# Crossing the line: Collusion or collaboration in university group work?

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'Almost everyone has difficulty identifying where collaboration stops and collusion begins.' (Carroll & Appleton, 2001, p.15)

In both policy and practice, collusion is a perplexing area of academic integrity. Students are expected to learn to work collaboratively in university courses, yet are often required to submit assessment tasks as individuals whilst in group-work situations. This paper discusses the tension between 'collaboration' and 'collusion' in group-work and the consequences for crossing the line. Adopting a theoretical framework from Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1971; Bourdieu, 1991) on symbolic power, the notion of legitimate voice and intertextuality, this paper outlines the effects on the academic identities of 17 students found 'guilty' of collusion in one Australian university. In addition, 34 staff involved in formal disciplinary procedures were interviewed. The findings indicate that collusion is a fraught notion and not approached systematically across the university, nor with any degree of confidence by staff or students. The delineation between 'acceptable collaboration' and 'collusion' appears to be founded in shifting sands, with negative attitudes towards collaborative tasks being the main lesson learned by students.

## What is 'collusion'?

Collusion is outlined in various university policies within the area of academic integrity or academic misconduct. A random sample of university policies across a range of Australian and international universities are used to illustrate the various ways in which collusion is defined. All policies used are available publicly on university websites.

Collusion is the presentation by a student of an assessment task as his or her own which:

- In whole or in part is the result of unauthorised collaboration with another person/persons.
- Is plagiarised due to inappropriate collaboration during group work.
- Involves working with others without permission.
- Is the product of two or more students working together without official approval.
- Is the product of unauthorised cooperation between the student and another person.
- Is a form of academic dishonesty (cheating) because it is the same or very similar to that of another student.

As can be seen from these statements, collusion is regarded as problematic where a student has engaged in 'unauthorised' collaboration with others in the presentation of an assessment item. As will be discussed later, one of the greatest issues is distinguishing the 'line' between authorised and unauthorised collaboration. An accompanying issue is taking responsibility for explaining to students where that line exists within disciplines and subjects. Some policies aggregate collusion and plagiarism, yet others position collusion within the suite of academic

dishonesty offences, which include plagiarism and cheating. Some policies place the onus on the lecturer/academic to clearly delineate 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' collaboration. All policies deem collusion to be academic misconduct and all universities state that penalties apply for those found in breach of the policy (although the penalties are often outlined elsewhere).

The term 'collusion' in this paper means 'inappropriate or unauthorised collaboration by two or more students in the production and submission of assessment tasks'. This definition is a paraphrase of the participant university's policy statement on collusion, as the precise university statement cannot be reproduced here for ethical reasons of identification.

## Prior research on student collusion

There are a number of excellent studies investigating the specific issue of student collusion in universities. Ashworth, Bannister and Thorne (1997) investigated students' motivations and understandings of broad academic misconduct. Their work found that students value learning and personal qualities such as friendship and trust above policy mandates on academic conduct. Therefore students may argue that they are 'helping friends' and collaborating as required by the university and do not see such actions as open to allegations of collusion. These findings are echoed in Bob Perry's (2009) questionnaire study of 355 undergraduate and 122 postgraduate students studying business at a British university. He found that 19 per cent of undergraduate students overall submitted work as their own but worked on it with others (with 14 per cent of first year students; 26 per cent at second year, 31 per cent at third year and seven per cent of postgraduates) confirming their work was not the product of a sole author and was the result of collaboration or collusion in groups. Perry stated, 'Ironically it might be that the positive teaching practice of using groups and the encouragingly high levels of student integration may, to some extent, help drive collusion' (2009, p.103).

