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Assessing collaborative learning

Desmond Hunter

School of Media and Performing Arts, University of Ulster, Northland Road, Londonderry BT48 7JL, UK

D.Hunter1@ulster.ac.uk

This paper is informed by one clear guiding principle: collaborative learning provides the platform on which independent learning is nurtured. The nature of collaborative learning in musicology as well as performance is considered. The focus is on learning rather than achievement, on process rather than presentation, on how students are encouraged to develop good learning habits. It will be argued that the assessment of a group endeavour needs to be integral to rather than detached from the learning. The centrality of the group endeavour in the learning environment does not diminish the role of the individual. The integrity of an individual's contribution to a group endeavour is validated by the group.

In a paper published in volume 16 of this journal (Hunter, 1999), the implementation of peer-learning programmes in Music at the University of Ulster was outlined to demonstrate the value of the approaches taken in terms of student learning. The main focus of the discussion was the peer-assessment of seminar presentations delivered by students working together in small groups. In analysing the cognitive processes that are activated in this kind of learning situation, it was noted that everyone present is actively involved – either they are delivering the presentation or they are assessing it – consequently, the level of concentration is high. The collaborative process benefits the individual: the sharing of thoughts and ideas encourages students to examine and reconsider their particular learning strategies and stimulates individual initiative. Peer learning is now embedded in the BMus at the University. The nature of the activities has changed over the years, often in response to student feedback. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on some of the developments and to consider some broader issues, particularly in relation to assessment. Views expressed are informed also by work conducted during the life of the FDTL (Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning) project, 'Peer Learning in Music', and, more recently, a National Teaching Fellowship project on assessment, the main outcome of which was a collection of essays under the title *How am I Doing?: Valuing and Rewarding Learning in Musical Performance in Higher Education* (Hunter, 2004).

Assessing collaborative work in higher education is problematic. Degrees are awarded to individuals and, whether the assessment is based on coursework or examinations, we are required to determine marks for individual students. Assessment strategies are not designed to accommodate collaborative work. Where collaborative work is undertaken, various schemes operate to enable tutors to derive marks for individual students.

> The nub of the problem is fairness. If a group has done the project, should all the group receive the same mark or should one allocate marks on the basis of each person's contribution? If so, how? Because there are no easy answers to these questions, some people are reluctant to use group projects even though they can be easier to organise

> and mark than individual projects and they do provide a set of valuable learning experiences for students. (Brown *et al*., 1997: 136–137)

There is a contradiction between the focus of assessment on individual achievement and the promotion of teamwork; it is widely recognised that the development of teamwork skills enhances students' employability prospects (see Drew & Bingham, 1997: 113; Rhodes & Tallantyre, 1999: 108–109; Heywood, 2000: 374). The challenge is how to promote collaborative learning within higher education without compromising the group ethos. Before addressing some of these issues, it will be helpful to begin with some fundamental questions.

What is collaborative learning?

Collaborative learning is sometimes described as cooperative learning, collective learning, peer learning, reciprocal learning or team learning. Whichever construction we use, the reference is to learning that involves students in working with others and, crucially, learning together. The outcome, therefore, should provide evidence of the nature of the collaborative endeavour. Where, for instance, a group of four students interact effectively in delivering a seminar presentation or in giving a performance of a string quartet, the collaboration is self-evident. If, however, the members of the seminar group simply take it in turn to read portions of a prepared script, that outcome would suggest that the extent of collaboration was of limited benefit to the group as a whole. John Henry Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University*, a series of discourses compiled in 1852, may seem an unlikely source of information on collaborative learning, yet the author makes some interesting and relevant observations:

> If then a practical end must be assigned to a University course, I say it is that of training good members of society. Its art is the art of social life, and its end is fitness for the world . . . It [a University education] shows him [the student] how to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them'. (1912 edn.: 177–178)

There is no specific reference to collaborative learning in Newman's discourses. But, by implication, the thrust of the passage quoted is that learning to work with others and benefiting from developing productive relationships is a vital part of a university education.

