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### Exploring Student Engagement and Collaborative Learning in a Community-Based Module in Fine Art

John McGarrigle

*Institute of Technology, Carlow*, [mcgarrij@itcarlow.ie](mailto:mcgarrij@itcarlow.ie)

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## **Exploring Student Engagement and Collaborative Learning in a Community-based Module in Fine Art**

**John McGarrigle**

Humanities Department, IT Carlow

### **Abstract**

This article is based on masters research<sup>1</sup> into student and civic engagement using a case study of an innovative Community Based Module in a Fine Art degree course (McGarrigle, 2009).<sup>2</sup> (Flyvbjerg, 2006) notes that contrary to some common misunderstandings around case study research, it is possible to use individual case study to test theory particularly in relation to falsification. The research presented here is based on student's responses to Coates' (2007) quantitative study of student engagement and attempts to test his engagement typology which identifies the terms *passive*, *intense*, *independent* or *collaborative* to apply to students' approaches to online and general campus learning. In a participatory action research framework, low agreement was found between students (n=13) and lecturers (n=3) in assigning these terms to student postings to online discussion fora. This presents a challenge to the validity of such a narrow typology, and discussions with this student group suggested the addition of 'adaptive' as a valid student approach to the varied demands of third level learning. Further evidence from the case study found greater student collaboration in discussion fora when linked to practical course activity. Qualitative analysis of discussion threads using conversation analysis provided evidence for collaboration in deeper knowledge construction when supported by lecturers' contributions. Collaborative approaches to learning may support learning within a social constructivist paradigm, though acknowledgement must be made of the context of an individualistic society where competition may present real or imagined barriers to student collaboration. An argument is made for Pedagogies for Community Engagement to promote these ways of learning to in order to develop active and engaged citizens of the future.

**Keywords:** student engagement, discussion boards, collaboration

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<sup>1</sup> Study on MA in Third Level Learning and Teaching at DIT.

<sup>2</sup> This article focuses on one part of the research carried out in the case study.

## **Introduction**

A desire to link third level study to its community context led to the development of an innovative Community Based Learning module which was piloted in a Fine Art course. The module fits within an area of what is called 'Service Learning' (see Zlotkowski, 2007) across the Atlantic and 'Community Based Learning' in the United Kingdom which aims at promoting actively engaged citizens (see Campus Engage, 2009). The case study was devised within an action research framework in order to explore student engagement on a blended course and investigate how students conceptualised 'community'. The case study captured various aspects ranging from student feedback on research on student engagement, use of discussion boards to support collaborative learning and interviews with participants on what 'community' meant to them. The findings presented here focus on student engagement and use of discussion boards.

Dichotomies can be considered as fairly narrow conceptualizations, so drawing an analogy between 'David and Goliath' and 'qualitative versus quantitative' methodology has its limitations. In terms of parsimony, one can conceive of 'goodies and baddies' in this and identify with one more than the other. Such interpretations are clearly limited, since in warfare there are no winners or losers, only casualties. At present quantitative data is a large weapon, making decisions about resource allocation in society and education affecting the lives of citizens. As a naïve qualitative researcher interested in how students learn and collaborate together and making my own subjective journey through epistemology, I was influenced by a quantitative study by Coates(2007) using a large number of research participants (1,051) and the power of multivariate analysis to uncover a typology of ways that students engage online their studies. Coates' research is attempting to understand the student experience from the detached statistical analysis of responses to online questionnaires. It

seems apparent that at the centre of teaching and learning is the difficulty of knowing what is going on in the mind of the other person. As teachers, we can make assumptions that are biased and subjective and it is important to check out what the student is thinking.

In a blended course, there are issues over online learning and face-to-face learning. This current study sought to verify the findings of the Coates (2007) research in an Irish Higher Education context. It also attempted to explore its meaning to students and lecturers. Here the analogy can be deconstructed: who chooses the weapons and rules of engagement? Can one test quantitative findings using qualitative methods? Can data produced qualitatively be valid evidence to contradict quantitative data? The image can be explained: how will a small scale qualitative study of 13 art students compare to the 1,051 online questionnaire responses of Coates?

It is reassuring to note a suggestion from (Flyvbjerg, 2006) who argues it is possible to use individual case study to test theory, particularly in relation to falsification. Can Higher Education avoid making our students the casualties of paradigm wars? At present, it is observed that the online survey used by Coates has been adopted by Institutes of Higher Education as a measure of student engagement. This paper is offered as a qualitative stipulation to the information it provides.

### **Challenging Views of Student and Community Engagement**

As Pedagogies of Civic Engagement (PfCE) explore the link between communities and how students interact with them, it implies a broader definition of the term *engagement*.