In 2005, Ruth Barrett and Anna Cox compared 59 lecturers' and 451 students' understandings of plagiarism and collusion through a scenario-based questionnaire at a university in the United Kingdom. They found that although generally there was a sound understanding of plagiarism by staff and students, the same could not be said of collusion. Their research illustrated that staff considered the issue of collusion much more problematic to resolve than that of plagiarism and that many staff believe that 'assessment is the primary way in which students learn' so that

a 'blanket ban' on collaboration is 'unrealistic' (Barrett & Cox 2005, p.111). Similarly, students acknowledged that they help each other with assessment tasks, particularly when lecturer assistance is not forthcoming and they have difficulty distinguishing between legitimate collaboration and collusion. In particular for group work scenarios, Barrett and Cox (2005, p.116) noted:

> Eighteen per cent of participants said that there are situations in which collusion or plagiarism are acceptable. Of these 60 per cent mentioned group work. This may be attributed to confusion between legitimate collaboration and collusion or a misunderstanding between individual and assessed group work in the design of the question. It may also be referring to situations in which the more capable students help the weaker to bring up the group mark.

The authors found that 'both staff and students feel that collusion is much more acceptable than plagiarism because some learning is taking place. It appears that there is no consensus on the boundary between collaborative behaviour and collusion' (Barrett & Cox 2005, p.107). They concluded that large numbers of staff could not correctly identify instances of collusion in the scenarios, and as the staff did not consider collusion to be a serious offence, therefore, 'it is perhaps not surprising that students also do not consider collusion to be a serious offence' (2005, pp.118-119). The finding that staff are unable to identify cases of collusion or lack sufficient institutional professional development to identify and explain instances of collusion to students is of grave concern to institutions and those responsible for academic integrity within them. Inconsistency in outcomes for cases of collusion is likely, which is as Pecorari and Shaw note 'potentially dangerous for students that teachers hold significantly diverse views about the sorts of intertextuality that are, and are not, acceptable' (2012, p.150). If staff indicate that they consider collusion not to be a serious academic offence, they are unlikely to implement institutional policies in relation to collusion. Therefore, revisiting university policy and implementation processes in relation to collusion may be warranted.

Anna Sutton and David Taylor conducted a large study in the United Kingdom in 2011 in relation to academic integrity and collusion. Over 1,038 questionnaire responses were analysed and four key themes emerged:

1. Trust – students rarely put themselves in a situation where they are likely to collude. They have competitive attitudes towards study and if they share work it is with people they trust.

2. Cooperation – students feel obligations to 'help' their peers, particularly if they are struggling.

3. Information technology (IT) use – students increasingly use IT in all aspects of their lives to 'share' artefacts (Twitter, Facebook, Google docs). Sharing is not viewed as collusion.

4. Conscientious working – students are aware of the competition involved in successfully completing assessments and the final goal of employability.

Sutton and Taylor's (2011) study indicates that students are caught between understanding academic competitiveness and their genuine desire to assist peers with work. The authors write:

> In all the focus groups, students reported a strong social pressure to 'help' friends or colleagues with academic work whilst, conversely, experiencing a culture of competitiveness where they felt the need to protect their own interests to maximise the relative quality of their own work. Students were concerned about academic misconduct and had been told how serious it is, but felt they were not sufficiently well informed about expectations in this area to avoid possible problems (2011, p.837).

These prior studies indicate that students are confused about the boundary between collaborative group-work (expected by their lecturers, peers, institutions, future employers) and collusion. All studies indicate that there is a greater need to make the 'line' between collaboration and collusion clear and transparent. Some previous work illustrates that academic staff are not clear about the line themselves, or how to enforce the line under current policy mandates (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, 2010). Universities must also consider how they accept responsibility for and ensure the line between collaboration and collusion is maintained. This is pertinent as universities claim, in their graduate attributes, that graduates will leave the institution having learned and evidenced an ethical, honest working ethos.

