Group working

‘Many people cringe and groan when told that they will need to work in a group. This phenomenon is called “grouphate.” Grouphate has been referred to as the dread and repulsion that many people feel about working in groups or teams... However, these feelings diminish among group members who have received proper instruction about working in groups.’

(Burke, 2011)

Introduction

Burke might well be overstating the promise of ‘instruction’ where attitudes to group working are concerned. However, it is certainly the case that if group working is to feature as part of HE curricula, then it does need to be structured and supported so as to enable students to experience its benefits.

What we need to do

As with everything else we want students to learn to do well, support for group working involves thinking about students’ prior experiences (for better or worse), as well as how group work tasks themselves are introduced, explained, justified, supported and assessed. One common error – again, as with other areas of academic practice – is to assume that support can be best provided through workshops and resources that aim to tell students things like ‘how to work effectively in groups’. Such approaches might well enable students to answer questions like ‘what makes a group effective?’, but the knowledge evidenced in such answers does not necessarily tell us much at all about students’ ability to actually practice effective group working. To achieve the latter, we need to think more about how group work tasks are structured and assessed.

Reference