

Alfredo Gaiton: Students' Reflections on Groupwork

Notes from workshop presentation:

PDP is much more than skills – it is also awareness.

Intuitions from social psychology – transformative power of groupwork!

Frequent experience of ineffective groupwork where participants do not speak or ask questions!

Led to valuing 'learning by doing'. Commitment to Bruner, Vygotsky – social and developmental approaches; Lave and Wenger – situated practice, social learning.

In practice: 2hr slots – intensive learning experiences. Students must collect data in relation to a task, and in the group analyse data and write up report. Must be submitted within two days. 40% of module

This poses many problems!

Kolb's cycle: the lab based experience follows the cycle broadly: an experience then reflection then conceptualising, then experimentation and feedback.

Don't expect 100% participation – but encourage passive members to engage. Don't assign roles or differentiate them – just encourage everyone to join in.

Link to PDP – teamwork, employers request for skills connected with teamwork – BUT we send mixed messages all the time. Normally there are not group reports – we're terrified of the problems – complaints, social loafing, practical issues etc We shy away from assessing group tasks.

QAA subject benchmarks mention groupwork but don't specify really clearly. In popular culture it seems to be about competition and survival – expelling members or rewarding them (e.g. 'reality TV) – rather than what we'd like to see in groupwork in HE.

Value diversity of written assignment – allow students to reflect on the process in whatever ways suit them.

Alfredo used mindmapping used to explicate the data showing categories of responses. A mix of positive and negative feedback was shown.

His findings were: "very significant" in relation to group process. Key issues he feels are around: membership, identity, process, motivation. Feelings are shown to be of huge importance. More problematic issues arising outside of the supported framework of the tutorials.

Outcomes – gaining confidence; revealing attitudes; enlightening in respect of overcoming prejudices.

Academic results; knowledge; skills used and skills gained; awareness - how to define. Identify or distinguish between these outcomes?

Student stories – their own insights on learning and on group process very valuable. Transformative power of group experience for some engaged individuals was affirmed!