

Peer support groups as an alternative to assessed group work: A case study

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Today's session

- Challenges of assessing interdisciplinary group work
- An alternative approach
 - Setting up the peer support groups
 - Peer feedback
 - Assessing interdisciplinarity
 - What worked well
 - What I will do differently next time

Benefits of group work

- Promotes 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning
- 'Active' rather than 'passive' learning
- Promotes experiential learning
- Collaborative and cooperative learning
- Constructing knowledge
- Authentic assessment
- Reducing the marking load in large cohorts
- Developing transferable skills
- Fostering social membership
- Informal forum where new ideas can be discussed and assimilated



Reviewed in: Davies, 2009



What are the challenges of interdisciplinary group work?

My experience of assessed interdisciplinary groupwork

- Students were expected to already identify with their discipline but often did not
- Students were worried about the impact of lack of contribution from others on their marks
- Ideas mainly based on personal experience rather than disciplinary knowledge and skills
- Not all students engaged, which caused issues

Setting up the groups – tutor or self allocation

- Inconclusive whether tutor or student allocated groups perform better
- No difference in group dynamics but better outcomes in tutor allocated groups (Hassaskah and Mozaffari, 2015)
- Self-formed groups got off to a quicker start with no difference in marks between those and tutor-allocated groups (Hilton and Phillips, 2010)
- When students comfortable in group, content mastery increased by 27.5%, having a friend in a group biggest impact on comfort but not directly associated with improved performance (Theobald et al., 2017)



Setting up the groups

- Initially used a form where students could select two students from their own course and two students from a different discipline who they would like to be in their group
- Using a page of a OneNote Class Notebook anyone who had not completed the Form could add themselves to a group as long as it had a mix of disciplines