All previous research has focussed on student understandings of collusion before disciplinary action has occurred. This paper extends prior research by examining students' responses post-disciplinary hearings where they have been found 'guilty' of collusion. This study explores how that process influences their sense of academic self within their disciplinary discourse community, as developing a strong sense of academic identity is a key component of student empowerment. There are three theoretical frameworks – discursive power (Fairclough, 1989), academic identity (Bourdieu, 1991) and construction of knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – which underpin this study. An individual's sense of linguistic power is embodied in their status as 'legiti-mate' or 'peripheral' (Flowerdew, 2000) members within group situations, with the authority to speak and be heard. This concept of 'legitimate' or authorised use of language is echoed in the policies outlining acceptable and unacceptable academic practices, coded as collaboration (authorised/legitimate practice) and collusion (unauthorised/illegitimate collaboration).

## Approach to study

In 2010, seventeen students and 34 staff were interviewed about their experiences of collusion. The research was approved by the university Ethics Committee and parties and the university have been de-identified in this paper. The seventeen students (male n=10 and female n=7; undergraduate n=11 and postgraduate n=6) students were found 'guilty' of academic misconduct (collusion) by faculty disciplinary committees. The students were from faculties including Arts (n=6), Education (n=4), Engineering (n=3), Science (n=5). One student was enrolled as a double degree student in Arts/Education. All students who had appeared before disciplinary hearings (the term used by the institution) for academic misconduct of collusion (term in the policy) were invited to meet with the researcher to talk about their experiences. A global email was sent through the student union, the postgraduate research centre and through advertisement on faculty bulletin boards and central university advertisements inviting participation.

All interviews were taped and transcribed with permission and interviews took place post-hearing and post-penalty. Staff were invited to participate through emails sent to each faculty disciplinary committee secretary, seeking voluntary participation. The staff members interviewed are volunteer members of disciplinary committees within their own faculties. At the participating university, students are entitled to appear with a friend and also the student advocate (who is not a lawyer) at the hearing. Under formal processes, written notice of the right to appear and speak are outlined. For students not living in the same area, national and international phone links are arranged and funded by the university. The thirty-four staff were from faculty committees in Arts (n=8), Science (n=11), Education (n=15).

Data were coded using N*vivo software to find themes under the three theoretical areas already outlined. A common theme of 'lines' emerged, which frames the following discussion of findings. All names used are pseudonyms, only gendered names remain the same as the original participant.

## The 'fine line' between collusion and collaboration: staff responses

All staff members (n=34) agree that collaborative group work is an essential element of their course assessment, as it is required under the university graduate attributes policy and faculty assessment policies. At the course level, group work must be included in at least some assessment tasks. Staff members agree that working in teams is an essential skill and some disciplines indicate that it is a professional registration requirement for students to evidence their successful group work involvement. One female academic in Education said, 'Pre-service teachers must be able to work in teams because that's what happens in schools. You have to be able to work collaboratively to write and deliver curriculum and learning objectives and the Teacher Registration Board requires evidence of this. It's not an option in our courses'. However, most staff consider there is a 'fine line' between collusion and collaboration, which is not easy to articulate to students. All academics interviewed expressed concern at the reliance students place on internet-based resources and were worried that the 'cut and paste' generation may end up facing collusion allegations because they use exactly the same words or possess poor citation skills.

Overall, staff consider the term 'collusion', as defined in the university policy, to be quite vague and difficult to put into action. The 'vagueness' is because of the phrase 'inappropriate or unauthorised collaboration'. Staff say that to know whether something is 'unauthorised' collaboration, means that there should be very clear guidelines in the assessment task as to what is deemed to be 'authorised' collaboration and what student activities would cross the line into the forbidden realm of 'unauthorised' sharing of work. Similarly, most staff (n=32) consider that 'inappropriate' collaboration needs to be clearly outlined or distinguished in each assessment task from 'appropriate collaboration' if students are asked to work in groups on a particular task. One male academic from Arts said, 'You know, this is something we struggle with all the time, because if students are asked to share ideas, work, sections of tasks, or peer review work, it's hard to give concrete examples of when that crosses to the dark side of collusion'. Another academic in the field of science responded, 'in lab work, when students are working on experiments or data collection together but need to write up a lab report, often it's difficult because so much of it is in a template form now. Only some of it needs to be the same and the software picks it up as collusion. Then it's a bit dicey as to how different staff members interpret the

report' (the software used is Turnitin). Conversely, a male staff member also from science said, 'You can tell from the lab report if students have colluded or not. Their words are the same for much of the report, and they even report the wrong results in the same place'.