The literature on group work and collaborative learning is extensive, much of it providing valuable commentary on the nature of group work and underlining the need for a structured approach to collaborative learning (see, for example, Brown *et al*., 1997; Miller *et al*., 1998; Biggs, 1999; Griffiths, 1999). In a wide-ranging essay on 'Teaching and Learning in Small Groups', Sandra Griffiths (1999) describes stages in the process and provides a helpful list of various ways of working with small groups. In considering approaches to assessment, Brown *et al*. (1997: 174) suggest that 'peer assessment may be the only satisfactory way of assessing how students work together in a group project', a view echoed by Heywood (2000: 374). (See also Goldfinch & Raeside, 1990; Conway *et al*., 1993; Somervell, 1993.) Falchikov (1993: 276) explains an approach in which 'the

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end product was rated by experts and the same mark awarded to all group members, while individual contributions to the group effort were assessed by group members by means of a form of group process analysis'. Lloyd-Jones & Allen (1997: 73) suggest that 'adding on an individual mark to a 'group' assessment is a conservative rather than a radical step – students already receive the bulk of their marks via an individual assessment mode'. Whilst supporting this view, Boud *et al*. (2001: 75) advise caution:

> Unless there are sufficient opportunities to build group planning and group accountability skills, then the use of group assessment is premature. Schemes in which there is an explicit mix of individual and group assessment for common tasks might provide a bridge to wider use of group assessment in these circumstances.

John Cowan (1998) describes group work undertaken by students of technology at Aalborg University which places emphasis on process as well as outcome. In explaining the value of 'analytical self-appraisal of the processes they [the students] followed', Cowan notes that 'The demand of process analysis . . . places considerable formal emphasis on explicit reflection about what the students have done or are doing as a group, how they can improve on that, and on what they should concentrate, next time round' (Cowan, 1998: 16). Heathfield (1999) and Bryan (2004) also discuss process and its assessment and stress the importance of valuing process. Two themes highlighted here in relation to the assessment of group work, the individual/group dynamic and the relationship between process and outcome, are developed further in this paper.

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to collaborative learning:

The peer group as a support mechanism

Collaborative learning may encourage the formation of peer groups, each one providing an informal support mechanism. Such groups might meet weekly, share learning experiences and address any difficulties that individual group members might be experiencing. It is helpful if the group maintains a cumulative record of issues discussed and how they dealt with and resolved particular problems. The value of such a support mechanism is self-evident.

The peer group as a task-oriented collective

Collaborative learning may require students to work in pairs or in small groups in completing designated tasks: a written assignment, a seminar presentation or a performance. In this type of situation, the collaborative learning is focused on the achievement of a particular learning outcome, which may be measured using appropriate methods, instruments and sources of assessment. Involving pairs or groups in conducting assessment of work presented by other students is another dimension of collaborative learning. Assessment panels, judging performances for example, may be composite, with a mix of students and staff. Collaborative learning is not just about interaction between students but also between students and staff.

The size of the group is a determinant in relation to the way in which the group might function and the nature of the peer learning that develops. Where two students are

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involved in preparing an assignment or a performance, management of the process is less complicated than that involving a group of four or more students. Also, the nature of the engagement is different in that discussion and negotiation involving two students is subject to fewer variables than that involving four or more. Indeed, it might be argued that creating opportunities for students to work in pairs is a desirable preliminary to placing them in group-learning situations.

Preparing students for their participation in group-learning activities is important. It would seem that musicians are at an advantage (over, say, students in history or languages) in that from an early age they have probably been involved in shared music-making; taking part in choral or orchestral activities or as members of a smaller ensemble.

Why collaborative learning? How does it benefit the learner?

In defining our approach to peer learning in Music at the University of Ulster (Hunter, 1999) it was explained that, in our experience, peer, or collaborative, learning:

- engages students as active participants in the learning process;
- enriches the learning experience of students;
- creates a more interactive environment;
- encourages questioning, discussion and debate;
- develops skills (both cognitive and generic) which benefit students in their working lives.

