

Abstract 3B

The Development and Implementation of a Method of Collaborative Learning for First Year Philosophy Tutorials

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The traditional tutorial takes the form of a dialogue between the tutor and tutees, where the tutor is the subject expert and the tutees are the learners. However, there is evidence to suggest that better learning occurs when students are encouraged to discover and construct knowledge for themselves. In addition, the literature suggests that learning is reinforced when students work together in small groups in order to teach and learn from each other.

During the first semester of the academic year 2010-2011 a project was funded by a grant from the Higher Education Academy to develop and implement a method of collaborative learning for first year philosophy tutorials. This project was inspired by Aronson's "jigsaw classroom" technique, which is a method for small group work which allows all students to become subject experts and to teach and be taught by their peers. Students were split into three sub-groups, with each sub-group being given a particular question about the tutorial topic to focus on each week.

Tutorial materials were delivered via a Moodle Forum and a Moodle Wiki prior to the tutorial and students were encouraged to post answers to the tutorial questions before attending a tutorial. During the tutorial, each sub-group had a few minutes to discuss their answers and nominate a spokesperson. Each group then presented to the rest of the class and taught them what they had learned. By the end of each tutorial, the group as a whole had built a model answer to the tutorial topic, covering more ground than would have otherwise been possible.

This presentation will discuss the development of the teaching materials, the technologies used, and the tutorials themselves. The jigsaw classroom will be contrasted with other methods of enabling peer assessment and formative feedback, and there will be a comparison of the jigsaw classroom with enquiry based learning. In particular, the literature shows that, when considering induction and the first year experience, the first class taken by a student plays a vital role. Students who are happy and intellectually challenged in their first class are more likely to adjust to the environment of higher education. This is an important factor to consider in terms of student retention within a subject and within the University as a whole. The jigsaw classroom, with its emphasis on collaborative learning and social interaction, helps students to make the transition into their new learning community.

Detailed feedback from the GTA and from the students will be presented (six students have indicated that they would be interested in talking about their perceptions of these tutorials as part of this talk). At the time of writing this project is just entering its assessment stage, but the preliminary finding is that students have benefited from this model of tutorials, and the reasons for this will be discussed.