

Student attitudes towards group work and group assessment

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Group-based or co-operative learning can benefit individual student learning (1), however, recent verbal feedback from students at Sydney University about group work was disappointingly negative (2). This feedback prompted the present study, which set out to determine the attitudes of a larger cohort of students to group work and group assessment

Students in Pharmacology (n = 119) and IT (n = 118) were evaluated at the beginning and end of semester two (2003) using a published questionnaire (3) and one of two additional questionnaires developed for this study. These two disciplines were chosen as their group work was assessed differently and it was of interest to determine whether the differing methods of assessment affected students' attitudes.

At the start of semester all students indicated a neutral to slightly negative attitude towards individual work but a favourable attitude towards group work. A significant but small change in favour of group work was found for Pharmacology students whereas no change in attitude was indicated by the IT students. Interestingly, we found no particular preference for group assessment that used peer evaluation to obtain individual marks to one that was based on a shared group mark.

In conclusion, despite concerns expressed in a recent University of Sydney Academic Board Review about group work and assessment, this study reinforces the findings of previous research into group work suggesting that the experience is generally positive for students.

1. Slavin, R.E. (1996). Research on co-operative learning and achievement: what we know, what we need to know. *Contemp. Educ. Psychol.* 21: 43 - 69.
2. Academic Board Review (2002).
3. Cantwell, R.H. and Andrews B. (2002) Cognitive and psychological factors underlying secondary students' feelings towards group work. *Educ. Psychol.* 22: 75 - 91.