Collaborative learning engages students as active participants in that they are placed in situations in which they have to explain what they are doing and why they are doing it and take account of the views expressed by others. It guards against the danger of students being isolated, particularly in the first year of a programme, and as such serves also as a valuable retention strategy. In group-learning situations, students are working with others whose learning experiences are probably different to their own. In forming a group ethos, therefore, there is an emphasis on how you learn as well as what you learn. As Mike Heathfield observed in an article in the *THES* in 1999: 'Groupwork should be a key element in any learning strategy because it reflects the true nature of learning'. A key point that should be reinforced is that collaborative learning provides the platform on which independent learning is nurtured. Students gain in confidence, become aware of their strengths, and are encouraged to develop their own ideas. After conducting some trial sessions with first-year students at the beginning of the academic year 2004–5, the students were asked what particular benefits they felt they would derive from working in small groups. The first comment that most of them volunteered was that working as part of a team helps your confidence. As Sandra Griffiths notes: 'It is within the small group that self-confidence can be improved' (1999: 97). It is often stated that collaborative learning enhances students' satisfaction with their learning experience, promotes self-esteem and develops skills in negotiation, organisation, leadership and evaluation. An important point underlined by John Heywood is that 'students construct their knowledge in an active way while working cooperatively with classmates' (Heywood, 2000: 209–210).

In evaluating collaborative learning, we need to be able to explain the nature of the collaborative endeavour, which aspects are being assessed, how the assessment will be

conducted and how that assessment will benefit the learning. Assessment that focuses on outcome has a limited function and will encourage engagement with learning only insofar that it serves the achievement of the outcome. Assessment that focuses on learning will encourage students to engage with the methodologies, practices and skills that are more likely to ensure a successful outcome and, equally importantly, will embed good learning habits. Inevitably, this will place significant emphasis on student evaluation of their own work. Involvement in assessment is a vital part of the learning cycle; excluding students from this part of the process limits their learning experience.

What collaborative learning opportunities might be provided and how should they be assessed?

Three different learning situations will be exemplified in the following narrative:

- Students working in pairs might be given one or more of the following tasks: essay outline/essay; progress report; review; project; rehearsal; performance.
- Students working in small groups might be involved in a seminar presentation; a debate; a quiz; a rehearsal; a performance; or they might contribute to the assessment of a task.
- Where students and staff work together in groups, they might be involved in rehearsals; assessment panels; negotiation sessions.

Essay outline

This task requires first-year students, in pairs, to provide an outline response of *c*. 500 words to a particular question. The outline may be in the form of a series of bullet points. In addition, the students are required to locate at least four sources (books or journal articles) containing information relevant to the topic; they are asked to explain why they have chosen the particular texts, what they could draw from them, and how that material would inform their essay. A commentary on each item is required. The emphasis, therefore, is on research, on process. Looking at this a little more closely:

- The topic may be set, there may be a choice of topics or students may be able to negotiate the topic.
- The research might be conducted by each student working independently; the two students might engage in collaborative research; or, two pairs of students might work together in conducting the research.
- When the essay outline is submitted, the students also provide a process report.
- Informal peer evaluation of the work may be conducted by another student pair.
- Tutor evaluation of the assignment will be informed by the process report and possibly also by the informal peer evaluation.
- Feedback is provided and the students are given an opportunity to challenge the assessment in a negotiation session.

Throughout the process, the students are encouraged to maintain a diary which then informs the process report that is submitted. The process report is a combined report. It may be considered desirable to invite each student to submit an individual report in which they

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clarify and weight their contribution and that of their partner to the process, but perhaps this is somewhat at odds with the nature of a collaborative endeavour. In addition to explaining the process, the students award themselves a mark for the work submitted. In assessing the work, the tutor is influenced by the process report. His/her mark is then given as a multiple of 5. Once the work is returned and the students have had time to digest the feedback, they have the opportunity to enter into negotiation with the tutor. As the marks awarded are in multiples of 5, the students may negotiate for a maximum of four extra marks. For example, if the mark awarded is 55, they may be able to raise that mark to 59, but a strong argument would have to be presented. This process ensures that students read and reflect on the feedback provided. If they are going to challenge the mark awarded, they must be able to demonstrate that they have given careful consideration to the comments and criticisms provided by the tutor. There are two elements here which should be highlighted:

- The process report provides valuable information on the preparation of the assignment, but also includes a mark proposed, and justified, by the students. The report offers an insight on the learning and on the process of self-evaluation.
- Once the students have digested the feedback, they have the opportunity to challenge the assessment and present arguments for additional marks. This encourages them to reflect critically on the feedback and then to engage with the tutor on a metacognitive level.