Interestingly, what is considered to constitute 'collusion' varies across the faculties and disciplines. One female member of staff from creative arts said, 'You know, in fashion design, we are always plagiarising designs. In fact, part of what we learn to do is to copy expensive *haute couture* designs and adapt them for business women or for special events like the Spring Carnival and that is an expected and assessed outcome of part of the course. Naturally, there will be collaboration, to varying extents in group design work – how else will students learn? To then say students have colluded would be impossible for us to tell, and even unfair, in my opinion'. Similarly, a female in education said:

> I don't think collusion is seen the same way by all areas of the university. I mean in the area I teach (dance choreography), one task requires them to work together to choreograph a dance piece but all take a separate grade-able section. As it has to all 'fit' into one overall performance, so of course they are going to collaborate and perhaps collude, but replication of some steps could, arguably, be links to tie things together. I mean how could we call that collusion, but maybe such tactics in other departments would be collusion. I mean I don't know. How consistent is this across the university anyway?

However, a male academic from the arts stated, 'I don't think there's much doubt about when students collude. I mean students know they can talk about things in groups and that's to be encouraged, but when students turn in the same phraseology and it's a bit 'off', then you know something more than collaboration has happened'. The data indicates there is no common view of what constitutes collusion as 'unauthorised collaboration' across the disciplines, although staff members indicate that 'collusion is a greyer area than plagiarism' (female, Science). This supports the work of Erik Borg (2009) who found that the discipline-specific fields informed and altered lecturers' approaches to plagiarism and collusion to the extent that expectations varied according to disciplines. Borg concluded that, 'disciplinary differences divide us profoundly, because disciplinary variations are realised in intertextuality, this variation needs to be recognised in policies intended to address plagiarism and collusion' (2009, p.423). The staff in this study also consider that at disciplinary hearings, cases of collusion do not appear to be thought of as serious as plagiarism. Although specific

penalties set for cases of collusion in each faculty were not available to the researcher, staff estimate that warnings are more common in allegations of collusion than zero grades for assessment tasks. This may support prior research findings that staff do not consider collusion to be as 'serious' as plagiarism (see Barrett & Cox, 2005).

Most academics interviewed (n=32) regard the policy as framed in terms of negative actions. However, interviewees are concerned that the policy does not then take an active stance to state how offences are to be avoided. One female in education said, 'You know the policy is full of *'thou shalt not'* dictates, but nowhere is there anything that tells students how *not* to fall into these traps. There aren't even links from the policy to other areas that can outline how students can avoid these things, like the language and learning specialty websites and the like' (emphasis in the original). Given that these academics view the policy as negatively framed or unclear, they also consider it is difficult for academics, particularly junior or sessional staff, to explain the difference between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' collaboration to students. One male in education responded:

> I wonder about the equity of this. Like, I think about the sessional tutors or new staff and wonder whether the course coordinator has explained how they tell 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' collaboration in group work to these folk. And I also wonder how it works for off-campus students – I mean, it doesn't really seem to be any clearer in writing than an oral explanation, so how does that work for students you never get to talk to. I mean, what is the departmental or actually the university responsibility for ensuring casual staff and markers understand this, I wonder?

This academic raises the question about the level of responsibility the university accepts for ensuring policies covering areas such as plagiarism and collusion, can be enacted in practice. This is particularly pertinent when universities give undertakings to the community at large that their graduates can evidence ethical skills and qualities upon graduation (Sutherland-Smith, 2008, 2010).