Engagement can be applied to how a student engages with their study, but also has a relevance in the notion of how engaged they are as citizens. Zlotkowski (2007) makes an

argument for the use of the use of practical pedagogies such as problem based learning within the area of service and community based learning. Boland & McIlrath (2007) suggest using the term 'Pedagogies for Civic Engagement' (PfCE) in Ireland in order to avoid some of the negative connotations felt by many academics over the terms 'Service' and 'Community'. If the content of PfCe is engaging with community, then this involves a dynamic interaction with the process of learning and how engaged participants become at different stages in a course of learning. Can quantitative methods adequately assess developmental change in learners as they essentially capture data from a snapshot in time? Longitudinal studies of a qualitative nature that attempt to plot changes in students as they go through a course of study would seem to be a useful approach. However, Zlotkowski (2007) points out that large scale quantitative surveys of student engagement such as the National Survey of Student Engagement which emphasize traditional knowledge transfer approaches to learning seem to be the accepted methodology e.g. (Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Gonyea, 2007). Indeed, student engagement is narrowly defined as time spent on educational tasks and this is then causally implicated in student retention. (G.D. Kuh *et al.*, 2007) make a distinction between social factors as relating to students leisure time and academic study, with an untested assumption that the former contribute to disengaging from study.

These concerns arise at the institutional level, but what is happening at the student level of engagement? Some researchers have attempted to devise models of 'student engagement' to describe the learner experience while still imposing an institutional perspective on the data. In a large sample of Australian students of higher education, Coates (2007) employed quantitative methods and sophisticated statistical analyses to 1,051 responses to the Student Engagement Questionnaire (Coates, 2006, p.65) from 17 different lectures in 4 different institutions across 4 different areas of study. Arising out of this, he proposed a model of

online engagement that distinguishes ‘*between the academic and the social dimensions of engagement*’ and suggests there are four types of student engagement - intense, collaborative, independent or passive. These labels, he argues, refer to styles or states of engagement, rather than to different student types or enduring traits (see Figure 1).

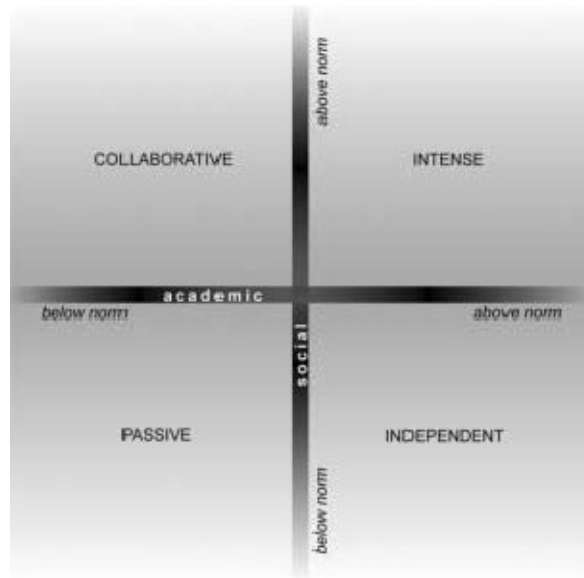


Figure 1 Typological Model of Student Engagement

(From Coates (2007) A model of online and general campus-based student engagement)

Yet he then goes on to describe the typical learner who uses an intense or independent style of engagement as the more academic, in contrast to the collaborative or passive student who enjoys the social side of student life. Coates then seeks to align his typology with a model from 1966:

*Although not direct antecedents, earlier university student typologies validate the current model. The very popular model proposed by Clark & Trow (1966, p.24), for instance, characterizes four student subcultures as combinations of two variables: ‘the degree to which students are involved with ideas and the extent to which students identify with their college’. These broadly resemble the academic and social dimensions which underpin the current model. Furthermore, the academic, collegiate, nonconformist and vocational orientations which Clark & Trow (1966) propose broadly resemble the intense, collaborative, independent and passive engagement styles defined in the current study. The current model also shares a broad correspondence with the typologies of (Astin, 1993) and (Kuh, 2001).*

A continuing thread in this appears to be that academic and social are to be separated if students are to gain the deeper insights higher education hopes for. Is there an assumption that knowledge cannot be gained through social interaction or collaboration? There is a contentious linking of ‘vocational orientations’ with ‘passive’ learning style when these may be quite reasonable responses by students to the societal pressure to get a qualification in order to get a job (Bryson & Hand, 2007). There is also an inconsistency in proposing an engagement style and describing the typical student using each one of them and denying that you are not trying to impose these traits on learners. Coates asks: *‘To what extent is there a tendency by researchers and practitioners to interpret identified styles as stable traits?’* (p.138). A considerable amount it seems when encouraged by large scale institutional research grants which conclude that students have not changed much since 1966.

