

Editorial: Groupwork in Education

To say that we are very pleased to introduce this special issue of *Groupwork*, one that focuses on the role of groupwork in teaching, learning and assessment within the global classroom is quite an understatement. This issue facilitates the sharing of educational approaches that have been designed using groupwork principles to engage students across a variety of subject areas. It seeks to prompt reflection, provoke discussion, and inform practice, through providing insights into new and innovative methods of engagement based on groupwork principles.

Four of the papers in this Special Issue on groupwork within education focus the use of groupwork by educators to enable students to learn. Sometimes groupwork is an educational technique used for students to gain knowledge about a particular topic, for example, technical drawing in the article by Owodunni, Onoriode and Potokri, but, for most of the authors, the purpose of the groupwork is to impart, at the very least, awareness and sensitivity to groups and sometimes, in addition, groupwork skills and understanding of group process. Some authors also seek that groupmembers gain additional understandings or knowledge relevant to their field of practice, such as Taylor in her paper about book groups in social work education. The fifth paper by Tadam, Matoon, Mano, and Singh considers how groupwork can offer support to the educators themselves.

In this issue

The common threads that tie this edition together are themes of co-production, creativity and contemporary practices that attend the changing education landscape. Thus, they put emphasis on learner empowerment and the facilitation of a more dialectic type learning space. For instance, in *Ain't Gonna Study War No More: Teaching and Learning Cooperation in a Graduate Course in Resource and Environmental Management*, Welch and Pinkerton, in attempting to address what they see as a 'skills deficit in 'real world problem solvers', identify the potential of groupwork to develop the knowledge and skills that result in effective cooperation and conflict resolution. In essence they deploy groupwork to develop groupwork mindedness through group experiences that expose learners to the skills essential to working effectively as a group. The paper touches on the significance of values underlying such work and, in this context, the authors explore notions of development and change.

In contrast, In *Students' participation in group production of instructional resources for teaching technical drawing: academic achievement and interest reflections* (Owodunni, Onoriode and Potokri) the authors discuss the group involvement of students in a Nigerian university as an instructional modality which can impact positively on achievement and interest in the subject matter. Their use of the group challenges the efficacy of teacher dominated learning environments and speaks to the importance of learner empowerment.

In *Challenges and Opportunities for Applying Group Work Principles to Enhance Online Learning in Social Work*, Simon, Cohen, McLaughlin, Muskat and White discuss the challenges and opportunities that exist in online teaching in social work. They emphasise the use of group work principles to advance student learning within Canadian social work programmes. The focus of this online course was social work with groups. In this case the educators and students have to learn new pedagogy and to gain familiarity with the online and technological systems; and develop new and creative ways of sharing experiences which can require greater participation of students than more traditional learning environments. They conclude that many of the opportunities and challenges of groupwork were the same as

in face to face groupwork and conclude that group work knowledge and skills are particularly well suited to guide the group dynamics and apply group work principles to online teaching.

Taylor, in *Book groups in social work education; a method for modelling groupwork practice*, writes of the use of book groups in social work education. She describes how a book group can provide learning about groupwork as a practice method – but also that fiction can be utilised to explore issues or problem areas common to groups of service-users.

In *Group support for transformational social work education: a study of the Black Academics Forum* Tedam, Matoo, Mano, and Singh focus on a support group for educators. The authors outline the collective and individual experiences of four Black social work academics in the UK and their encounters with the wider complexities of higher education. This paper presents the Black Academics Forum as an innovative and integral strategy to enhancing its member's wellbeing through fostering a sense of belonging, trust and acceptance. The paper demonstrates the utility of groupwork processes in reducing isolation and individualism and in promoting self-awareness and self-esteem by conveying a message that each member has something constructive and worthwhile to contribute to their education institutions, – and resulted in the formation of the Black Academics Forum (BAF).

Given that it is predominantly within formal education contexts that learners are socialised, which are themselves group environments that are directive and prescriptive in nature, it is unsurprising that challenges such as those described in these papers can arise when the shift is made to the more independent and less prescriptive methods in the course of their educational journey. As these papers have shown, it is essential to think about how groups, groupwork skills and group dynamics are employed and to promote approaches that enable student's to transit between, and learn within, what are more interdependent and co-produced spaces than they may have experienced previously and which will have formed their expectations and fashioned their learning patterns. In revisiting the nature of groups in education, and exchanging ideas about how prior socialisation influences learners, educators may come to reflect upon how they can exploit groupwork

methodologies to create shared learning experiences that are stimulating and that invite not only academic achievement but also the development of skills in both collaborative and independent learning. In essence, it is this ongoing appraisal of groupwork methodologies and the effectiveness of these approaches that is going to be core to academic success and subsequent employability.

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