## The 'mythical line' between collusion and collaboration: student responses

Overall, students in this study are unclear where the line between acceptable collaboration and collusion is drawn across the disciplines. Similar to Shirley Yeo's (2007) findings, most students in this study indicate they 'need clear guidelines on the boundaries of collaborative work' (2007, p.213). They want to be told what constitutes acceptable collaboration, rather than being repeatedly told what *not*

to do, or that what they submit for assessment contravenes policy after the fact. Students indicate they want examples of successful practice rather than examples of what they should not do – emphasising the positive rather than the negative in learning spaces. Providing such guidance to students presents a challenge to university faculties, as what constitutes 'acceptable collaboration' or 'unacceptable collaboration' in terms of group work for individually assessed tasks is not clearly apparent in policy or practice, according to the student participants in this study.

These students can generally provide a clear definition of plagiarism but are less clear in defining collusion or giving examples of it, even after their disciplinary committee hearings, when 'penalties' (the term used in the policy) were awarded. One undergraduate female student said, in frustrated tones, 'If it is a group work project – how do you know where this *mythical line* is between *'collaboration'* and *'unauthorised collaboration'*?' (Georgia; emphasis in the original). Despite the fact she had been found 'guilty' of collusion and the penalty was a warning and her name entered on the register, she still did not have a clear understanding of what she had done wrong. Georgia said the whole group talked, both face-to-face and via Facebook about the group project. They shared written documents through Google documents so continual amendments were enabled and freely added from whatever resources individual members brought to the group task. She said it is 'stupid' that so much of the design and thinking about the group project was done by most members, yet the marker required the project be divided up and written individually for the purposes of ultimate assessment grading. Georgia said:

> We all contributed, except one person who was pretty slack, so why do lecturers make us work in groups and then assign an individual writing task for assessment? When you talk about stuff and comment on bits, particularly time and time again, you don't remember who wrote or said what originally and if it's been altered by the group, then how can one individual claim it as 'theirs' in terms of the written assignment. I just don't get it at all!

Georgia argues that words appearing in the same way in their tasks, is 'bound to happen', simply because of the way in which they had set-up the joint document and the recording of their group conversations. This example indicates Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of the social construction of knowledge, because during the group collaboration, Georgia notes the accompanying dialogue shapes and reshapes ideas and words. Within the act of engagement, words and ideas are shared in the group without an expectation that they will carry notions of

ownership or authorial rights requiring attribution. Georgia remains convinced it is unfair that 'collusion' was the outcome of her case because there had been no specific instruction from the lecturer or tutor about how the group were to write together and what was to be distinguished between the collaborative discussion / writing and the final individual written submission. She says she feels 'cheated by the system' and is reluctant to work on a group writing project again, unless the whole group submits one piece of assessment for a final group mark. Although Georgia was given the chance to speak at the hearing, she said she did not seem to be able to convey the lack of clarity about the 'mythical line' between collusion and collaboration to the panel. She said, 'I tried to explain that the very way we set up the electronic document meant that words and phrases were likely to be used by people in our individual written work, but they didn't seem to get that it wasn't collusion, just really good collaboration. They still punished me anyway'. Georgia is concerned that she is now labelled as a 'colluder' and believes she will not be taken seriously in any group work projects in the future. This experience has left her with a very low academic sense of self and is worried about her future academic 'legitimacy' within her disciplinary discourse community.

> Pete said, 'It's ridiculous to expect students' group talk will not be reflected in their writing! Do lecturers expect us to talk about something, share ideas and then not reflect it in our writing? If so, then what's the point of having any group work at all?'