### **Moving the Focus to Students’ Ways of Learning**

So can we move the focus to the student learner? Bryson & Hand (2007) prefer to think of engagement as a continuum ranging from engaged to disengaged, and refer to the notion of alienation in regard to the latter in the work of Mann (2001; 2005). Perhaps the student exhibiting a passive style of engagement is alienated by the ‘foreign culture’ of Higher Education? They suggest that student engagement is multifaceted involving the relationship between teacher and student, between student and peers, the context of learning and the perception of learning the student brings to study; this they argue can foster a sense of belonging and play a part in the developing identity of the learner student. (Reid & Solomonides, 2007; Solomonides & Reid, 2008) make interesting connections between creativity and engagement in relation to design students, and refer to a ‘sense of being’ as central to the development of their transforming identity as design students through engagement with the creative process in a design community:

*Engagement and creativity are perceived as integral components of their commitment to transformative learning, to their production of objects and their identity as designers. Intuitively, the students support the notion that engagement and recognition of their creativity is situated within the community of designers (Wenger, 1999) where they see themselves as active participants (p.37).*

These authors refer to the notion of liminality devised by (Meyer & Land, 2005) to describe the transformations that occur when a student is inducted into a subject discipline. These ideas resonate with (Barnett & Coate, 2005) whose model of the engaged curriculum involves three domains of knowing, acting and being (cited in (Boland & McIlrath, 2007)). The notion of 'being' seems a loose concept, but one of value due to its connection with the area of identity. As students move through their course, changes occur as they identify with the area of study thinking in the manner of the artist, engineer, teacher or whatever subject they are studying. At the end, they have developed a sense of being an artist or other professional. This process implicates notions of identity in student engagement and learning, and also negates earlier conceptions of vocational orientations being passive forms of engagement.

The role of the teacher in facilitating this identity formation can be acknowledged in the Vygotskian sense of the expert other guiding and questioning the learner. Perhaps though it requires more of a movement in and out of expert and novice to encourage the students' growing confidence with material. To be informed of a student's researching into a topic requires a teacher to adopt an authoritative, questioning naivety to allow the student to teach what they have found out. Thus, the teacher's own identity is relevant to engagement as are relationships and communication. (Mottet, Matthew, & Myers, 2004 ) note the communication style and approachability of teachers in student engagement:

*Thus, one remedy for the disengagement of students from engagement with their teachers may be to encourage those teachers to produce more frequent and more emphatic verbal messages expressing such themes as personal recognition of students, humor, closeness or inclusiveness with students, self-disclosure, willingness to communicate, responsiveness, and caring or appreciation of their students (pp.121-2).*



These interpersonal factors may also be operating in student relationships, where they learn to manage conflict in communicating and collaborating together. The Community Based Module required 3<sup>rd</sup> year fine art students to locate and engage with local community groups and use their creative skills to respond to the needs that they may articulate. The discussion boards and face-to-face workshops would be a place where students could share their learning throughout the course including any ethical issues that may arise and the students were also encouraged to use blogs to record their individual journey and experiences. Students were actively encouraged to collaborate in online and actual environments.

### **Research Design**

Within the context of a case study of an innovative community-based learning module, action research attempted to explore notions of community as well as student engagement. The present paper reports on the student voice in relation to the latter and, in particular, feedback on positivist research on student engagement. Can data produced qualitatively be evidence to contradict quantitative data? I have chosen to embed quantitative data in my qualitative study and invite other interpretations as well as questioning of my interpretation. The social constructionist philosophy informing my perspective allows the acceptance of multiple worldviews – to accept that there may be something in the experience of 13 people – and that it may be perceived and interpreted from my perspective as teacher/researcher.

In using a study from quantitative research and analyzing it in a participatory action research framework, I have chosen to apply qualitative methodology to quantitative data. In pursuing a quasi-experimental examination of the quantitative research on student engagement, I have temporarily accepted the assumptions of positivist research. The conventions of presenting data using numbers, charts and statistical data are adhered to, which can be interpreted by the

reader, other researchers or the academic world in their own frameworks or worldviews. As Crotty (1998) states: 'If we seek to be consistently constructionist, we will put all understandings, scientific and non-scientific alike, on the very same footing. They are all constructions.' (p.16). It is accepted that a more rigid attempt at falsification within an objectivist research paradigm would require a larger sample with experimental and control groups.

A conventional research procedure is to check inter-rater agreement to quantify how much credence to give to how items are rated by researchers. In the spirit of empirical inquiry I was interested to see if Coates' (2007) typology made sense to lecturers and students. Thus the research question focused on a small group of students' perceptions of the terms *passive*, *intense*, *independent* and *collaborative* and if they can be used to identify contributions to online discussion fora? A background in psychology directed me to examine inter-rater reliability in how these terms are assigned, as it is a common practice to validate use of a term. A high agreement between users of a term indicates that it has a shared meaning – so is there a shared meaning attached to these terms? Do students share that meaning with lecturers? Do these terms have any face or construct validity as demonstrated through high inter-rater reliability among lecturers? If the constructs 'passive', 'intense', 'collaborative', 'independent' are shown to have validity when extracted from questionnaire data by sophisticated statistical procedures such as cluster analysis, discriminant analysis and statistical modeling, then do they have face validity for students in the context of their learning?

