

Collaborative Learning - investigating support for team work among students

MARAGH, Dean and CAWKWELL, Jackie

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Collaborative Learning

Jackie Cawkwell & Dean Maragh

Introduction

What do we already know?

Students & staff report that learning collaboratively can be a rewarding and transformational experience BUT.....it is also reported to be one the most challenging and unsatisfactory aspects of the academic journey.

Intuitively and through evaluations, we know how difficult collaborative learning can be. How might we equip both students and staff to meet this challenge and develop attributes that will take them beyond HE into employment?

| The Context

Exploring the learning experience further

Initial research (February 2014):

- Undergraduate, first year students, 600+ student module
- Business/finance-related modules
- Summatively assessed piece of group work (presentation)

Further evaluation (April 2015):

- Also undergraduate, first year students, large student cohort
- Managing Resources module
- Summatively assessed piece of group work (presentation)

| The Project *Aims and Objectives*

Aims

- Evaluate the student and staff experience
- Identify issues relevant to other similar modules
- Contribute to the knowledge base

Objectives

- Describe the activities and identify associated supporting interventions
- Identify and evaluate existing strengths
- Identify opportunities for further enhancement
- Evaluate the usefulness of process value mapping as an enquiry tool
- Disseminate findings

Timeline *The Research Process*

- Determine research question with client: *October*
- Rapid literature review: *November*
- Determine & design data collection methodology: *December*
- Ethics approval: *December*
- Data collection:
 - trial Process Value Mapping: *January*
 - student survey(s): *March*
 - PVM in staff focus group: *March*
 - PVM in student focus groups: *April*
- Analysing, interpreting & writing up: *May & June*
- Dissemination: *June & July*
- Project management: *monthly project meetings*

| Research Methods *Survey*

- Informed by literature review
- Areas the survey covers:
 - prior experience/views of group work
 - features of the group (commitment, organisation, fairness of workload, relationships, team characteristics)
 - view of the group work project
 - demographics

Handouts of survey and participant information available

Research and Evaluation Methods *Process Value Mapping*

- Business tool used to map out a process
- Adapted as a research tool in education
- Provides a visual focus for discussion by participants
- The mapping is annotated to identify key features of 'process', and explore the student learning experience
- Number of focus group events held - staff and students
- Comparison of mappings possible as well as analysis of discussion

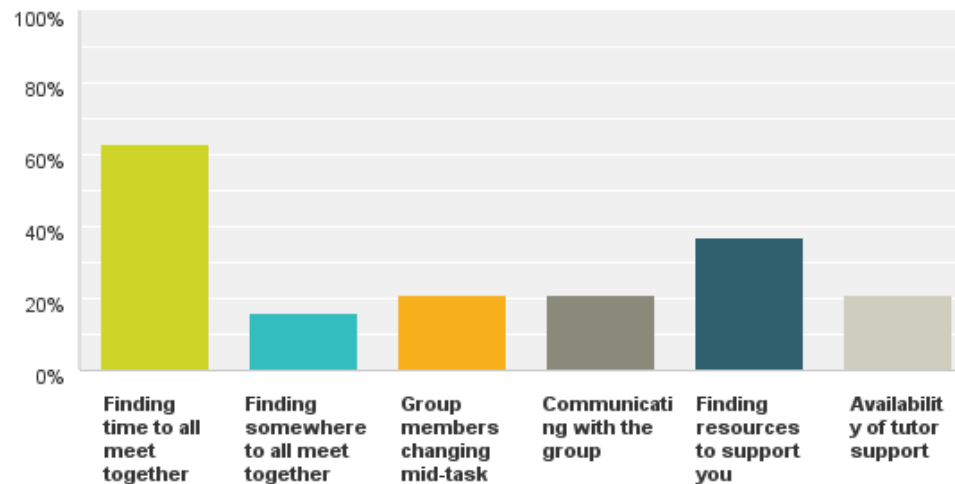
Demonstration PVM available

| Initial Findings from Research *The staff and student experience*

- Most students saw the importance of group work
- Yet many remained anxious over future group work
- Over half reported practical difficulties
- Opinion of students split on whether it is better for staff or students to choose groups (58% Students - 42% Staff)
- Staff identified group formation as an area that requires more attention
- Preference for hard workers over high achievers

Discussion

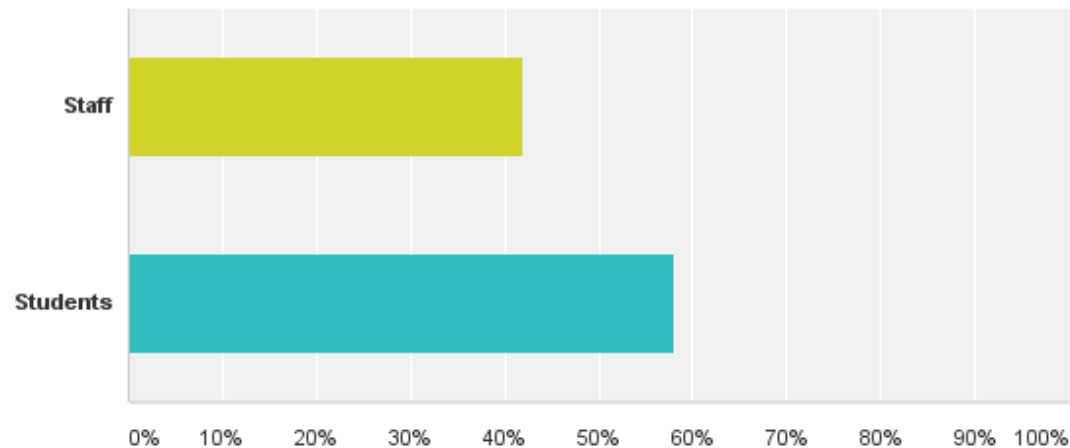
Practical Difficulties



Suggestions to address these issues included:

- timetabled group-working time
- large learning spaces with multiple seminar groups and tutors on hand to provide support
- Facebook groups for communicating
- Improved library orientation

Discussion *Group Formation*



- Staff suggested additional group task at the start of the module
- Staff suggested identification of teams earlier, but students commented that they didn't know each other very early on
- One suggestion was to have groups chosen by staff at Level 4 (Y1), but at levels 5 and 6 (Y2 and Y3) students self-select

Findings from Evaluation
Module Design Perspective

- Curriculum Design
- Employability?
- Enterprise Skills?
- Reflection?
- Group work? or group work skills?
- Problem solving? or problem solving skills?
- Communicating the purpose with our academic team