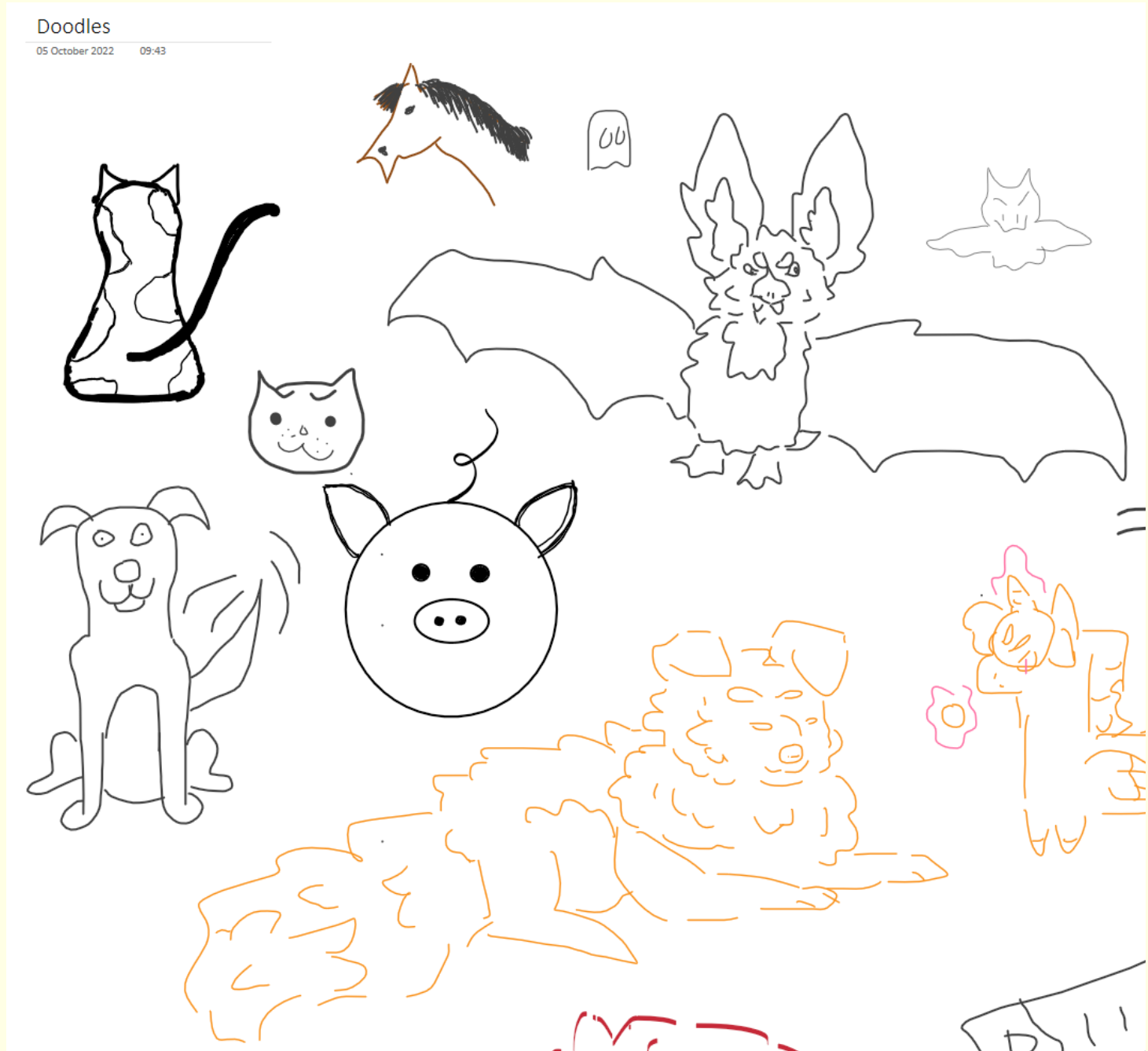


Class Notebook sign up page

Group	Name	Course
Antelope	[Redacted]	Marine and Terrestrial Conservation
	[Redacted]	Marine and Terrestrial Conservation
	[Redacted]	Animal Behaviour
	[Redacted]	Civil Engineering
	[Redacted]	Illustration and Animation
	[Redacted]	Medical Science
	[Redacted]	Medical Science
	[Redacted]	Zoology
	[Redacted]	Medical Science
	[Redacted]	Psychology with Criminology



Doodle time



Peers provided feedback on lobby paper ideas

Lobby paper ideas

05 October 2022 09:18

Share your ideas for your lobby paper here to get tutor and peer feedback. We are looking for idea for the lobby paper, that is asking clearly for something to happen, change, be amended etc. Is it relevant to animals? Could it have financial implications/implications for business/people's livelihoods etc.?

I am lobbying for.....	Tutor feedback	Peer feedback
<p>Banning horse slaughtering in Italy for commercial and consumption purposes</p>	<p>This is a good topic, my question would be is this to stop transport of horses across Europe to be slaughtered for human consumption or to stop killing horses for human consumption completely? As these are slightly different topics. You might need to make it clearer exactly what you are arguing for. If it is the former is it okay to kill local horses for human consumption, if it is the later have you got evidence that it should not be acceptable to eat horsemeat but it is acceptable to eat beef.</p>	<p>I didn't even know they did that to horses in Italy, I'm looking forward to hearing more about this.</p> <p>There is a great argument for their economical worth as well as being sentient beings</p>
<p>Making a compulsory subject dedicated solely to teaching how to care for and look after animals. Starting in Primary school and continuing forward, even having a dedicated GCSE. Effectively being as core as Science, Literacy, and Maths.</p>	<p>I like this idea, education (not just about animal care) is so important to improve animal welfare. My questions would be how could you justify it in an already congested curriculum? How could it be used to teach application of core academic subjects? How could it be used it help teach life skills? After all, although some disagree with having class pets (a whole other debate) isn't the purpose of having pets in school to help teach both life skills and science.</p>	<p>Oh wow, that's really interesting, I'm sure there'll be lots to talk about around that.</p> <p>I wish this was taught in my school from young age. Kids reflect views of their parents so animals such as cats were a big problem as many parents hated them. Kids would throw rocks at them for 'fun'.</p> <p>I really like this idea, very important and I don't know why it hasn't been spoken about sooner!</p>

And on lobby paper outlines (in tutorials)

Lobby paper outlines

10 October 2022 13:45

Please add your lobby paper outline into the table below for peer and tutor feedback no later than 10am on Wednesday 19th October. You will have opportunity to discuss this in more detail during the assignment tutorial session on Wednesday 19th October.

