

# In Their Own Words: Students' Stories of Persistence Through Challenging Collaborations

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### PROJECT OVERVIEW

- Research on cooperative learning and using groups in the classroom highlights the benefits group work has for students, including academic learning, building relationships, and developing communication skills. <sup>2,3,4</sup>

*“If teachers are not prepared to address their students’ concerns about groupwork, then innovative group assignments will be frustrating for all concerned-and, therefore, ineffective and short-lived” (p. 81)<sup>1</sup>*

- Some students hold negative perceptions and often find group work challenging.<sup>1</sup>
- Challenges may create times where students feel “stuck” in completing tasks or communicating with group members.

### PRELIMINARY FINDINGS: LEARNING THE STORY

- There is a common frustration of dealing with group members who are unwilling to communicate. *It isn't because they do not want to or are incapable...they need support handling complex problems.*

*“I wish they would be able to see how hard it was to work with someone who doesn't care about the rest of the group.”*

- Students develop strategies for getting unstuck and improving communication.
- Students may stay stuck or simply give up because of challenging group members.

### EMERGING IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS

#### Where do we begin?

- How do we make space to listen and empower our students?
- How can we create a space to empower instructors?

#### What are practices that instructors could consider?

- Students need to be able to talk about their experiences during the semester.
- How do we provide space for students to work through challenges and develop collaboration skills?
- Think and plan carefully when using groups. *What do you want your students to learn by working in groups?*

### PROJECT DESIGN

#### Research Questions

- What are the stories they tell about challenges and learning in groups?
- When students get stuck on challenges during group experiences, how do they describe their experience?

#### Method

- Students in upper division communication courses participated in the study (N =65).
- Students completed **online surveys** with open-ended questions that allowed them to write about a **challenging experience** working in groups.

#### Analysis

- Responses were analyzed for key themes about challenges, getting stuck, learning, and what they wished instructors knew about their experiences.

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

#### Preliminary Conclusions

- Results provide an understanding of student experiences in their own words, which can help us re-envision how to help them work through challenges.
- We need to address the disconnect between theory and practice,.
- Students may learn lessons about working in groups, *but are they learning the lessons that we, as instructors, want them to learn?*

#### Future Directions and Questions

- What are the other stories students tell about their experiences?
- What are the stories instructors tell about their experiences?



### REFERENCES

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