At the same time as a researcher, I was interrogating my own position in the research. Social constructionist perspectives of knowledge emphasize collaboration so I was exploring how

this may take place between researcher and participants, lecturer and student, and in online discussion fora.

### *Demographic Data*

The participants in this study were 13 students, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a B.A. degree in Fine Art at a Third level institution, 2 lecturers and the main researcher. There were 6 males and 7 females with a majority of mature students (10:3). The first stage of the research involved explaining the purposes of the research and gaining ethical consent from participants. 16 students were on the course and 13 gave ethical consent to participate. Some issues arose in the early meetings in relation to my presence influencing the research, and I acknowledged this aspect and explained that in my view all research can be subjective and biased, and the use of action research may help to improve the module in the future. After ethical consent was gained from the participants, the first stage of analyzing contributions to the discussion board took place at an afternoon lecture.

The method included a quantitative investigation of online postings to discussion fora and an inter rater reliability of coding of postings between students and lecturers. A quasi-experimental testing of Coates (2007) model of student engagement in a participatory framework allowed the student group to learn about the ways they engaged with discussion fora. Qualitative methods were employed in a participatory action research framework whereby results of data analysis were fed back to students and discussed in relation to relevant research on student engagement in the literature. These sessions were akin to information sharing sessions rather than the more formal structured focus groups, as I was concerned with the difficulty of capturing the conversation especially when there was an

imbalance of contributions with some who did not speak as much as others (though some found a voice in later online contributions).

### ***Examining the Model of Online Student Engagement***

As I wished to examine how students collaborate together throughout the duration of the module, the first online discussion thread was chosen to explore and compare with a later thread. The first thread was produced at one of the early sessions where the goal was to encourage students to learn how to post a comment and to promote the social aspects of learning together. Having started the module in face-to-face sessions using a role play, the content would be expected to relate to that and be more in the form of social chat with less in depth comments. By engaging the students in analyzing their own data, there was an opportunity for them to become more aware of the content and also how collaborative they were – possibly influencing future collaborative behaviour and postings. Each posting was typed up on separate pieces of paper and made anonymous. A selection of 40 items was made and each statement was required to be placed in different categories: Independent, Collaborative, Intense or Passive. The floor was sectioned using large white tape and labeled as in Figure 2 overleaf.

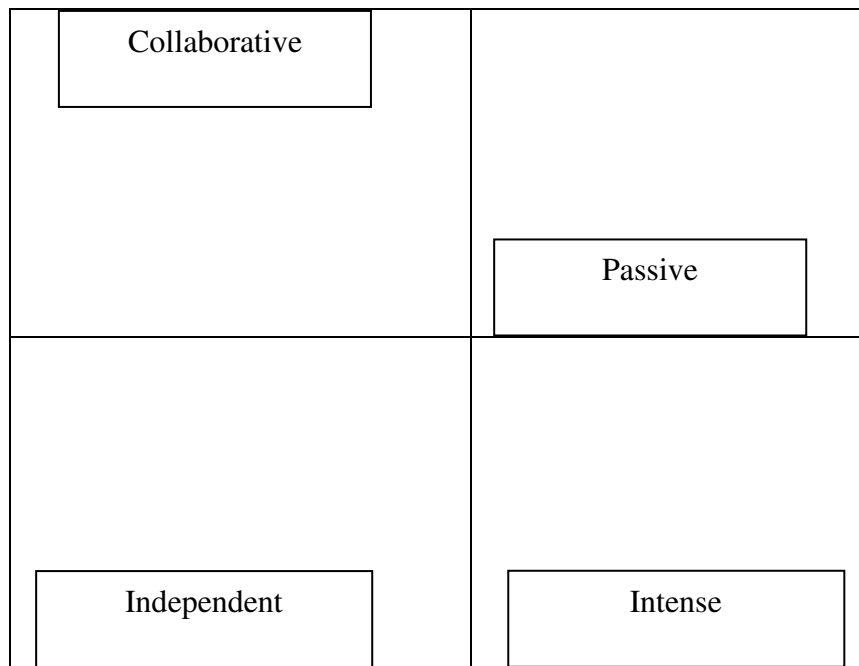


Figure 2 Floor layout for group analysis of first discussion thread

Together, 7 participants and 2 lecturers (a colleague and I) worked in small groups of three, deciding where to place each statement according to the categories: collaborative, independent, intense, passive. The process itself was an attempt to create the conditions for collaboration and construction of meaning in the social constructivist sense. Some of the discussion that arose was noted in the researcher's journal. After agreement was reached on the position of the items, they were placed in envelopes labeled appropriately and taken away for the data to be recorded in an excel spreadsheet.

To examine for the inter rater reliability of the typology of student engagement, two lecturers were independently asked to assign the postings. In an attempt to continue the participatory nature of the research, a feedback session took place in the middle of the module with the students where results from this first thread analysis were discussed as well as related literature.

