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ON THE EDGE

Supporting marginalised students in groupwork assessment



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“How can I best support individuals who may feel marginalised during group work activity and assessment, whilst maintaining equity and transparency in tutor-led support across the entire cohort?”

Background

I am module tutor for Soil Degradation and Rehabilitation, which has a cohort of around 30 students and forms part of the final year of our BSc (Hons) Geography programme. The group assessment comprises 40% of the module marks and includes a group oral presentation and written report.

What I did

I implemented four interventions:

- Made four timetabled sessions available for the groups to meet and to discuss progress with tutors, thus addressing the practical problem of lack of opportunity to meet and facilitating group interaction early on in the process.
- Allowed groups to play to their strengths. We encouraged students to think about their strengths in terms of the tasks required as part of this assignment to identify what their contribution might be and their role within that group.
- Provided formative feedback on drafts of the written report. This enabled us to encourage and promote the need for a dialogue between group members where a synthesis of materials was lacking.
- Included an individual critical reflection component as part of the assignment. We aimed to promote reflection on the learning inherent in the activity regardless of the form of the experience or the summative mark of the end product.

Keep in mind

A considerable investment of time is required to provide effective support to individuals and groups, and this may well outweigh any savings in time that may accrue from marking. Provision of timetabled support sessions will inevitably lead to sacrifices in the delivery of academic subject content. Students may find the process of critical reflection to be particularly challenging and are likely to require significant guidance and support, especially if they come from a scientific background.