COLLABORATIVE LEARNING
Orientation Lecture
We offer

- Academic writing workshops
- Oral presentation skills workshops
- Online writing resources
- Individual consultations

We do not

- Proof read assignments
- Edit writing
- Teach general English Language courses
Contacting the Learning Centre

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1. What is collaborative learning?

2. Positive and negative experiences of collaborative learning

3. Key factors affecting the quality of group work

4. Strategies for effective group work

5. Collaboration and academic honesty
What is collaborative learning?

Collaborative learning is ...

› ‘the grouping and pairing of students for the purpose of achieving an academic goal’ (Gokhale, 1995)

› constructing knowledge through interaction with other learners – e.g. discussion, co-operating on tasks

› Interaction may be face-to-face or computer-mediated

What is collaborative learning?

Collaborative learning involves ...

› group goals, as well as personal goals

› building and relying on good relationships with others

› contributing your ideas to the group and learning from one another
What is collaborative learning?

› Claims about collaborative learning:

- It enhances critical thinking

- It helps you retain information longer
  (deep vs. surface learning)

- It helps you achieve higher levels of understanding

- It encourages the development of autonomous learning skills
Positive aspects of collaborative learning

According to Gokhale’s (1995) influential study:

- Participating students
  - ‘performed significantly better on the critical-thinking test than those who studied individually’

- The experience
  - ‘provided students with opportunities to analyse, synthesise and evaluate ideas cooperatively’

- The informal setting
  - ‘facilitated discussion and interaction’

- Group interaction
  - ‘helped students learn from each other’s scholarship, skills and experiences’
  - obliged students ‘to go beyond mere statements of opinion
    - by giving reasons for their judgments and
    - reflecting upon the criteria employed in making these judgments’
In short, collaborative learning

- fostered the development of critical thinking through
  - discussion
  - clarification of ideas
  - evaluation of others’ ideas
Negative aspects of collaborative learning

› In Gokhale’s study, some students felt that
  
  - ‘they wasted a lot of time explaining the material to other group members’ (1995, p. 28)

› Summary of student comments on disadvantages from the Wisconsin Centre for Education Research:
  
  http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/CL1/CL/moreinfo/MI4C.htm
  
  - Someone may try to take over the group
  
  - Quiet people may not feel comfortable
  
  - People may not pull their weight
  
  - Sometimes people just don’t get along
Discuss with a neighbour:

› Have you ever worked in a group to produce a group assignment?

› Was the experience mostly positive or negative?

› Why?
Key factors affecting group work

- Level of knowledge and level of skills in organisation & decision-making
- Level of commitment
- Quality of individual contributions
- Quality of group process
- Quality of group product
- Level of interpersonal skills
- Quality of group learning
- Quality of group collaboration

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Key factors affecting group work

What is a contribution?

› Working on the sub-tasks: e.g. researching, writing, editing

› Sharing knowledge of the topic

› Supporting interaction: e.g. encouraging others and creating good feeling

› Organising group work: e.g. finding meeting locations, emailing reminders
Discuss with a neighbour:

› What are your strengths as a group member?

› What sort of contributions do you prefer to make?
Key factors affecting group work

Characteristics of effective groups:
- Equal contributions
- Full discussion
- Individuals feel supported

Higher quality outcomes
Higher level of member satisfaction
Key factors affecting group work

Common problems:
- Logistics – e.g. finding a time to meet
- Unequal sharing of work
- Poor co-ordination of contributions
- Lack of commitment

Lower quality outcomes

Lower level of member satisfaction
Strategies for effective group work

› Early on, e.g.,

- Work together to clearly define the group’s aims (e.g. working co-operatively together at all times) and desired outcomes (e.g. achieving a Distinction result!)

- Agree on the necessity or not of having a group leader, a scribe, ...

- Break the task down into achievable sub-tasks with a time-frame for each

- Agree on the allocation of the sub-tasks after discussion of individual members’ preferences and strengths

- Decide on dates, times and locations for the following meeting(s)
Strategies for effective group work

› Each time the group meets,
  - monitor the group dynamics, e.g.,
    - if a group member doesn’t prepare in advance, take action early as a group
    - if a group member isn’t contributing orally, check if this is because of
      - a lack of preparation
      - a lack of the opportunity to speak, or
      - a question of shyness, and/or of a different language and cultural background
Each time the group meets,

- make sure that
  - everyone contributes
  - all group members understand what is going on
  - each member is aware of the opinions and tasks of the other members
  - there is time at the end of each meeting
    - to sum up group decisions, and
    - set the agenda for the next meeting
› Academic honesty
- The work you submit is your own original work
- Anything by other people is acknowledged

› Plagiarism
- The work you submit is partly or wholly other people’s work
- Work by other people is not acknowledged
So, what kind of collaboration is acceptable?

- Group work assignments
- ‘Legitimate cooperation’
- Acknowledging (i.e. referencing) others’ work
‘Legitimate cooperation’:

‘any constructive educational and intellectual practice that aims to facilitate optimal learning outcomes through interaction between students’

Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism in Coursework Policy, p. 3.

(Date of effect: 1 January 2012)
From academic honesty to plagiarism:

- Group work
- Legitimate cooperation
- Discussion of topic
- Discussion of readings
- Academic negligence
- Inadequate referencing
- Academic dishonesty
- Plagiarism
- Cheating
- Outsourcing
- Recycling
Your faculty/school/department should provide:

- Guidelines on group work assignments
- Clear procedures for monitoring group work
- Information on assessment criteria
- Information about the right referencing convention to use
Sources of information:

- Read the university policy on plagiarism
- Seek help if you need to improve your skills for using information and referencing
- Consult books and/or guidelines about referencing conventions
- Ask your lecturer/tutor for information if you don’t understand
Some Learning Centre workshops:

- Using sources:
  - Developing and supporting an argument
  - Quoting, summarising and paraphrasing
  - Language strategies for referring to evidence

- Collaborative Learning:
  - Working in groups
  - Discussion skills
› Academic honesty policy

- ‘Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism in Coursework Policy’, 1 January 2012

  (Search via ‘policy online’ or sydney.edu.au/policy on Sydney University homepage)

› Learning Centre

- sydney.edu.au/lc
  - Workshop timetables
  - Lecture notes
  - Online resources for academic writing & referencing

› Further research papers on collaborative learning and group work in a tertiary context:
