RESEARCH QUESTION

What are you curious about? What would you like to know about strategies that might hinder and/or help students to learn, in your course? Do you want to know if an activity, assignment, or teaching strategy "works?" Do you have a question about how to help your students learn a particular skill?

Premise/Context:
Group or team-based assessments are frequently applied in the courses I teach; nearly every semester the groups experience common challenges related to self-organization, such as missed due dates, unbalanced workload distribution, lack of a communication strategy and general disconnectedness or lack of interdependence. Faculty may assign groupwork assuming that all students understand and are prepared to effectively form and manage work within a group, understand group dynamics and deal with conflicts. Faculty often maintain minimal visibility on the internal dynamics and management of groups. I'd like to begin exploring how effectively these groups self-organize and what motivates individual students to participate and contribute fairly to the groupwork.

Research Question: Will the introduction of "group training" help groups more effectively self-organize, improve participation and motivate students to contribute fairly to groupwork?

Secondary Question: Will the use of a designated, structured, and collaborative task management tool increase student motivation to participate and contribute fairly to group work?

Tertiary Question: How can instructors respond more effectively to lack of contribution? Guide for responding?

Key terms:
- 'Participation' will refer to active and timely communication with group members, involvement in discussion, meeting attendance, correspondence.
- Contribution will refer to effort extorted in the interest of research, planning, brainstorming, task completion, building, development related to collaborative groupwork.

Process Questions:
- Should the question be specific to a type of group assessment?

MEASURE LEARNING

Identify challenges/outcomes related to learning that are related to your question. Describe the learning in a way that suggests how you might measure it using either qualitative or quantitative methods.

Challenges:
- Interpersonal / personality conflict
- Communication barriers (tools, reliability, time zones)
- Resistance to training
- Lack of prior collaborative experiences/group work
- Inefficiencies in group assessment design
- Individual member disinterest in assessment and/or collaborative environments

Outcomes:
- Plan, organize and distribute assessment work fairly among group members
- Recognize and accommodate individual workload capacity limitations
- Monitor the progress of group activities and assessment tasks
- Identify and mitigate risks to effective group self-organization
- Recognize the stages of group formation (Tuckman)
- Identify/Recognize the skills, experience and interests (prefered type of work) of group members
- Compare and contrast roles within a group (natural and appointed)
- Apply effective communication strategies using a variety of tools and channels

- Demonstrate the use of group-building strategies/activities
- Identify characteristics of an effective group (strategy, ability to reflect)
- Create group goals and objectives (for assessment)
- Apply strategies for corrective action

Qualitative Analysis:
- Peer-reviewed and self-evaluation of member participation and contribution
- Identification/acknowledgement/awareness of stages of group dynamics
- Effectiveness of planning strategy and tools

Quantitative Analysis:
- Level of individual contribution (based on word count)
- Establishing and meeting internal group milestones/deadlines
- Completion of group-building activities (videos, read module, conduct ice breaker)
- Meeting assessment due dates

LEARNING ACTIVITY

Describe the instructional activity, assignment, or teaching strategy that will promote student learning on the outcome you identified. SoTL projects might investigate the impact of a modification to an existing strategy or assignment. Describe how the new approach differs from the old approach and why this modification might change student learning on this outcome.

Old approach:
- Groups are assigned by faculty
- Groups choose their own method(s) of communication and collaboration (tools)
- Assessments require a single submission for the entire group
- Faculty are not involved in any group communication/meetings
- Meeting notes not often not recorded/shared, or visibly by faculty
- No faculty visibility on status of tasks, distribution of work, contribution of members
- Reporting of "lack of contribution/participation" is inconsistent or occurs very late in the process
- Optional peer review survey is provided but has very low response rate
- Peer review responses are often consistent between members when reporting lack of contribution
- No recognition for work leader/organizer

New approach:
- Introduce a "group training" module
- Consider an academic incentive for completion of module
- Use of faculty-assigned technology tool to promote transparent self-organization and progress monitoring at group and individual level

- Include an "Instructor guide" for delivery of the module and activities?
- All members contribute to all work (ex. All members must respond to all case questions, then collaboratively aggregate best responses)
- Promote interdependence among group members

Impact on student learning:
- Workload distribution considered fair/equal
- All group members accountable for contributions
- Increased collaboration and knowledge sharing (via increased participation)
- Late submissions and penalties avoided
- Positive collaboration experience (vocational outcome?)

Considerations/questions:
- Does group size affect the efficiency of self-organization?
- Does the type of assessment influence the group's effectiveness (case-based, model building, research, etc).
- What is the effect of online vs in-person collaboration on the effectiveness of group organization and management?
- What impact does pre-assignment of group members have on group dynamics?
- What are the implications of allowing students to self-select groups?

EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

Describe the evidence that would persuade an external audience that the new or modified teaching strategy improves student learning on the targeted learning outcome. Describe the evidence you would need to collect to answer questions about the impact or value of this teaching strategy. How would you convince others that this approach is better than other approaches? What comparisons should you make? Examine students' skill before and after the assignment? Compare students who complete the learning activity to another group of students – what comparisons would be meaningful?

Conduct a Student Survey:
- What is your approach to planning tasks for each group member?
- Are you satisfied with the work contributions of your group members (peer evaluation)?
- Were all internal assessment milestones achieved?
- How did the group deal with issues? (members not communicating or contributing, concerns with quality of work, evidence of group self-correcting).
- Rate stress level working in group (before, during, after assessment)

SHARING WORK

How and where would you publish, present, or disseminate this work?

- Colleagues (faculty discussions, program meetings)
- Broader institutional community (workshops, professional development sessions)
- Conferences (speaker series, workshops, discussions)

GUIDING RESOURCES

Group Work: How to Use Groups Effectively (2011)

Scaffolding Student Understanding in Small-Group Work: Students' Uptake of Teacher Support in Subsequent Small-Group Interaction (2018)

'Scaffolding' through talk in groupwork learning (2009)

Cooperative Learning Online in Higher Education. Second Experience at Roma Tre University, Italy (2015)

Group work: Using cooperative learning groups effectively (2015)

It's Good Till It's Not (2017)

Adapted from: C. J. Stanny, E. M. El-Sheikh, & H-M. Chung (2009) ***Getting Started with a SoTL Project***
Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment http://uwf.edu/cutla/