

## In the Classroom 68

# What Is a Jigsaw and How to Use It in the Classroom

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**Stan Skrabut:** Well, thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot to me. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are doing other things, but you're still hanging out with me. I really want to say I do appreciate it. Today we're going to talk about this strategy called Jigsaw Method. I have read about it, I have seen it referenced in a number of books, and I had never used it. I didn't really know a lot about it. I want to take a personal deep dive myself just to understand this. Man, I am glad I did.

This has one of those very high effect size which means it has a lot of impact if you use it. I wanted to take a moment to briefly explore this valuable teaching tool. Let's take a deeper look and come join me. What is the Jigsaw Strategy? The jigsaw activity was developed by Dr. Elliot Aronson back in 1971 down in Austin, Texas. It is a cooperative learning activity involving group work. The history behind it is actually fascinating.

If you think back to 1971, schools were being desegregated and it wasn't going well. There was a lot of white supremacy and those groups were trying to hold down the minorities. There was a lot of fights. There was a lot of hate crimes and students who were in the minority, were having a tough time trying to learn. Trying to learn in a room with all the white majority, and it was extremely difficult.

Dr. Aronson, because he was a social psychologist, he was tasked to find a strategy to improve learning in this difficult classroom structure. He did. He was able to work out a strategy that not only helped in the situation as it was but also has a huge effect size, which Dr. John Hattie had discovered.

Dr. Hattie, he had listed and ranked all these different learning strategies or elements that had an effect on learning and come to find out jigsaw ranked extremely high, very powerful tool for the classroom. That just got me all kinds of excited about what the strategy was and how it could be used. Let's talk about what does the jigsaw strategy look like?

There are anywhere from 6 to 10 steps, depending on who basically outlined it. I'm sticking more to the six, but I've added some additional notes to this and you'll be able to see all the other different permutations of this because I put them into the show notes. I linked out to different articles that are referenced and you'll be able to see those and take a look at yourself. There's some really key elements, there's these six steps that I'm outlining seem to be the very key pieces to this.

It starts out that you develop what are called home groups. These are the jigsaw groups. When all the pieces are together, this is the end product, but it's also the starting point. Basically, you divide up the classroom into these groups that have anywhere to four to six members. Now ideally, those groups or the membership of those groups are also in alignment with the number of topics that you need to cover. The overall idea is students will go out, learn about a topic on their own, then come back together and help teach that topic to their group. That's the overall idea.

Starting basically at the beginning, you have these home groups, each member is given a number and that number is in alignment with the number of topics that you have. If you have four topics, then you should have four members as part of the home group. If you had six topics, then you should have six topics, but basically, you're working with a number four to six. That's the first thing, identify the number, each person will have a number. Each home group, you're using the same numbers.

Each group will have one through four, or one through five or one through six, entirely up to you, but each group will have that and each home group will have the same number of people. There are certainly things you can do if you have an odd number, that you have an extra person or two, you can certainly weave those in there. Ideally, you're starting with groups that are going to be the same number of members. Each member is assigned a portion of an assignment or a research project.

Basically, all the number ones will be assigned the same reading assignment, the same questions to answer, the same maybe essay to write or presentation to create; they will create, but it's all around the same topic. All the number ones have that. Number twos, they will all have the same reading assignment, research questions, homework, okay?

They will initially go out and do this research independently. You may give them a day or two where they have to go out and do a little research, they have to maybe read something, figure out what the main points are, summarize this, what-have-you, they'll do it independently. That's really number two. They have these research questions that they need to answer.

When they get done doing that independent work, answering those questions, and those questions, you can have them turn that in as part of a class assignment. That's number three, that they turn this in as a class assignment. You can grade them on it, but basically, you're wanting them to be ready to present this material.

Number four, basically all these now experts will gather together. All the number ones will gather together, all the number twos will gather together independently. Number threes, fours, fives, what-have-you, all those with the same number we'll get together. As a collective in their expert group, they are going to discuss what they have learned and basically clarify the main points.

Additionally, they're going to figure out strategies that they can use when they go back to their home group in order to teach the content. This is a really important step. They're initially assigned topics. They go out and study those topics

independently, then they come together in expert groups. Make sure that they're not missing any key points, figure out ways that they're going to teach that to their home group. That's really key.

In step five, they get back to their home group. Starting with number one, they start teaching this to their home group. They basically go in order, number one, number two, number three, number four, number five, number six. The reason is, and you want to control this where you allot time for all the number ones to teach to their home groups. Then number twos will go when you designate it, and then number threes, and number fours, et cetera.

