

Panel organised by Dr Sally Wiggins (Linköping University)

Understanding group work in education: Psychological perspectives on group work processes

McQuade, R., **Wiggins, S.** & Ventura-Medina, E. (September, 2017). *Doing disagreement without being disagreeable: How students deal with conversational norms in group work*. Oral presentation at EuroPLAT 2017 Conference, University of Salzburg, Austria.

The growing prevalence of group work in psychology places requirements on students to learn not only their subject matter, but also social and educational skills such as working with their peers. In problem-based learning (PBL), a crucial element is that students should challenge each other in terms of ideas or assumptions (Azer, 2004). Through disagreeing, it is argued that students will develop a more sophisticated understanding of the knowledge. Disagreements in conversation, however, have already been shown by conversation analytic work to be socially troublesome (Pomerantz, 1984), so it is vital that students learn to disagree ‘appropriately’ (Marra, 2012). The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how research in social psychology and discourse can provide empirical insights into how students might learn to interact more effectively in group-work settings. The paper reports on analyses from a project that aims to understand how engineering students develop the soft skills of group work alongside their academic knowledge by examining the interactional practices and processes within PBL tutorials. In particular, we focus on how students ‘do’ disagreements in tutorial interaction. The data is taken from 30 hours of video-recorded data from PBL tutorials at a Scottish university. Using conversation analysis, we focus on sequences in which students disagree with one another, and illustrate the different ways in which this is achieved. The paper will discuss the interactional barriers to disagreeing with other students in group work and will offer insights from empirical data to illustrate how these might be overcome.

References

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