### ***Feedback with Students***

As students were in face-to-face and online learning situations, feedback was provided through Blackboard discussion fora and in-class sessions on the progress of the research. After analyzing the data and producing the results of the discussion fora analysis outlined above, a feedback session was held with the students to discuss student engagement. As well as presenting this information, the researcher discussed related research including a comment on Coates (2007) by Bryson referred to in (Morosanu & Den Outer, 2008) and an article about the role of being and student engagement in art and design students by (Solomonides & Reid, 2008).

### **Findings**

At the start of this research, these were some of the questions asked:

1. Is there any face validity to the terms passive, intense, independent, and collaborative in terms of student engagement?
2. What does this group of students think about a particular way of categorizing learning?
3. Do lecturers and students agree on the meaning of these terms?
4. Can collaboration on discussion boards lead to deeper learning?

### ***Investigating the Model of Student Engagement***

The results of the group analysis of the postings to the first discussion thread are presented in Figure 3 in comparison to the ratings of two independent lecturers. The data represents the number of items placed in each category: *passive*, *intense*, *collaborative* or *independent*.

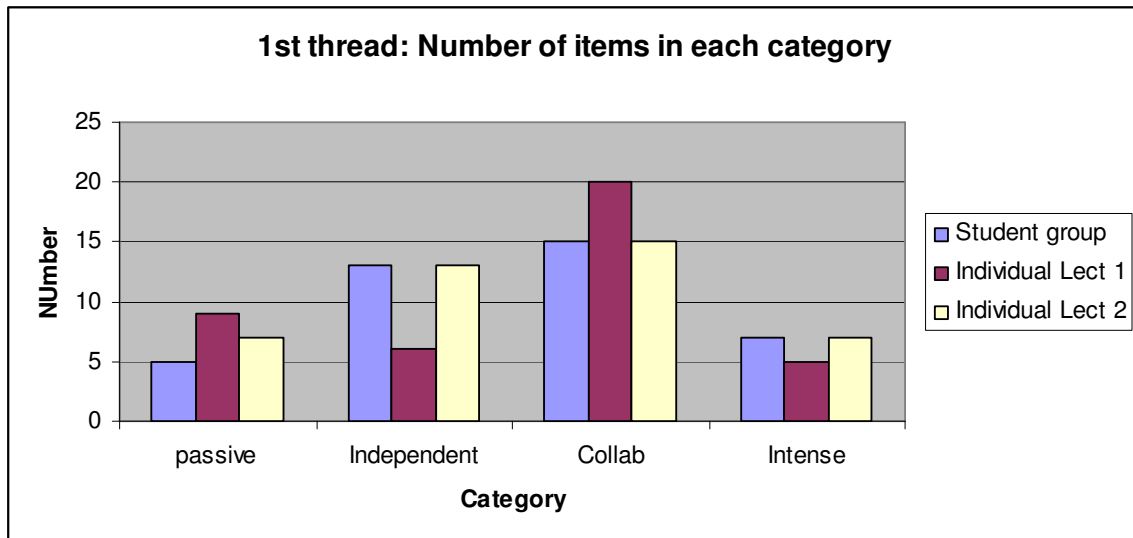


Figure 3 First thread comparison of group to independent lecturers

Visual inspection of the data in Figure 3 indicates that the category *collaborative* was assigned more than other categories by all raters. The student group assigned the *independent* category next and the *passive* least. There was a similarity between the ratings of the student group and one lecturer in the number of items placed in each category. As these refer to the number of items, an attempt was made to see how much agreement there was between ratings made by the group and those made by independent lecturers. In other words did the group of students place the same items in each category as the independent lecturers? To reach a percentage figure on agreement between raters, the number of items placed in the same category by each was divided by the total number of items to be rated. Comparisons between the Student Group and Lecturer 1, Student Group and Lecturer 2, Lecturer 1 and Lecturer 2, and between Student Group and both lecturers are shown in Figure 4.

