

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta

The Teaching Council



Title: The Impact of Teaching Group Work Skills on Student Motivation, the Quality of Interactions, and Student Learning in One-hour Collaborative Learning Classes in Junior Cycle English

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Relevant key words: Collaborative Learning; Student Voice; Student Engagement; Collaboration Skills; Value in Group Learning

Summary:

Research has shown that collaborative learning can result in social and cognitive gains for students. However, such findings are deemed contentious by studies that report significant collaborative inhibition, owing in no small part to students' lack of preparedness for collaboration. More recently, researchers' interest has moved away from outcomes to consider the processes of collaboration and how students learn. Notwithstanding this refocusing in the literature, there is a paucity of research into the impact of skills training on student engagement. The need for greater understanding on this issue in an Irish context is given added urgency in light of policy developments which urge teachers to facilitate collaborative learning with their students.

The objective of this action research study is, therefore, to understand the impact on student engagement of teaching collaboration skills *before* students participate in collaborative learning activities. Over a period of four weeks I observed and supported my First Year English students as they worked in groups, creating, scripting and acting out their own short plays in groups. I used this activity to teach and model specific collaboration skills which students would later require while engaging in three group investigations over a six-week period.

Informed by an interpretive paradigm, the study uses a mixed-methods approach and employs data gathering techniques such as questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, student reflective diaries and researcher field notes. Following inductive analysis of the data sets, the study found that skills training may have a positive impact on students' subsequent engagement in

collaborative learning. However, the nature and extent of that impact is mediated by factors such as students' attitudes towards collaborative learning, the perceived value of the collaborative task, students' perceptions of group efficacy in addition to students' perception of the value of their own voice and that of other students in the group. One unexpected conclusion which emerges from the research, is that teachers should be mindful during direct instruction to endow value in the voice of every student, since that value may impact on their subsequent participation in collaborative learning.