If the focus of the assessment is on the learning, then these two elements are extremely important. At least, they should inform the tutor's assessment. If we were to imagine an analogous situation in relation to performance: it might involve a rehearsal or an illustrated progress report provided by a duo.

Illustrated progress report

The illustrated progress report was introduced in the BMus course at the University of Ulster specifically to reward learning. It is one of the assessment tasks to be completed by first- and second-year students. Some of the reports have been presented by duos. The focus is on a work that is being prepared for performance. However, the performers are not expected to give a performance of the work. Rather, they are required to explain how the work is being prepared for performance. In doing so, they highlight the challenges that the work presents, describe what has been done and achieved, illustrate how particular passages have been tackled, and outline their work plan for the period leading to the performance. The progress reports are presented to the year group and students present are invited to ask questions. This assignment facilitates the process of reflection and provides a structure that enables students to develop skill in explaining the process of preparation to others. It is an important peer-learning activity. Student involvement is not confined to the one year group. We have often involved final-year students in these sessions. Their participation is welcomed in that they can relate more closely than staff to the nature of the exercise. Final-year involvement in the assessment, therefore, ensures that the evaluation is informed by a range of perspectives.

In evaluating the illustrated progress report, our current practice is to consider the management of the presentation, the information provided, the relevance of the

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illustrations, response to questions and the content of the supporting written submission. The written submission is in a form similar to the process report submitted with the essay outline and the content will inform the assessment. The written submission often provides real insights on the learning that has taken place and it could be argued, therefore, that this core piece of evidence should form the basis for the assessment.

Turning to a consideration of activities involving small groups of students, seminar presentation and debates offer particular opportunities for valuable collaborative learning.

Seminar presentation

Traditionally, seminar presentations are delivered by individual students. Group presentations feature in a number of courses and often students are encouraged to engage in some form of role-playing, partly to ensure that the group works as a unit, partly because it makes the task more interesting, and also because it tends to result in a presentation that holds the attention of the audience. Students at the University of Ulster have always been encouraged to think of imaginative ways in which they might deliver a presentation, above all avoiding the approach that involves students taking it in turn to read portions of a prepared script; indeed, that approach is actively discouraged in that it is not in the spirit of a collaborative endeavour. What approaches, therefore, might they take? At the University of Ulster presentations delivered have been in the form of debates, panel discussions and rehearsals, some have been modelled on gameshows, and some have adopted the format of a newsline programme. These seminars feature in modules in Musicology and the topics set are always challenging. Certainly, the topics themselves don't immediately suggest a particular format, but it is amazing how resourceful and imaginative students can be when they are given the opportunity!

A topic that was set some years ago invited a seminar group to identify unifying features in a cantata by Bach (the cantata in question was 'Christ lag in Todesbanden'). The presentation was modelled on 'Blind Date', a game-show in which one of the participants is required to select a partner following the consideration of responses to a series of questions addressed to a group of potential candidates. In parodying the format of the game-show, a partner was selected on the basis of responses to questions relating to the unifying features in the cantata. The presentation, delivered by first-year students, was slick, informative and held the attention of the class. In a more recent seminar, in which a group was given a topic that required an analysis of the roles of the solo instruments in the first movement of Brandenburg 5: we had to imagine that three members of the group were the solo instruments, studying the score of this 'new' work, and discussing their roles with Bach, the fourth member of the group, and engaging with each other, bragging about the importance of their parts. There are two important elements here: innovation and enjoyment. It is important that students are encouraged to push the boundaries, to draw on other experiences and that we make the learning enjoyable.

To place these presentations in context and consider the various stages:

- The formation of the groups may be determined by staff or students. Sometimes each student is invited to write down the names of three other students they would like to work with and those lists are taken into consideration when forming the groups, ensuring that each student is placed in a group with at least one of their named peers.

