

Assessment and Collaboration: Do Grades Help or Hurt Group Culture?

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Grades are not neutral measurement tools. In group work, they actively **shape behaviour, trust, accountability and the quality of collaboration.**

What the study asks

Motivation or disruption?

Do grades strengthen or do they undermine openness by making collaboration feel risky?

Fairness and contribution

How do students respond when effort is uneven, visible, hidden, rewarded or ignored within a group task?

Culture, not only outcomes

The study looks beyond marks. (examine interpersonal climate, anxiety, competition and mutual respect.)

Assessment models create different cultures

Shared group grade

Helps:
collective responsibility and interdependence

Risks:
free-riding concerns and resentment if effort feels unequal

Individual grade

Helps:
clearer accountability and visible personal effort

Risks:
students may protect their own mark rather than help the group

Peer evaluation

Helps:
reflection, transparency and contribution awareness

Risks:
bias, social pressure, strategic ratings

The grading model teaches students what collaboration is for.

Efficient task-splitting systems

If assessment rewards only the product

Collaboration becomes a learned practice

If assessment also values process, feedback and contribution

Strategic vs authentic collaboration

Strategic collaboration

Task division, minimal interaction, focus on mark optimisation and risk control.

VS

Authentic collaboration

Shared problem-solving, negotiation and collective meaning-making.

Design tensions to manage

Accountability



Trust



Too much of either can weaken culture.

Performance



Process



Assessment should make both visible.

Assessment design principle: balance accountability with trust, and product quality with collaborative process.

