Is “working together” working?
An investigation into tertiary students’ attitudes toward collaborative assessments

Value of collaborative assessments

- Promotes learning (Hargreaves, 2007)
- Increases knowledge (Desrochers et al., 2007)
- Better retention of knowledge (Cortright et al., 2003)
- Vehicle for transferable skills (Dyball et al., 2007)
- Develops critical life skills (McKechn & Ellis, 2012)
- Enhances inter-professional practice (McCallin, 2005)
Team-based testing as a special type of collaborative assessment

- Enhances the development of communication and team-work skills (McAlpine, 2000)
- Offers learning in itself (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation) in addition to assessing knowledge (Robinson et al., 2008)
- Offers reduction in test-anxiety and improved grades (Zimbardo et al., 2003)

One question remains unanswered:

What do the students think of collaborative assessments?

QUALITATIVE STUDY

Participants
- 7 female; 1 male
- Mean age = 30 years (range = 19-51)
- 3 NZ, 2 Asian, 1 No’American, 1 Maori, 1 Middle Eastern

Data and Analysis
- Thematic analysis of semi-structured open interviews

KEY THEME

Collaborative learning and assessment are favourable when self-perceived levels of academic competence were low and unfavourable if self-perceived levels of competence were high.
Will perceived grades or world-view influence student attitudes toward collaborative assessments?

To answer, I designed a quantitative survey-based study:

**Participants**
- 80 Social Psychology students
- 79% female; 21% male
- Mean age = 24 years
- Range = 17-53 years
- Ethnicity:
  - European/Kiwi: 29
  - Asian: 12
  - Indian: 7
  - Māori: 9
  - Pacifica: 9
  - South African: 4
  - North American: 3
  - Middle Eastern: 3
  - African: 2
  - Filipino: 1
  - Eastern European: 1

Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>A moderate amount</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>An extreme amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  I see myself as an individualistic person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2  I see myself as a collectivist person</td>
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<td>3  I can see the benefit of working collaboratively with others</td>
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<td>4  I achieve more by working with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>5  I dislike group assessments</td>
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<tr>
<td>6  I prefer assessments that are based on group work, where everyone shares the grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>7  I like group activities as long as my grade is not dependent on the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>8  Working with others is too difficult</td>
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<tr>
<td>9  I feel “taken advantage of” when I work with others in a group</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 If I have to complete a group assessment, I prefer working with people I know</td>
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</table>
What role will *perceived grades* have on attitude toward collaborative assessments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>Q9</th>
<th>Q10</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.0000</td>
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<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.85</td>
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</table>

**Perceived grades:**

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<tr>
<th>A range</th>
<th>B range</th>
<th>C range</th>
<th>D range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=46)</td>
<td>(n=20)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Negatively correlated with:**

1. I prefer assessments that are based on group work, where everyone shares the grade

**Approaching (negative) significance:**

2. I achieve more by working with others

Attitude toward collaborative assessments as correlated with *Individualism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>Q9</th>
<th>Q10</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>-0.37</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
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<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td>0.77</td>
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</table>

**Negatively correlated with:**

1. I see myself as a collectivist person
2. I can see the benefit of working collaboratively with others

**Positively correlated with:**

5. I dislike group assessments
Attitude toward collaborative assessments as correlated with Collectivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
<th>Q6</th>
<th>Q7</th>
<th>Q8</th>
<th>Q9</th>
<th>Q10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>-0.35</td>
<td>1.00000</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.64</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
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<td>80</td>
<td>78</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Negatively correlated with:**
1. I see myself as an *individualistic* person
5. I dislike group assessments

**Positively correlated with:**
3. I can see the benefit of working collaboratively with others
4. I achieve more by working with others
6. I prefer assessments that are based on group work, where everyone shares the grade

**Summary**
- Despite research showing the value of collaborative assessments, not all students like them
- Students’ world-view seems to have some influence on their attitudes, with collectivist students liking group assessments significantly more than individualistic ones
- Qualitative research found high-achieving students to dislike group assessments but the quantitative study failed to fully support this initial finding

**Implications**
- What is not clear is if these positive or negative attitudes influence the value/benefit of collaborative assessing
  - even though some students don’t like shared assessments, they may still benefit from them
- There may be value in collaborative engagement for students without their grades being dependent on the shared work
Limitations

- The study surveyed mostly psychology students; students from other disciplines may have different attitudes.
- No questions were asked that distinguished marked assessments from unmarked group work (the later might be enjoyable and beneficial even without the former).

Future Research

- More work is needed on the different aspects of group assessments:
  - The influence of students being able to choose their partners
  - What to do when others “loaf”
  - If there are different attitudes toward different types of assessments (e.g. shared tests, practical work, written assignments, etc.)
- Research is also needed on how attitudes may influence the value of group work.

References