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- In preparing the presentation, members of the group might work in pairs. If this approach is adopted, the students would be encouraged to change the pairings to ensure a variety of learning experiences.
- An overview of the presentation would be provided one week in advance of the seminar, to familiarise the other groups with the treatment of the topic and enable them to prepare questions.
- Following the presentation, other groups would have the opportunity to question the presenting group. Peer evaluation would be conducted.
- Peer-evaluation reports would be submitted by the assessing groups, a process report by the presenting group.
- Tutor assessment would be informed by the peer-evaluation reports and also by the process report.

What are the key stages here in relation to the assessment of collaborative learning? The process report submitted by each group is an important document. It explains the stages in the preparation of the presentation and includes reflective comment on the presentation itself (see below under Debate). This report will inform the overall assessment. But, is it not in fact central to the assessment process? Each of the peer-evaluation reports submitted should provide a fairly clear picture of the collaborative learning on two levels: what each group drew from the presentation; how subsequent discussion within the assessing group translated into critical comment on the peer-assessment report.

Individual members of the presenting groups and the assessing groups may be asked to submit individual self-evaluation reports. Such reports can provide valuable information on the working of the groups and in some schemes this mechanism is used to allocate marks to individual members of groups. This approach has been used at the University of Ulster, at the request of students (see Hunter, 1999), but it is debatable whether it is in the spirit of collaborative practice. There are at least three elements that need to be considered here:

- the process report submitted by the presenting group, which includes comments on both the preparation and the presentation;
- the presentation;
- the peer-evaluation reports.

If we are assessing learning, then, as far as the presenting group is concerned, we might focus on the process report, with the presentation providing the evidence of the outcome of the process. We might also consider the learning conducted by the peer groups, based on the feedback provided in the peer-assessment reports.

Debate

One of the most successful exercises in promoting collaborative learning is the debate. Given that you are pitting two groups against each other who have prepared the same topic, albeit taking opposing positions, debates tend to generate lively discussion.

The format is a variation of that established for seminar presentations:

- Topics given to three groups: debating groups and a questioning group
- One or two students nominated by debating groups present their views

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- Groups engage in debate, challenging views expressed . . .
- Questioning group addresses questions to both groups
- There may be questions from the floor
- Process report submitted by each group
- Evaluation reports submitted by peer groups present

How should the assessment be managed? There are a number of elements to consider:

- the initial presentation by each group;
- the ability of each group to defend their views and challenge the opposing group;
- the extent to which the students work as a team;
- response to questions;
- process reports (submitted by debating groups and questioning group);
- peer-evaluation reports;
- and, if the questioning group is assessed, the appropriateness and sequencing of the questions, and the ability to pursue a particular line of enquiry.

The process report completed by each group should be an informative document. In common with that used for seminar presentations, it would include: (1) preliminary comments, under specific headings, on the research conducted and the preparation for the debate; (2) reflective comments, also under specific headings, on the group's contribution to and management of the debate and the response to questions. Under (1), the group would propose and justify a mark for the preparation. Under (2), there would be the opportunity to revise that mark, following the debate; confirmation or revision of the mark would be accompanied by an explanation. The process report, therefore, should provide an insight on the working of the group and their engagement with reflection and evaluation. In assessing the learning of the group, the process report provides the most substantial piece of evidence. The groups' involvement in the debate and the peer-evaluation reports provide supplementary evidence.

It was mentioned earlier that collaborative learning may involve students and staff working together. This happens in relation to the peer assessment of performance at the University of Ulster.

Peer assessment of performance

Final-year students are involved in the assessment of first- and second-year performances. They work in groups, each group consisting normally of four students. Two approaches are taken:

- Students and staff sit together on panels in conducting assessment of first-year performances.
- Student and staff panels operate independently in assessing second-year performances but meet subsequently to discuss those performances and negotiate marks to be awarded.

We view the composite panel approach as a useful training for the peer assessment of second-year performances. Focusing on the panel deliberations, there are three different

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learning situations created:

- The composite panel, consisting of four final-year students and one member of staff, conducting assessment of first-year performances, with the member of staff guiding the students through the process (tutor-led process).
- The separate student panels, conducting assessment of second-year performances and agreeing provisional marks and preparing preliminary reports (student-led process).
- The negotiation sessions, in which students and staff as equal partners discuss and agree marks and the content of reports (shared process).

