

## Sessions for Interaction and engagement

**Title:** Supporting group work in LIS education

**Organiser:** Pamela McKinney, University of Sheffield

### **Abstract (150w)**

The purpose of this session is to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss the challenges and benefits experienced by students when they work collaboratively in groups in LIS education. There is increasing interest in visual methods in LIS research, and participants will actively engage with creation of visual data in the form of drawings and will develop their knowledge of the “draw and write” methodology. Participants will view and discuss drawings created by LIS students and will gain valuable insight into the conceptions students hold about working in groups, how they work together and manage their group activities, the difficulties and challenges they face and the positive aspects of group work that can be celebrated. The session will be highly interactive and reflective, and will encourage participants to draw on their own teaching experience in supporting students working in groups with a view to developing this in the future.

### **Purpose and intended audience**

The intended audience for this session is educators in the LIS field who use group work or collaborative inquiry-based learning as a pedagogical strategy with their students, either in face-to-face or distance learning. Social constructivist educational theorists are convinced of the social, personal and professional benefits of working with others in a learning context (Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Race, 2007; Vygotsky, 1980). The ability to work well in a team is noted as a professional competence by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP, 2017). Yet students can have very negative opinions and experiences of group work, and can view group work as a “difficult and dreaded” activity (Lightfoot, 2006). Problems can arise due to variable contribution of members, and in particular “free riding” where some group members do all the work, is widely known to cause significant problems for students, and by extension their tutors (Freeman & Greenacre, 2010).

Many Information Schools have a highly international cohort of students, and while this has the potential to offer students the opportunity to be exposed to cultural diversity and benefit from new multicultural perspectives (The Boyer Commission, 1998), there are acknowledged difficulties faced by students working in multicultural groups. Differing academic attitudes, difficulties in communicating in a non-native language, and how support is framed for students can have a significant impact on enjoyment of group work and by extension achievement (Asgari, 2017). Managing group work is a complex process, particularly when students have conflicting academic, personal and social responsibilities. In a learning space shaped by modern communication technologies and social media, students find their group work “heavily mediated by technology” (Benfield & De Laat, 2010). Universities provide Virtual Learning Environments and other institutional electronic spaces for groups to interact, but social media and other open platforms are also available. Groups must negotiate not only *when* to work together, but also *how*, and on what platform.

This session has been informed by a research project that sought to investigate student conceptions of group work through the medium of student created drawings collected using a draw and write methodology (Angell, Alexander, & Hunt, 2014). There is increasing interest in visual research methods in LIS generally (Pollak, 2017), and this project was in turn informed by Hartel's (2014) research into pictorial metaphors of information. A data collection protocol developed by Hartel was adopted, whereby participants are asked to contribute a drawing on a 10cm x 10cm card (known as an isquare), and are then asked to write a description of their drawing on the reverse. In this research project, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students from the University of Sheffield Information school were asked to simply "draw group work". 146 drawings were collected and analysed, and the data revealed interesting conceptions of the organisation and management of student group work, and the benefits and challenges experienced by students (McKinney, in press). Subsequently the drawings have been used to stimulate discussion with LIS students about group work. Students were given a subset of drawings and were invited to discuss them in a group work preparation session. This enabled them to openly surface their preferences and assumptions about working practices and communication, and begin to develop a plan for how they would practically manage a particular group assignment. The activity provided a non-threatening space in which to discuss the culturally different ways that students from different backgrounds might view group work, and how language competence might affect groups.

### **Proposed activities**

The session will be highly interactive and reflective, and will invite participants to consider their own experiences of group work, how students experience group work, and ultimately how they can better support group work in their own teaching practice. The proposed activities are as follows:

- A short introduction to the research project and data collection method that has informed this session
- Participants will be invited to contribute their own drawing of group work following the same protocol adopted in the research project. This will enable participants to experience the "artful, egalitarian, accessible and fun" (Hartel 2014 p. 1350) method for themselves.
- Discussion in groups of the participant created drawings, with common themes surfaced for discussion with the group as a whole. Reflection on the experience of data collection.
- A selection of student-created drawings will be given to groups, to enable them to compare and contrast their own conceptions of group work with those of students. Participants will be encouraged to identify elements they are both familiar and unfamiliar with, and to relate the drawn data to their own teaching experience.
- A plenary discussion will take place to identify the potential uses of student created drawings of group work in teaching and support of students working in groups.

### **Relevance to the conference**

In an increasingly digital world, it is still important that students are able to work well with others, however the methods of interacting with each other and managing the work they have to take part in in groups in LIS education is evolving. LIS educators who ask their

students to engage in collaborative inquiry will be interested in understanding how they can improve support for students working in groups. This session will introduce participants to a practical method for generating open and frank discussion with students about the purpose and practice of working together in groups.

### Length of session

This session will span 90 minutes

### References

- Angell, C., Alexander, J., & Hunt, J. a. (2014). "Draw, write and tell": A literature review and methodological development on the "draw and write" research method. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X14538592>
- Asgari, S. (2017). *Conceptualising cultural issues and challenges within a UK Information School context*. University of Sheffield. Retrieved from <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/16100/>
- Benfield, G., & De Laat, M. (2010). Collaborative knowledge building. In *Rethinking Learning for a digital age: How learners are shaping their own experiences* (p. 223). Abingdon: Routledge.
- CILIP. (2017). My professional knowledge and skills base: Identify gaps and maximise opportunities along your career path. Retrieved July 25, 2017, from <https://www.cilip.org.uk/careers/professional-knowledge-skills-base/access-professional-knowledge-skills-base>
- Freeman, L., & Greenacre, L. (2010). An Examination of Socially Destructive Behaviors in Group Work. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 33(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475310389150>
- Hartel, J. (2014). An Arts-Informed study of information using the draw-and-write technique. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 65(7), 1349–1367. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.23121>
- Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (1992). Positive interdependence: key to effective cooperation. In R. Hertz-Lazarowitz & N. Miller (Eds.), *Interaction in cooperative groups: Theoretical anatomy of group learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lightfoot, J. M. (2006). A comparative analysis of e-mail and face-to-face communication in an educational environment. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 9, 217–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2006.06.002>
- McKinney, P.A. (in press) Student conceptions of group work: visual research into LIS student group work using the draw and write technique
- Pollak, A. (2017). Visual research in LIS: Complementary and alternative methods. *Library & Information Science Research*, 39(2), 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2017.04.002>
- Race, P. (2007). *The Lecturer's Toolkit : A Practical Guide to Assessment, Learning and Teaching* (3rd ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- The Boyer Commission. (1998). *UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION : A Blueprint for America's Research Universities*. Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University Stony Brook NY. Retrieved from <http://reinventioncollaborative.colostate.edu/the-boyer-report/>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