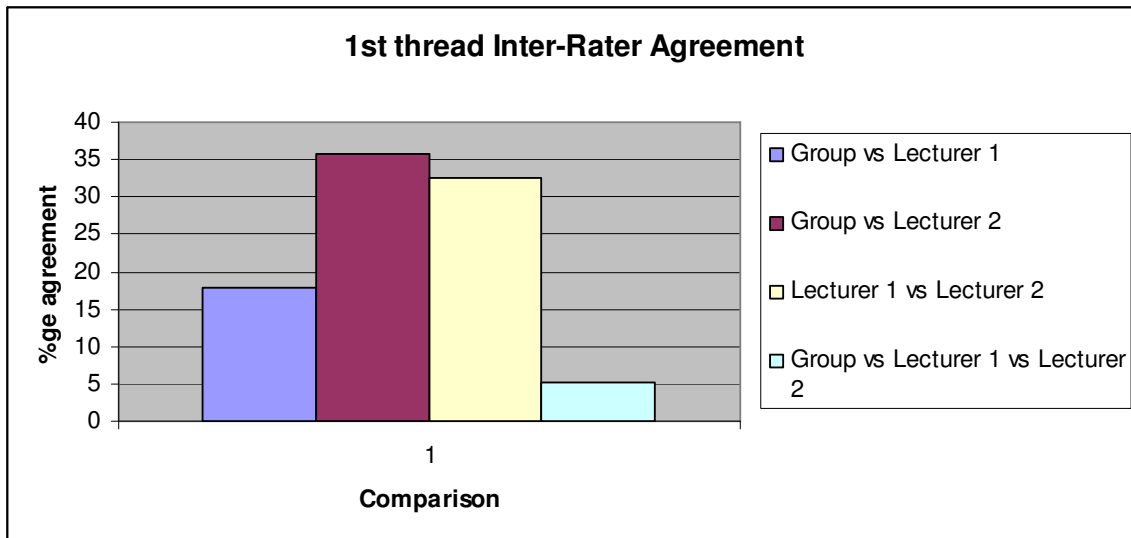


Figure 4 First thread Inter-Rater Agreement

Visual inspection of Figure 4 indicates that though the independent lecturers agreed with each other in 33% of cases, there was wider variation between each individual lecturer and the student group. One lecturer showed higher agreement with the student group (35%), while another lecturer agreed with the student group 18% of the time. This data indicates that there is the possibility for misunderstanding between students and lecturers in the use of the term *collaborative* and also less shared meaning of the terms *independent*, *passive* and *intense*. In order to examine later threads to see if online collaboration increased as the module proceeded, a selection of 20 postings were taken from a later discussion board forum and rated in a similar manner by a tutor involved in the course delivery and two independent lecturers working separately.