The final-year students may offer their contribution to these assessments as part of their performance studies programme in final year. They provide a report on the level of their involvement, offering critical comment on the collaborative process.

Leaving aside the role of the composite panels in conducting assessment of first-year performances and concentrating on the peer-assessment of second-year performances, there are three elements to be taken into consideration in evaluating the learning:

- preliminary reports prepared and provisional marks agreed by student panels;
- the contribution of each student panel to the negotiation sessions;
- the drafting of final reports on the performances.

We require students to complete a self-evaluation of their contribution to the process. This would include comment on the performances assessed, the issues that were addressed in group discussion, the determination of marks, the negotiation sessions, and on how they have benefited from involvement in this particular peer-learning activity. The self-evaluation submitted by each final-year student is the main element on which assessment of their contribution to the peer-assessment process is based.

General issues

There are some general issues that relate to the various activities outlined in this paper:

- the size and composition of groups;
- preparing students to work in groups;
- the duration of the collaboration;
- management of the group;
- ownership of collaborative learning;
- resolving difficulties within the group;
- focus of the assessment.

The size and composition of groups

In an ensemble, the size of the group is normally determined by the scoring. Other groupings are determined by the nature of the task. If it is considered important to ensure a mix of personalities, the tutor(s) involved should probably determine the groupings. (And, for groups conducting assessment of performance, perhaps it is helpful if the students represent a range of instrumental specialisms.) One cannot predict how members of a group will interact, however, and, although composition based on personality mix and instrumental variety would seem to be a good concept, it will not guarantee an effective group dynamic. A reserved student will not necessarily respond to an extrovert companion. Students of

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a quiet disposition may experience a feeling of isolation within a group dominated by strong personalities. Grouping students of a quiet disposition together can be an effective strategy: personality blend would seem to be a stronger determinant of developing a group dynamic than any other single factor. For this reason, it is probably more productive, in terms of learning outcomes, to allow students to form their own groups. There are other advantages: if the students self-select, they are likely to form groupings of individuals who are free at the same time during the week; transferring responsibility for the formation of groups to the students tends to ensure a greater sense of commitment to the group work undertaken. Apart from the tasks undertaken by students working in pairs, we would work with groupings of four or five students. Experience of group work suggests that once you extend the size of the group to six or more, there is the danger of 'free-riders'. As John Biggs notes: 'the larger the group, the more likely it is that 'social loafing' will take place' (Biggs, 1999: 89).

Preparing students to work in groups

It is essential that some training is put in place for group work in seminars. 'Such training will develop an understanding that all groups go through a number of stages. Hence, when conflict arises in the group, for example, it can be understood and dealt with as a natural feature to be resolved, rather than perceived as a descent into chaos' (Griffiths, 1999: 99). Students need to get to know each other, develop a familiarity with the strengths of each member of the group and together create a strong sense of group cohesion to enable the group to function effectively and efficiently as a unit.

The duration of the collaboration

The final point made in the preceding paragraph would suggest that groups need to work together over a lengthy period. It can also be argued that once students learn how groups function, they should then have the opportunity to experience group work in a variety of learning situations, involving different groupings. Although this can be applied in seminars and debates and in relation to assessment panels, it may not be the approach that one would recommend in performance.

Management of the group

Sometimes natural leaders emerge from groups. The leadership role is one that could rotate, so that each student within the group may be given the opportunity to chair discussions. It is helpful if, in addition, each group member experiences different roles within the group. These arrangements should be discussed and agreed by the members of the group. Not every student necessarily would feel comfortable in a leadership role and, therefore, it would be inappropriate and unproductive to require all students in any group to undertake roles that would inhibit their effectiveness as team players. The point to stress is that students should provide support for each other so that they feel part of the whole and essential to the group endeavour.

Ownership of collaborative learning

At the outset, the process is tutor-led. When is the ownership shared and at what point is it transferred to the students? Ideally, this should happen as soon as possible but, inevitably,

some groups will take control more quickly than others. Groups can learn from each other and there is value in encouraging different groups to share their learning experiences. Inter-group rather than tutor reliance ensures that ownership remains with the student body.

