
FOSTERING GROUP WORK AND CONNECTION ONLINE: THE JUXTAPOSED VIEW OF STUDENT AND EDUCATOR

Tracey Kuit and the Students and Educators of BIOL103 2020

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Establishing social connections is important in educational learning spaces, both face-to-face and online. In the sciences we offer practical experiences that are places for skill development and linking of theory with application, but also for social connection between students and with educators. Participation in these authentic activities provides opportunities for students to establish a scientific identity and a sense of belonging to the scientific community. Importantly, practical experiences are also recognised for creating motivation and enhanced student engagement (Hofstein & Mamlock-Naaman, 2007; Smith et al., 2014).

In 2020, most practical opportunities moved to remote delivery, where educators leveraged online tools to foster connection and group work while still focusing on skills and engagement. This presentation will share educator and student perspectives on strategies to foster connection and group work online through a major group work research project undertaken by 650 first-year molecular biology students at the University of Wollongong in 2020 (delivered and facilitated fully online). The presentation will also focus on what students and educators believe cannot be replicated online as a means to focus our current efforts on elements that should remain delivered face-to-face and elements of scientific teaching and social connection that may be supported online.

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