Similarly, two students in arts were found guilty of collusion on an essay writing task, based on group discussion and a group presentation. They are angry that their written work is considered a product of collusion. These students share a house, often discuss university work and happened to be placed in the same online discussion group for the task. Pete said, 'It's *ridiculous* to expect students' group talk will not be reflected in their writing! Do lecturers expect us to talk about something, share ideas and then not reflect it in our writing? If so, then what's the point of having any group work at all?' (Emphasis in the original). His housemate, Rina, agreed, 'So we both thought the same words were great – we talked so much, we don't even remember who said what and how are you meant to cite spoken stuff anyway? *Never* seen the lecturers cite what words *they* take from other places, it's just two sets of rules and it's *unfair*!' (emphasis in the original). These students raise a considerable challenge in terms of lecturers' and students' expectations of the dynamics and use of spoken text in group work. The students claim that they are now less likely to 'give away' their ideas freely in class or in online discussion groups, with Rina even saying, 'I've reverted to being a 'lurker' online. I read others' contributions but rarely post anything of real significance myself. You know, just meaningless garbage saying what a good idea someone else had, or restating something from a reading. I've learned to keep my thoughts and ideas to myself'. It is of great concern that this is the learning that students gain from their collaborative group-work experience. It is particularly so when prior research outlines the importance of group work in collaborative working spaces (Bakker, Albrecht & Leiter, 2011) and for the development of 'positive and pronounced learning identity' that leads to 'increased motivation and engagement' (Tinker, Buzwell, & Leitch, 2012, p.2).

Rami, a male, and Sakhoni, a female, both in postgraduate studies in education raise issues of their academic and 'moral' (their term) obligations to help peers. Rami said, 'Why would I not help my friends if they ask? It is helping each other, learning together, you know, collaboration, so how is it collusion?' Sakhoni said:

I thought it was part of collegiality to help friends who are struggling. We set up a reading group, to go through various unit readings and share ideas and thoughts about them. There were six of us and we all agreed to take turns to lead the discussion on a particular reading. It was kind of like being a mini-tutor for our little study group. We did it because some of the younger Vietnamese students were struggling with all the readings and we thought it would help us all to be clearer about what we thought and then wrote. As an older student who has been in Australia for a number of years, it is my moral obligation to help. I mean, what kind of person would I be if I did not help? Is that really the kind of teacher you want in your schools – someone who sees peers or students needing help and just ignores them and won't give it?

Similar to Sutton and Taylor's (2011) findings, students in this study spoke of friendship and loyalty as an essential part of their growing academic identity to 'help' peers. These students have been 'punished' in some way, they feel 'the greater good of mutual help' is lost (Tammy, female in science). They are concerned that students view them as 'cheats' as do their lecturers, so are reluctant to speak in class. Leila, a female postgraduate in education, was particularly strident in her response. She explained

that it is common in education units to work in groups but then to write assignments individually. Leila said:

> When I got the letter, I felt like a criminal. The worst thing was I didn't know what I'd done wrong. I still don't! … a student in my group asked me not that long ago, 'Oh, can you email me this?' and I said 'No! I've already been caught up on this and I'm not risking anything any more'. I still don't understand how sharing ideas and words in a group is collusion but I will not risk my studies. I know they [current group members] don't think I *collaborate* in the group, but I don't care. I'm not going to be charged with collusion again. I reference every sentence now and I don't share work with anyone and I don't speak much either. I keep my ideas to myself. I despise being like this because I don't think it's really how learning is done, but that's what I've learned at university…trust nobody, including your lecturers! (emphasis in original, my insertion)

Leila is adamant that the assessment format was unclear in terms of when sharing was to occur and when not. She is also very angry that her lecturer and tutor had not given specific instructions on shared or individual writing and she blames them for the outcome. She says she sees collaboration happening in the professional lives of school-teachers, but that her experience at university has taught her that assessment is divorced from true collaboration – that it is 'collaboration in name only' (Leila's words). She remains convinced that the only way to succeed in passing her degree is to participate minimally and wait until she 'gets into the real world' to collaborate 'properly' (Leila's words).

