



COUNTERING STUDENT ALIENATION AND ANXIETY WITH TEAM FORMATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The way students communicate with each other and with faculty have dramatically changed through the years. Increased use of e-mail and texting has diminished face-to-face interaction. Consequently, students are experiencing a sense of isolation, increased anxiety, and an inability to connect with each other as well as with their professors. Team formation in the accounting classroom was considered to examine the impact on students' course grade. The goal was to determine the effect of team formation on the students' overall course experience. The academic and personal implications were determined by an examination of students' grades, observation of teams, and interviews with team members.

Students were organized into teams of 5 to 6 students and participated in team activities throughout the semester. Team activities included class presentations, in-class assignments, homework, and organized exam preparation/review sessions. Two entry-level accounting classes were examined and compared to their counterparts who studied exclusively in an individual learning environment.

The classes in which team formation was implemented resulted in higher academic achievement; increased student passing rate, increased class attendance, and decreased number of student withdrawals. Observations noted included friendlier class environment, increased student to student as well as student to professor interaction, and heightened awareness of other cultures. Interviews with team members echoed sentiments of increased self-confidence, lower levels of stress, and deeper understanding of learned material.

Keywords

Group Learning, Student Anxiety, Individualism, Classroom Environment, Enhanced Learning

The way students communicate with each other and with faculty have dramatically changed through the years. Increased use of email and texting has diminished face-to-face interaction. Students come to the classroom with invisible blinders; heads down towards their cell-phones and unaware of their classmates. Traditionally, time spent before class started would be used for light-hearted conversation-the weather, TV programs, current events, and even course topics. There was a chance for relationships to form. Today, relationships in the classroom are non-existent. Consequently, students are more isolated, anxious, and unable to connect with others. The purpose of this presentation is to show how team formation in the classroom counteracts this alienation and individualism. The study shows, as a result of group learning, both the students' grades and the passing rate increased. These results were easily measurable with the data obtained throughout the semester. Additionally, the study shows group learning: builds confidence, reduces anxiety, and prepares students for the real-world. These additional results were determined through observations and interviews.

Students were organized into random teams of 5 to 6 students selected by the professor. Students were chosen randomly as to avoid students teaming up with like-minded or similar looking students; all male or all female groups. Certain practices in the classroom were adopted by the professor. The names of each student were learned early on by the professor. In addition to students' names, through conversations, the professor became aware of the ongoing struggles of the students. Many of the students work full time, have small children at home; some are single parents with little or no help. Some students do not take care of themselves properly-many come to the classroom with lack of sleep and proper nutrition. The professor can be a conduit to the many resources available to students; food pantry on campus, counseling services, and child-care options. By implementing these practices, a tone at the top was created that would foster a class environment where learning and student interaction was probable. Students participated in team activities throughout the semester. Team activities included class presentations, in-class assignments, and organized exam preparation/review sessions. Although exam review

sessions were not a course requirement, students opted to arrange these sessions; a sense of belonging was evidenced early in the semester. Two entry level accounting classes were researched and compared to students in two entry-level accounting classes who studied exclusively in an individual learning environment. Grades were analyzed, student interaction was observed, and student interviews were conducted.

An analysis of the grades showed the number of students passing increased by approximately 33%, and those receiving an A increased by approximately 56%. (Figure1) Observations, only after three weeks into the

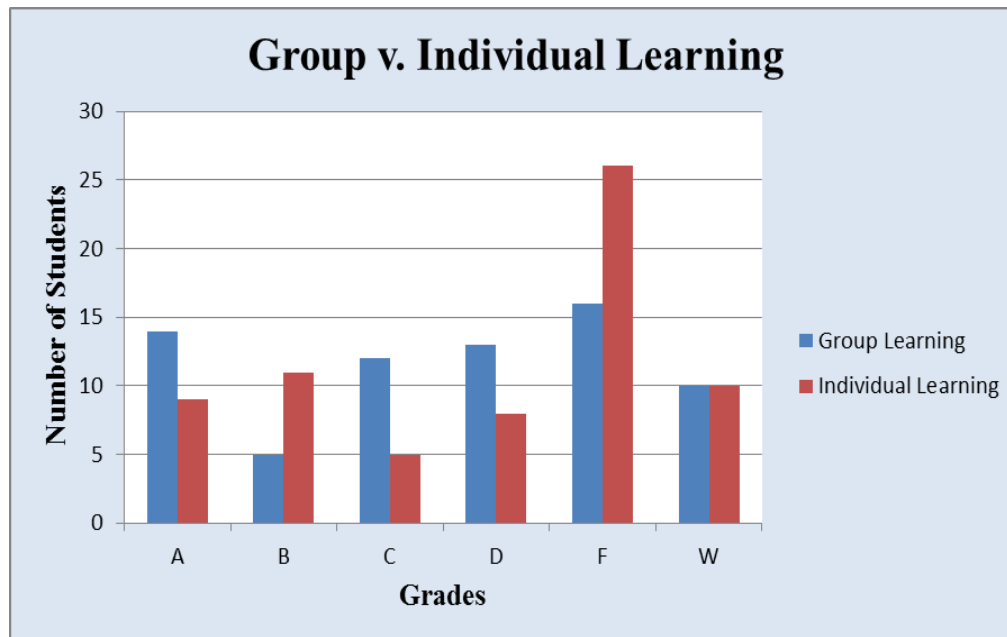


Figure1. Results of Study-Students' grades; a comparison of group learning v individual learning.

semester, noted: a friendlier class environment; students were joking and laughing. An increased student-to-student interaction; students were observed exchanging cell phone numbers, discussing outside classroom activities, lunch, college clubs, and next semester classes. A heightened awareness of other cultures and ethnicities; discussion of cultural holidays and traditions were noted. Team formation gave the students the opportunity to learn from one another and also about one another. It was evident friendships were formed in the classroom and beyond. Interviews with team members echoed sentiments of: amplified self-confidence, lower levels of stress, and a deeper understanding of learned material. Learning complex material created a sense of achievement among students. Students came to the realization that they didn't have to go through the anxieties of a course alone.

In summary, the classroom experience in a group setting is positive when compared to individual learning; increased academic achievement and improved student passing rate. As these were easily measurable, however, what couldn't be measured and seemed to indicate more importance to the students were the shared experiences. The group experience led to increased student confidence, less anxiety, and better prepared for the real world. Students were observed figuring out complex course topics. Several students were noted joining college activities together such as the Stock Market club and the Business Bowl competition. Friendships were formed in the classroom. By implementing group learning, students are better prepared for the real-world as the team structure in an organization is often the norm.

Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, developed a theory of motivation based on a hierarchy of needs. Maslow suggests a sequence of needs through which people successively move as they satisfy their wants and desires: physiological needs, security and safety needs, *social needs-the needs to be loved, to be accepted, and to belong*, and self-actualizing needs (Pride, Hughes, Kapoor 2013). If we accept Maslow's theory about need levels, and then we should agree a class environment which assists in obtaining the needs to be accepted and to belong, such as in group learning is desirable.

Works Citation

Pride, William M. Hughes, Robert J. Kapoor, Jack R. (2013) Foundations of Business, 3E. Mason, Ohio South Western, Cengage Learning