‘Critical Intersections: the 12th Biennial Conference of the Association for Academic Language and Learning, University of Wollongong 25-27th November 2015’

Professional development: teaching and assessing group work

Dr Paula Keogh
Curriculum Services
Study and Learning Centre, RMIT University
“I have no question that when you have a team, the possibility exists that it will generate magic, producing something extraordinary, a collective creation of previously unimagined quality or beauty.

But don’t count on it. Research consistently shows that teams underperform”

J. Richard Hackman in Harvard Business Review
So why do groups underperform?

- absence of team identity
- difficulty making decisions
- poor communication
- inability to resolve conflicts
- lack of participation
- lack of organisational skills
- groupthink
- ineffective leadership

Can we support students to develop their skills in these areas?

Adapted from the book Leading Teams: Harvard Business Press

Photo by: Kheng Guan Toh
“The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas as escaping from the old ones.”

John Maynard Keynes
Mean levels of importance, willingness, confidence and emphasis to teach graduate attributes

So what is another old idea holding us back?

The assumption that students will automatically know how to collaborate – all we need to do is give them a task to work on together.

*Is this a reasonable assumption?*
The new idea

“Teams need coaching as a group in team processes—especially at the beginning, midpoint, and end of a team project. For the team to reap the benefits… it must focus on group processes.”

J. Richard Hackman in Harvard Business Review
Forming and consolidating a group is complex
Adapted from Drexler/Sibbet Team Performance Model

- **Orientation: Why am I here?**
- **Trust building: Who are you?**
- **Goal clarification: What are we doing?**
- **Commitment: How will we do it?**
- **Planning: Who does what, when, where?**
A focus on the process improves quality of the product and group work skills

Process
- Discuss the group dynamic
- Develop group skills in communication, organisation, negotiation, collaboration

Product
- Bring problem solving and creative thinking to the product: report, case study, essay, model etc.
How to do this? Integrate and align group work process across the curriculum

- **Teaching**
  - What do students need to learn?
  - Learning activities in the classroom

- **Assessment**
  - What do I want to assess, and how?

- **Evaluation**
  - Have the LOs been achieved?

- **Learning outcomes**
  - What do students need to learn?
Study and Learning Centre’s Learning Lab

Resources for staff

RMIT Learning Lab / Resources for staff / Group work
PD with academics on the group work process

1. Argue the case for teaching and assessing the group work process
2. Offer support in group facilitation: maybe team teach the first learning activity
3. Collaborate on developing:
   • learning outcomes for the group process
   • learning activities that support these LOs
   • assessment tasks focussed on learning from the group process
Closing thoughts
"None of us is as smart as all of us."

Ken Blanchard
References

• Jetten, Jolanda; Hornsey, Matthew J. (2010), Rebels in groups: Dissent, Deviance, Difference and Defiance. Wiley. (e-book)


• RMIT, Study and Learning Centre, Learning Lab – Assessment tasks/group work, http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/learninglab/content/group-work


• University of New South Wales, Learning and Teaching Unit, Group Work https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/group-work


• Australian Universities Teaching Committee, Centre for Higher Education, Assessing group work, http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/03/group.html,