Collaborative activities with Office 365

Teaching & Learning

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Photo: Bjarke MacCarthy

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TIP: Collaborative documents can be shared directly using a link, or embedded into your Canvas courses.

Collaborative activities promote learning through social interaction (JISC, 2016).

Collaborative activities can:

- support development of higher-level thinking, as well as oral and written communication.

- offer authentic learning opportunities (i.e., real-life social and employment situations).

- support development of such competencies as collaboration and leadership, self-regulation and time management.

- increase awareness of diverse perspectives and help build a sense of belonging.

- support student wellbeing through increased social interaction.

Online teaching contexts and Office 365

There are many collaborative activity types in existence that can suit different teaching contexts. When teaching online, 'live' sessions are best suited for short discussion-based activities and offer very limited scope for creating an output – try to also keep it simple when you suggest tools to support collaborative work here. Longer-term group projects can be as elaborate as you see fit for the course learning outcomes, both in terms of the output and the tools to support it.

The key advantages of using the Office 365 suite for student collaboration are:

- Ease of access – no new profiles would be required as all staff and students already have access.

- Data security - this is ensured by CBS to all users both in terms of the GDPR compliance, and the privacy concerns students might have if required to sign up with personal credentials to other services, e.g., Google.

- Data storage - the output is automatically saved in a student's drive and therefore available for review or re-use at a later stage.

Planning for collaborative activities

1. Create a clear prompt for the activity – this could be a case, a social issue, a question drawn from the lecture content. Set the instructions that will be accessible to students throughout the activity – mention the process for group formation, required output format, deadline.

2. Group work stage – make sure the students know when and how to get in touch with you if they have questions.

3. Output – be clear about what is required of students as the end product of the activity. Also, about where to send or upload it. And whether it will be open to the comments / discussions from the whole class or just to the teacher. Would this be a formal feedback opportunity?

Ideas for collaborative activities using Office 365

S – synchronous   A - asynchronous

- Breakout room discussions (S): ask the students to discuss an issue in randomly allocated groups and use a shared **Word doc** for recording their three main takeaways.

- Brainstorm (S): during a Teams session, open an integrated **Whiteboard / Whiteboard app** and share your screen. It is possible to allow students to write or draw directly on the board, as well as use sticky notes. The tool also allows you to move the entries around, so you have an option of curating the contributions.

- Debate (S / A): Prepare the debate board in advance – write up the issue or statement you want the class to debate and set up separate areas for 'PRO' and 'CON' arguments. You can use either **Whiteboard**, **Canvas Collaborations** (with **MS Office 365**) or **Sway**. If using Sway, add your debate statement as a 'Title card', dedicate section 1 to PRO arguments and section 2 to CON arguments and ask students to add 'text cards' with their contributions.

- Group portfolio (A): when groups are working together over a longer period, ask them to make continuous contributions to a Group notebook on **OneNote**. Be clear about the content (activity reports? reflective account?), frequency (one a week for the whole group? per participant?), expected word count, authorship (should every member of the group post at least once?) and whether it is being marked.

- Class wiki (A): set up a class notebook on **OneNote** and ask all students to contribute to its development. This can be used for session summaries (assign specific students to work on each week's submission) or a course glossary of terms.