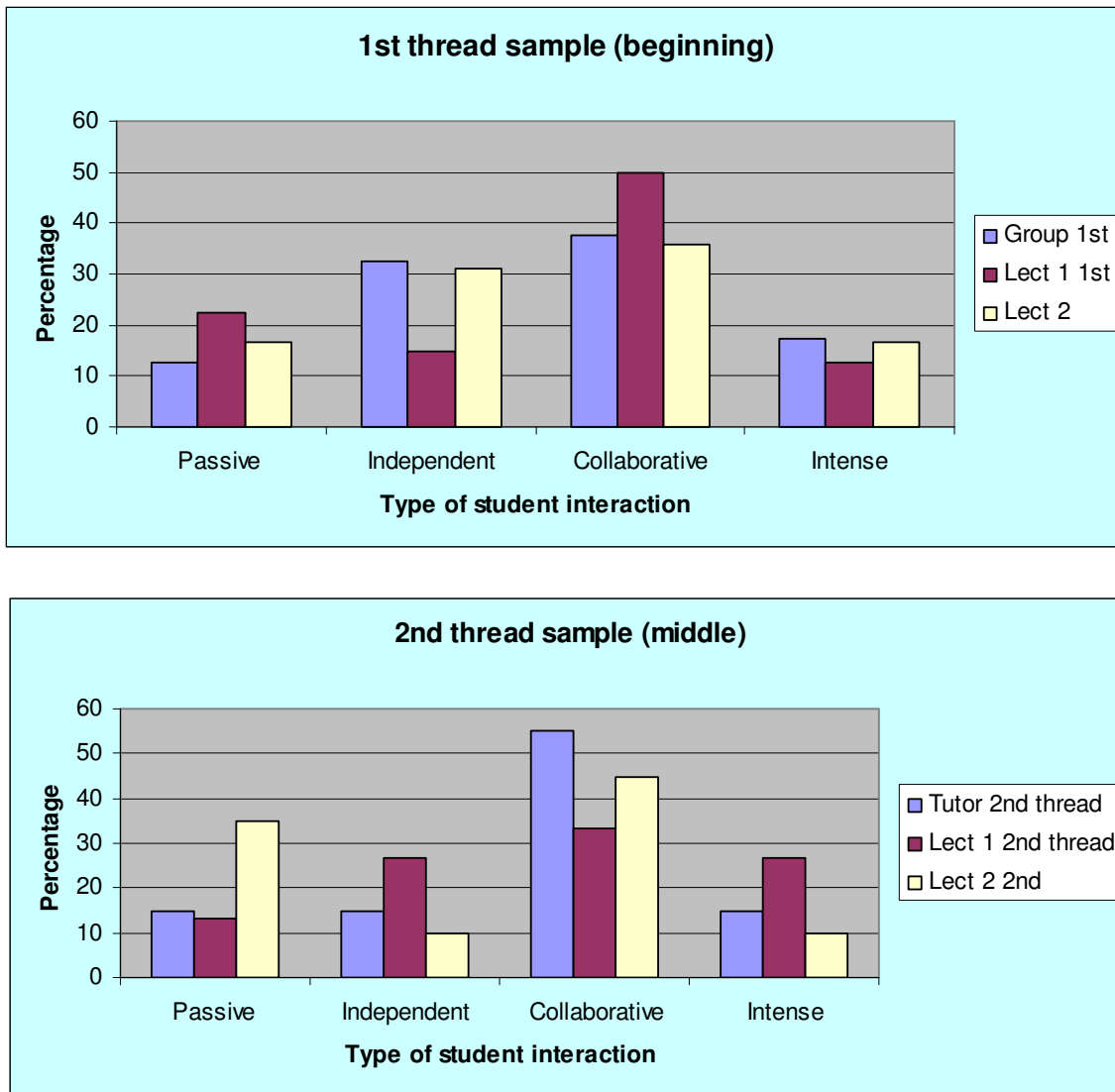


Figure 5 Comparison of first and second threads

Visual inspection of Figure 5 indicates a broadly similar pattern of assigning the terms *collaborative*, *passive*, *independent* and *intense* with again *collaborative* being the highest. Though it appears to be slightly higher, it would be wrong to conclude from this data that there was a higher rate of collaboration in the second thread. As the conditions for rating the two threads were not the same, caution is required when comparing and the use of statistical testing for significance is not justified.

### Quantitative Analysis of Discussion Fora

As it was noted that students were more engaged collaboratively with online discussion fora which involved a practical activity such as organizing the exhibition in the community, then a quantitative analysis of discussion fora activity was undertaken. A total of 646 postings were made to 7 different topic areas as represented in Figure 6.

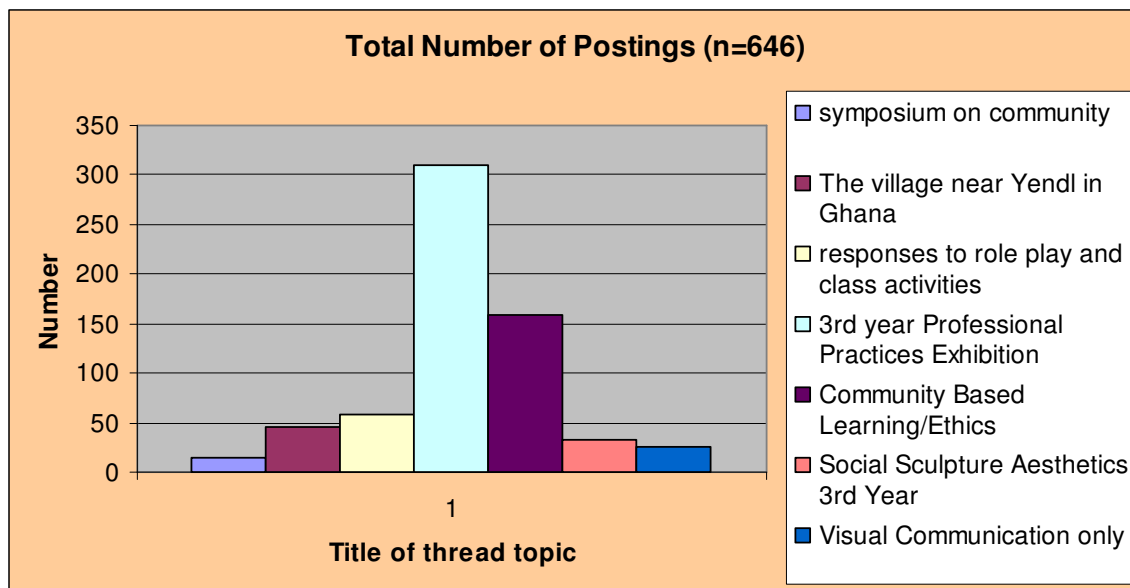


Figure 6 Total postings to different topics

Visual inspection of Figure 6 shows that just under half of the postings were to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year Professional Practices Exhibition forum and a quarter were to the Community-Based learning/Ethics forum. It seems that collaboration was highest when students were engaged on a practical task. This is strong evidence that significant student collaboration can be promoted by relating it to practical activities that are meaningful to students.

### Qualitative Analysis of Feedback Sessions with Students

The feedback session provided useful discussion of the Coates (2007) typology which included comments about the artificiality of the process. It was noted how taking the comments out of context effected their meaning and interpretation. It was also felt that

students move in an out of different styles of engagement to suit their purposes, and one student offered the term 'adaptive' to add to the typology. After this session the students were asked to post any comments on the process to the discussion fora. Cynthia (fictitious names are used to preserve anonymity) responded with:

*I think the process of analysing data together was an interesting experience. It created new ways of looking at things and prompted me to think about and analyse not only my responses on the discussion board but how I learn or communicate with people in general, whether its online or face to face. It raised questions in my mind about not only myself but the people around me also. Do we respond in the different ways to suit the situation or the people we are surrounded by? Or are people predominantly intensive, passive, independent or collaborative? (Tuesday Dec 2, 2008 5:45 pm)*

