey results have been positive for this type of teamwork.	I have received mixed response so far this semester. Based on students' midterm feedback, I have combined the teams and modified a few other things. Students seemed to be working better since the last two weeks.

Lesson Learned and Future Goals
I put in a lot of thought and effort into bringing small activities into the classroom to create cohesive teams. This was not an easy switch this semester because we lost substantial time in the first month in switching from on-line to in-person modalities of instructions. I really want to focus on the process of team building and the use of value rubric to assess the value it brings. I am hopeful that in the future semesters, I will be able to create better environment for collaboration and forming more cohesive teams based on students' feedback and my own observations of the process during this semester.