Faculty of Arts Instructional Support and Information Technology (Arts ISIT)

Strategies for the Effective Design and Implementation of Collaborative Peer Learning Activities

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Background and Introduction

Between 2020W2 and 2022W2, Arts ISIT partnered with instructors from English, Spanish, Chinese, Sociology, and Geography to investigate **how we can build capacity within the Faculty of Arts to facilitate peer pedagogies through collaborative learning.**

Surveys, interviews and focus groups examined:

- What advantages and barriers did students and instructors experience?
- What did they think about different learning tools?
- How can we better support collaborative learning in the Faculty of Arts?

Legend: ■ Positive ■ Neutral ■ Negative

Pie chart 1: 77%, 10%, 13% — **Collaboration benefitted my learning**

BUT

Pie chart 2: 53%, 21%, 26% — **Would I collaborate online again?**

Deep Dive: Microsoft Teams

48 % of students would recommend MS Teams in the future.

63 % of students reported technical issues.

61 % of students reported the use of other software to aid in collaboration.

Instructors communicated that MS Teams provided improved insight into group dynamics, allowed learning spaces to be set up in advance, and templates were extremely helpful. However, there are several ways that Arts ISIT can help to support these tools in the future.

Advantages to Collaborative Learning

1. **Community and relationship building:** Activities fostered a sense of community, enabling students to build friendships and understand each other's work styles.
2. **Student engagement and active learning:** Participation was encouraged and activities facilitated critical thinking and discussion.
3. **Student directed learning and skill development:** Students took more responsibility for their learning, negotiated roles in groups, and developed soft skills like time management and communication.
4. **Diverse perspectives and skill sets:** Activities encouraged empathy and intellectual diversity.
5. **Flexible learning:** Students could present and debate work online, providing a convenient hybrid option.
6. **Division of Responsibility:** Dividing tasks to fit students' strengths increased engagement and reduced workloads.
7. **Feedback:** Online activities allowed for more timely feedback from instructors and peers.
8. **Improved insight into student learning:** Instructors could more accurately track student participation.
9. **Teamwork and digital literacy:** Students learned teamwork skills and how to use digital tools more critically.

> "The main thing I learned was that it is important to trust the ideas of others and to respect those ideas even if they are the ones I don't agree with." - Student
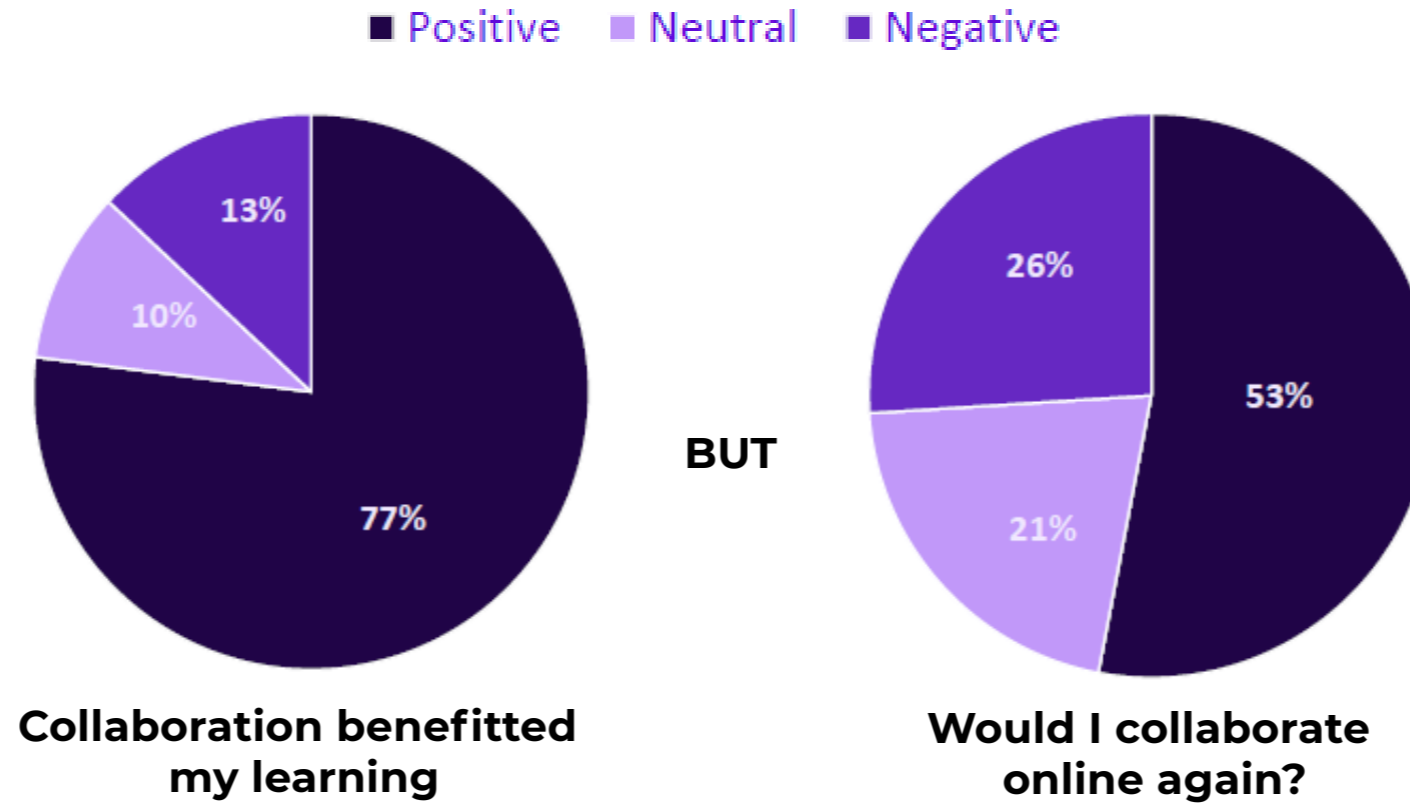
Barriers to Collaborative Learning

1. **Instructor workload:** Instructors found that tracking student engagement and contributions required significant time and effort.
2. **Increased workload and unequal effort:** Students did not feel like the effort required for group work was reflected in the weight of assignments, and some groups suffered from "free-rider" problems.
3. **Design, structure and guidance:** Students desired more specific grading rubrics, clearer instructions regarding group roles, and timely/consistent feedback from their instructors and teaching assistants.
4. **Time management:** Students desired more in-class time for group work and found coordinating schedules to be difficult.
5. **Communication:** Students suggested role assignments and ice-breaker sessions to overcome unresponsive group members, disagreements, and a reluctance to initiate discussions.
6. **Unification of voice and style:** Conflicting ideas and an uneven distribution of work could lead to less cohesive written assignments.

> "I sometimes found it difficult to coordinate with my group members to complete writing our key takeaway paragraph after class as everyone has different schedules." - Student

Support Recommendations

Based on our findings, we suggest several areas where Arts ISIT may provide additional support to improve the use of collaborative learning activities in UBC Arts:

- Provide **onboarding support and guidance** for faculty setting up new tools,
- Provide **training and documentation** to assist instructors and teaching assistant learning new tools.
- Adress technical issues through **help desk support.**
- Facilitate **support partnerships** with groups like UBC IT and Chapman Learning Commons to onboard and train students in the use of tools.

> "... we teach kids to write in school and read. We never teach anyone how to use technology critically.... There has to be structure to how we think about using technology and why we're using it. That's key!" - Instructor