This can be interpreted as evidence of learning from the group exploration of engagement styles. Another feedback session was held in the middle of the module where the data analysis of how students and lecturers rated statements from the first discussion fora was provided. At this session related papers about engagement (Bryson & Hand, 2007), design students (Reid & Solomonides, 2007; Solomonides & Reid, 2008) and the concept of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 ) were also distributed. Again the discussion fora were used as a way to keep everyone informed and feedback was requested which one student, Orla, provided:

*well I think we all agreed that it was unfair to label a student who works well in collaboration with others as 'below norm', academically speaking.....also, there was some contradiction in the definitions for each category, i.e. the 'intense' student is considered the opposite end of the scale to the 'collaborative' student, yet one of the positive attributes given to the 'intense' student was to be collaborative? talk about confusing!! I think that the lack of clarity and common understanding among students and staff about what defines each category(in general, not specifically in our class) could be a problem when gathering data - how can you trust in the resulting statistics when students seem to be answering questions with a different understanding of what they mean to the one intended. I don't mean to be critical of John's research, but I do question how the student engagement styles are defined in Coates explanation....' (Monday Feb 9, 2009 10:20)*

I am pleased that she chose to comment on the student engagement styles of Coates, as it allows a student voice to be heard in this debate. Her comments also are a useful interpretation of the low agreement between students and lecturers of these terms.

## Discussion

My reading of the data in relation to Coates (2007) typology of student engagement is that these terms make more sense in the abstract rather than in any real practical sense of describing actual student behaviour and their actual online contributions. There is more opportunity for misunderstanding in their application than agreement, and they limit our perception of actual learning. There exists a danger of typifying particular student behaviour without any relation to how the student sees it. A wider perspective of engagement is indicated to encompass the range of ways that students engage in learning. As students indicated these may include the addition of 'adaptive' to the list, as students will change their engagement to meet the demands of the situation. (Stefani, 2009) quotes Krause (2006, p.5) which seems to support this notion: 'The well adjusted and engaged student is one who assesses and re-assesses their thinking as transitions and opportunities to engage in different ways continue through and beyond the first year of university.' She makes an argument for curricula that provide authentic learning tasks that can fully engage the learner. (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2005) present guidelines for devising student centred approaches that promote collaborative group learning through project and problem based learning that would fit with this goal. The role of assessment in student motivation also requires consideration in providing a more comprehensive account of student engagement. (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006) present a model of self regulated learning which highlights teacher and learner dialogue and positive feedback that encourages motivation and the development of self assessment skills.

The distinction between social and academic styles in relation to this typology is also unwarranted, as a qualitative analysis of discussion threads demonstrated that social discourse plays a role in student collaboration. Further examination of the type of discourse indicates

that by learning to post proposals and responses in the early stages, these can influence later discussion through the practice of co-operative and collaborative communication. This analysis also showed that the deeper learning and knowledge construction in an online discussion forum can be produced by collaborative learning if supported by lecturers. Such knowledge construction requires collaboration over time and with stimulating input from lecturers that challenges student thinking. Williams & Lahman (2011) and Szabo & Jonathan (2011) provide further evidence for the use of online discussion boards to support critical thinking in students. A vital aspect of student learning supported by the findings is the emphasis on practical learning being a focus for engagement. Thus, the greatest activity in the discussion fora was found when students collaborated to plan an exhibition.

In drawing together the various strands of this research, I feel a strong argument can be made that student engagement is multi-faceted, and requires an examination of the procedures we use to assess it, as well as how we construct it in the context of Higher Education. A learner focused approach as presented in this participatory framework, has found qualitative evidence to counter superficial, institutional driven quantitative evidence for a student typology. A strong argument for collaborative learning is supported by qualitative analysis of online discussion, and a supportive learning framework has arisen out of conceptual analysis of the social construction of 'community' by a group of students in a Community-based (Service) Learning module.

The current study found that the quiet student can express themselves better through online discussion while some participants prefer face-to-face sessions. How can course design promote participation in small group learning to maximize the potential of different communicative media? An area highlighted by this study is in relation to facilitating students

to join discussion – how can they support each other to move in and out of being a leader one minute or a follower the next in order to promote collaboration? The social factors that influence these transitions such as gender, age, and facilitating the social interactions of mature learner and young student learner also require further investigation.

## **Conclusion**

A strong conclusion from this study is that collaborative group learning can support knowledge construction and student engagement. The focus is the same for any learning situation – online or offline – students are motivated by tasks that challenge and that they can relate to their own experience. The use of technology in supporting community development is more complex and multifaceted than a first glance would suggest as it must first meet the needs of the learning community. Part of the difficulty in promoting student collaboration in learning has to acknowledge the student context in today's individualist society, where students may feel they are in competition with each other particularly in relation to later employment outcomes. The Pedagogies for Civic Engagement offer a way forward to the learner, teacher and the communities we serve (Boland & McIlrath, 2007). Further research is suggested in relation to how students perceive their role as 'active engaged citizens', how institutions see their role in connecting with the communities they serve, as well as resource implications and support for staff who deliver this type of course.

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