Collaboration – Making Small Groups Work

1. **Getting to know you.**
   It’s important for group members to get to know each other, at least a little bit, before they start working together.
   
   a. Try starting with an informal introductory session: “Hi, my name is ______. Is this your first semester here at Northwest Vista College? Where do you work? What’s your major?” etc. Just get to know each other as people.
   
   b. Next, get to know a little bit about each other as it pertains to the group task or problem: “Have you worked on a project like this before? What are your skills that might be helpful in the completion of this task? When can we meet? Are you more comfortable meeting in person, on the phone, or online? What challenges or barriers do you foresee to the successful completion of this project?” Begin to define the group as a whole and as individuals in terms of the task.

2. **Get to know the task or problem.**
   What exactly are we supposed to be doing?
   What is the problem?
   What is wrong with the things the way they are now?
   What does each of you know about the problem?
   Where can we go to find out more? Who might we contact?
   What are the problems, barriers, and constraints we face? (ex., expenses, time limits, due dates, necessary components, etc.)

3. **Identify possible solutions.**

4. **Evaluate possible solutions.**
   This might involve rank ordering the possible solutions, assigning “positive” and “negative” qualities to each solution, or grouping possible solutions based on similar criteria. The ultimate goal is to decide on the best possible solution.

5. **Implement the best solution.**

6. **Test the solution.**
Group Activities

1. **Pennies** – One at a time, each person will take a penny from the bowl, read the date on it, and tell the group something about themselves related to the year on the penny. Expand on the story; for example, “My penny is 2001. That year I was in the 7th grade, and that’s when I started playing the trumpet. I remember it used to drive my parents crazy when I practiced at home, because I thought the best way to play a trumpet was really loud! When he was giving directions to get to our house, my dad used to tell people that after they turned onto our street, just to listen for the loud screeching that sounded something like an elephant giving birth—that would be our house. I played the trumpet until my senior year in high school, and luckily I got a lot better at it. Oh, and I learned to play softly, too.”

2. **Cards** – Each group has approximately 1/5 of a standard deck of cards. Using whatever method you think is best, try to put together as many complete cards as you can. You will have to use brainstorming, problem solving, compromise, and negotiation skills within and among groups. The group that completes the most cards will win a prize.

3. **Straw towers** – In this task, each group member will bring specific skills and specific challenges to the group. Your goal is to build as tall a tower as possible using only the materials provided. Each person should draw a colored peg from the envelope to determine their skills and challenges:
   
   a. **BLUE** – You may handle the materials, but you may not speak.
   
   b. **RED** – You may speak, but you may not touch the materials.
   
   c. **GREEN** – You have an idea for a sturdy base (green index card), but you may use only your left hand.
   
   d. **YELLOW** – You have some excellent ideas (yellow index card), but you do not speak English. (You may speak in any other language you know, or, if you do not know another language, you may make up a pretend language.)
   
   e. **BLACK** - You have some excellent ideas, but you are blind. You may handle the materials but you may not “peek” or remove your blindfold.
   
   f. **WHITE** – You could not make it to the group meeting. You may communicate with your group from the hallway by using your cell phone.

**NOTE:** You may not fasten the tower to the desktop, nor may you attach it to the ceiling or other item. The tower must be able to stand on its own.

When time is up, the group that constructed the tallest tower that can stand on its own for 20 seconds will be declared the winner.