

Group Work and Social Skills in the time of eLearning

Online teaching can open more ways to authentic ways of teaching and assessing students' understanding as well as preparing them for future employment.

Regarding self-isolating and social distancing experience in online learning, if students do not experience class engagement in break out rooms/think, pair, share, or any other kind of group activities as part of the instructor's course design and delivery approach, and assessment tasks, they may graduate as self-destructive individuals who are less confident in sharing and building knowledge or exercising their judgment in their future employment.

Being an independent learner as well as the ability to understand the concepts and develop deep approaches to learning are all essential but not enough for success in future careers and real-life situations. Future employment, sense of belonging and inclusion, and the experience of well-being are to a considerable significance affected by individuals' interpersonal skills. Part of these skills can be developed during students' experience in the higher education system. It is, therefore, more important than before to design online learning activities and assessments that involve significant interaction between the students and instructors, other students, and community/industry to promote active learning and social skills. Therefore, a clear sequence for engagement in purposeful activities and assessment tasks can encourage collaborative skills while reinforcing learning and giving the students the opportunity to demonstrate their competency in a real-world context.

Instructors can play the most significant role in gradually leading the students through the activities within the modules to help them build on and integrate knowledge, skills, value, and attributes to be prepared for the true to life setting situations. So, that would be a good idea to start with thinking about the pedagogy of designing that brings together different e-learning elements including the right technology, engaging learning activities, authentic assessments and the opportunity to provide timely interventions to underpin successful course progression.

Online tools including **Slack**, **Zoom**, **Discussion Boards**, **Padlet**, **Voice Thread**, or **Flip Grid** provide the opportunity for text, audio, and video communication and collaborative work among students. Also, collaborative annotation tools like **Perusall** and **Hypothesis** allow the instructors and the students to collaboratively read and discuss a text. Instructors can also use the **EdPuzzle** platform or **H5P** collaborative framework to create great interactive content and video lessons and encourage students to work in groups to answer the set questions.

Instructors can also design group assessments in which students are required to research a current issue, solve a problem, or interview people in community and industry and then present their work via multimedia tools such as video, podcasts, or digital storytelling. This can help students develop teamwork skills; time management skills, professional responsibilities; judgemental and interpersonal skills; seeking help and last but not least self and peer reflective practice.

In addition, some students might have multiple concerns about how to participate in online group work, and contribute to the joint goals without annoying others or looking stupid when sharing their opinions or asking questions. So, group activities need to be under the supervision and students should receive encouragement, and timely feedback to their contribution and questions, when required. However, when delivering a course remotely using online tools like **Zoom**, instructors may not get the opportunity to provide students with required attention when doing group work in break out rooms. Therefore, clear structure and expectations play significant roles in helping students have a specific understanding of what is expected from them, and what the purpose and learning outcome or objectives of the group activity are. It would also be a good idea to allow for possibilities of approaches to solve a single task or problem so students develop innovative approaches to solving issues.

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