The reason that you do this is if one of those members happens to be absent, that group can then listen in with another home group. There is some overlap there just in case somebody is absent. That way they won't miss any of that important material. Now, while they're in their home group, they have a responsibility to learn this content. They need to take notes, they need to ask clarifying questions, they need to basically understand what the key points are as explained by their experts.

Then finally, number six is there is some type of synthesizing activity. It can be a task that the group works on together, it could be a quiz, where they demonstrate their understanding of this content. Each person, of course, will be given the quiz and they'll have to, you know, they'll get a test result. Now, there's a slight variation there, it's called the jigsaw two. The only change is at this six-part when you're doing this activity, like the quiz, that the entire group, all the individual scores for that group are averaged and then also compared to all the other groups.

There builds in some competitiveness between the groups, so they end up having two scores. One score is their independent score, the other score is their group score. That way, they are a little more accountable to their group because they don't want somebody in their group not to be successful.

They're going to work on making sure everybody is successful in their group. That's basically the strategy.

One, divide up each group. Basically establish the home groups and issue out those topics. Each member will be assigned a different part of that project and they are to become the experts. Three, they can be assigned reading assignments, research questions, homework that they turn in, that helps them become the expert. Number four, the experts will gather together, review what they have put together, make sure that they understand their main points and have a strategy to teach it to the home group.

Number five, they get to it with their home group and the experts will teach this to their home group. Number six, there will be some type of synthesizing activity and it's up to you whether it's just independent scores or independent and group scores. There's a variation to this. Instead of getting back to the home groups, what you can do is have Expert Group Panels where the expert groups collectively present back to the class. Then the whole class is responsible for asking questions and learning about each of the topics.

That's really the strategy in a nutshell on how to use Jigsaw. It is very much in line with Universal Design for Learning because it's really making it student-focused. I like it. I think this can be a powerful strategy. As the research has already panned out, it is a powerful strategy. When do you use this? You can use it for developing background knowledge on a unit of study, for example. You can divide up a chapter into segments and have the students come together and learn about the chapter very rapidly.

It could be that you have where there's different viewpoints, maybe around a historical event or it could be that a topic can be approached from different viewpoints, and so you can use it during that time. It can be used as a review session where you can say that you get through, say four or five chapters or six units, and you break them up into six topics where each person just focuses on one chapter or one unit and synthesizes that information and they use it as a review session. Different ways to doing it. Why is this Jigsaw Method so successful?

There was a lot in the readings that I did. There was a lot of different reasons why this has shown to be so successful. One, it focuses on cooperation rather than competitiveness. In order to be successful as a group, everybody has to contribute to the group and is dependent on everybody as part of that group.

Also, each individual has something unique to contribute. Every single individual is a participant in this learning strategy that nobody is left out. Everybody is contributing to the greater good of the course because no one else in the group is doing the same task in that home group. Each student experiences a higher sense of ownership and accountability to the members.

It reminds me of the movie *Paper Chase*, where students were putting together study guides for the different courses that they were learning. Their study guides, everybody else relied on those because it was virtually impossible to independently build your own outstanding study guide. One of the most powerful things about this method is that students are learning from each other. They have to recognize the differences as individuals and that everybody is different, but yet they can benefit from those different individuals.

As I noted, the group is rewarded when they rely on the different individuals and their skills and knowledge as a whole. This is also a very student-centered learning environment where you have an instructor who normally lectures. This weans them off the instructor and they learn to be independent learners, as well as rely on fellow students. They build these bonds with these cohorts through this method.

Other benefit that is shown up in here, that students become more versed in the language of the discipline, the jargon, the terminology, and they start to own that a little more. Probably as I mentioned at the very beginning, that the effect size is crazy large. That it has an effect size of 1.2. John Hattie did a lot of meta-study researches like 800 of them. Study in 800 different meta-studies, pulling all the information together and ranked all these different strategies that affected the classroom. In that ranking, the average ranking was 0.40 as an effect size.

This method had an effect size of 1.2, which is absolutely huge. It ranked number seven on the entire list. I think there was 128 different strategies. This ranked number seven. Very powerful technique. I am surprised that I did not use this previously. It's something that I'm definitely going to explore in future classes. I want to see how this thing works. I'm pretty excited about it. That is the Jigsaw Method. Check out the show notes and you'll learn definitely a lot more about this particular strategy. Before you go, here's a quick plug for my book.