Lobby paper outline	Tutor feedback	Peer feedback

And on lobby paper outlines (an example)

Introduction:

- Lobbying for the ban of elephants in zoos but provide an alternative of an elephant sanctuary
- June 2021 passed to stop elephant captivity in zoos in UK –
 - to be put in Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill at end of year – didn't happen.
 - I propose an alternative of an elephant sanctuary where their needs can be met

Key points:

- Why this is an important issue –
 - educational benefits are necessary for the future understanding and protection of elephants
- Elephants are complex animals with advanced social groupings –
 - other elephant needs that must be met to ensure good wellbeing
- reasons why elephants' needs aren't being met
 - size of herds is considerably smaller than would be in the wild
 - space of enclosures
 - Cost?
- zoo stats of elephants
 - mortality rate (of young?) in zoos is worse than working elephants?
- how will a sanctuary meet the needs that zoos can't –
 - what benefits will this provide for elephants and humans
- propose alternative of elephant sanctuary –
 - funding from charities
 - Chester zoo to be involved? (<https://www.chesterzoo.org/news/elephants-in-uk-zoos-chester-zoo-response/>)
 - Work with elephant owners/conservers in Africa and Asia

This is an interesting choice of argument, and you've outlined some convincing, strong arguments. I would recommend finding research to support your views (and consider what would be the most effective target audience for your paper).

It would be interesting to know how many elephants are in the UK currently.
Interesting idea

Assessing interdisciplinarity

- Within the lobby paper – have they integrated arguments from multiple disciplines?
- Within the reflection – have they been able to describe the connections between disciplines and critically evaluate the benefit of integrating disciplinary knowledge?

What went well

- Students engaged with the formative process (to a degree)
- Students demonstrated greater integration of information from different disciplines within the lobby paper
- Students were better able to reflect on the benefits of integrating knowledge from more than a single discipline
- Less concerns raised about groupwork



Student feedback

“Communicating and helping out peers was good”

“Being able to view other peoples questions and ideas was helpful and nice to see a wide range of different ideas I like that we were able to give different perspectives from different disciplines enabling a wider view of the topic”

“The break out rooms and group definitely helped in being able to receive feedback. It allowed me to engage with other students and gain other opinions about a opinionated subject.”



What changes will I make for the next delivery

- In the peer feedback, ask students to comment specifically on what contribution they think their discipline can make to the argument
- Provide a time slot each week for students to meet in their peer support group to discuss their assessment work



Comparing my experiences

Assessed group work

- Students were expected to already identify with their discipline but often did not
- Students were worried about the impact of lack of contribution from others on their marks

Peer support groups

- Peer feedback still personal opinion but summative work demonstrated greater integration of ideas
- No concerns raised during the module or the evaluation about contribution to groupwork

Does a peer support group have the same benefits as group work?

- Promotes 'deep' rather than 'surface' learning ?
- 'Active' rather than 'passive' learning ✓
- Promotes experiential learning ?
- Collaborative and cooperative learning ✓
- Constructing knowledge ?
- Authentic assessment ?
- Reducing the marking load in large cohorts ✗
- Developing transferable skills ?
- Fostering social membership ✓
- Informal forum where new ideas can be discussed and assimilated ✓

Reviewed in: Davies, 2009



Any questions?

References

- Hassakhah, J. and Mozaffari, H. (2015) The impact of group formation method (student-selected vs. teacher-assigned) on group dynamics and group outcome in EFL creative writing. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*. 6 (1), 147-156
- Hilton, S. and Phillips, F. (2010). Instructor-assigned and student-selected groups: A view from the inside. *Issues in Accounting Education*, 25 (1), 15-33
- Davies, W.M. (2009) Groupwork as a form of assessment: common problems and recommended solutions. *Higher Education* 58, 563–584.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9216-y>
- Theobald, E.J., Eddy, S.L., Grunspan, D.Z., Wiggins, B.L., Crowe, A.J. (2017) Student perception of group dynamics predicts individual performance: Comfort and equity matter. *PLoS One*. 12(7):e0181336. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0181336.