Resolving difficulties within the group

Where difficulties arise, ideally these need to be resolved by the students. It is helpful, however, if there is a safety-net mechanism. This might involve engaging a postgraduate student or a member of staff to facilitate discussion. In some institutions, the view is taken that in the real world teams have to learn to work together (see, for example, Lloyd-Jones & Allen 1997: 74). But the university is not the real world and we have a responsibility to ensure that students develop good learning habits and the necessary back-up mechanisms to help them survive in the real world.

Focus of the assessment

This is the crucial issue. It has been suggested that the process or progress report submitted by a student pair or group might play a central role in the assessment. In other words, it forms the basis for the assessment; other elements provide supplementary evidence. It depends on the perception of the function of assessment. Should all assessment focus on either outcome or process, should it vary and should students be able to determine how (at least) some tasks/assignments/performances are assessed? Let's consider a situation in which one particular module is assessed through the completion of three assignments/tasks. The assessment of one of the tasks must focus on outcome, that of the others on process, with the students determining which assessment should focus on outcome, and staff which elements of process should be assessed in the other tasks. This would seem to provide a balance that benefits student learning, gives them some control over the assessment and enables staff to obtain an informed view of students' management of process and outcome. Elements that might be assessed, and their relative weightings, are proposed in Tables 1 and 2 for the essay outline and the group seminar presentation.

Table 1 *Essay outline*

Possible weightings				
Assessment favouring outcome		Assessment favouring process		
1	2	3	4	Elements assessed (assessment conducted by tutor)
80	60	20	20	Outline
20	20	80	60	Process report
	20		20	Performance in negotiation session

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Table 2 *Group seminar presentation*

Possible weightings						
1	2	3	4	5	Elements assessed	
50	40	20	25	10	Presentation (including responses to questions)	Assessment by tutor
	20	40	50	80	Process report	Assessment by tutor
50	40	20	25	10	Peer-evaluation reports (including responses to questions)	

A copy of the process report (proposed for implementation during the academic year 2005–6) for seminar presentations is included as an appendix to this paper. Similar forms are completed for performances and essay outlines.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper is to underline the importance of the group as an entity in the assessment of collaborative learning. Advocacy for the value of group work in itself is unnecessary; however, subordinating the role of the individual within the group in the assessment is an issue that causes concern. A member of a student string quartet, expressing some frustration with an assessment system that awarded marks to individual members of ensembles, stated: 'the reason for participating in chamber music . . . is to be assessed as a team, not as individuals'. The cultivation of the spirit of collective endeavour is central to all collaborative work, 'in which collaborators temporarily become almost a single entity' (Littleton & Miell, 2004: 4). Mike Heathfield (1999) reminds us that: 'Assessed groupwork is one important way in which quality learning can be registered beyond the simplistic and erroneous view of learning as an individual and privatised dynamic between tutor and student. Learning is so much more communally complicated than that. We need to continue to develop ways of assessing what we truly value rather than only valuing what we can more easily assess'. The assessment of learning is not a soft option. It is not a means of making it easier for students to gain marks. It is about valuing and rewarding learning rather than simply measuring achievement. If I may leave the final word to Cardinal Newman: 'A University is, according to the usual designation, an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill'. (1912 edn.: 144–145)

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Appendix: Group evaluation of seminar presentation

Group Members _____

_____

_____

_____

Topic _____

Date of Presentation _____

Preliminary Comments

1. Explain the process of preparation, commenting on:
   i) Group meetings (including discussion of agreed stages).
   ii) Research.
   iii) Assembly of material.
2. Comment on difficulties encountered and how you dealt with them.
3. Explain what informed the choice of format for the presentation.
4. Addressing the criteria for seminar presentations, what mark would you consider appropriate for your presentation?
5. Justify the mark awarded.

Reflective Comments

6. Which aspects of the presentation (including responses to questions) were you pleased with?
7. Were you disappointed with any part of the presentation (including responses to questions)? Yes/No. If yes, explain.
8. Do you want to revise the mark awarded above? Yes/No. If yes, explain.

Revised mark, if appropriate:

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