These experiences indicate that students leave the 'hearing' process with negative experiences of collaboration, assessment tasks in university settings and confusion as to their responsibilities for collegiality with respect to their developing academic identity. All students claim that, initially, they truly engaged in group work to test their discursive understandings and gain 'legitimacy' as members of their discourse communities. Now, they will not take the 'skeptron' of power outlined by Bourdieu (1991, p.109) as they are reluctant to engage in discursive group-work for fear of allegations of unauthorised collaboration. Their responses indicate that their experiences have had a profound effect in engendering a 'negative' academic identity, as they are seen in a deficit model of collaboration by other group members. They use words such as 'slack' (Georgia), 'spongers' (Leila) and 'non-contributors' (Rina) to describe how they perceive their current group members see them. None of the students want to wear the mantle of being un-cooperative in group work, but they do not see any alternative, as this is a mechanism of self-preservation and a path to graduation. Their comments indicate they are unclear how they are to develop a sense of authorial voice that does not include the work or voices of others but they will not contribute openly as they are afraid that allegations of collusion may be levelled at them again. Clearly, the promised learning outcomes at discipline and university levels, in terms of collaboration and team work, are far from realised by these students.

The student experiences must be aligned with government imperatives to ensure university graduates leave institutions with as skilled individuals able to work in groups and teams. It would be counter-productive to dismiss group work or team-based learning from the suite of approaches because of possible collusion. Indeed, Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck and Fantuzzo (2006) argue that small group approaches (like peer assisted learning) have positive effects on individual student's perceptions of themselves as academic achievers and their developing academic identities. This is because group work skills are engendered when students share ideas, comment on work and engage in a sense of collaborative learning.

## Conclusion and implications

This study indicates that collusion is no clearer for the 17 students having undergone 'disciplinary committee' processes than before experiencing disciplinary committee processes. Their responses also indicate that they are angry, frustrated and upset about the outcomes of the proceedings and blame lecturers and the institution for not making the line clear between collaboration and collusion in group-work. Student responses also suggest, supporting the prior research of Borg (2009), that collusion is viewed differently, in practice, across disciplinary areas, thus making the design of a common institutional approach to collusion a challenge. A most concerning finding relates to the 'lesson' that a number of students have taken from this experience. Whilst the institution may assume that the process has taught students how to understand the difference between 'acceptable collaboration' and 'unacceptable collaboration', in fact, students' report that they are now choosing not to collaborate at all. There is clear disjuncture between these students' approaches to learning in groups and institutional ideals and promises of graduate readiness for employment in terms of group cooperation. This finding indicates that the procedural handling of collusion is often counter-productive to the educational aspirations of universities. Instead of exhorting students to strive for academic integrity, the policy processes and outcomes drive students away from collaborative learning spaces. This suggests policy processes

should be rethought – perhaps by adopting more positive policy and procedural approaches to academic integrity issues (International Center for Academic Integrity, 2012; Sutherland-Smith, 2010).

Some students claim that they only resist cooperation in group-work for university assessment tasks, but will happily collaborate once in professional workplaces. This raises questions about the authenticity of tertiary assessment tasks in relation to workplace practices. Indeed, many of the student responses suggest a much closer examination of assessment design – particularly for group work – is warranted at both individual and programme curriculum levels. Perhaps integration of software-assisted peer feedback in group work may provide a means to provide equity of contribution and reduce confusing lines between collaboration and collusion (see SPARKPLUS, 2012; Willey, Jacobs & Walmsley, 2007, for example). Staff are also concerned with how best to deal with collusion. Some consider it is difficult to explain, hard to prove and not as serious as other academic honesty issues, such as plagiarism and cheating. They are, perhaps, less likely to implement collusion policy or formal processes for academic integrity management. On the other hand, staff are aware of their responsibilities to ensure the academic integrity of their students' work. Balancing these competing discourses is a continuing point of tension for staff which needs to be acknowledged by institutions and supported through ongoing professional development and institutional resourcing.

Broader education issues arise from this study relating to students' opportunities to develop their own academic identity and positive sense of learning self. If Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion that knowledge is socially constructed is accepted, and these students are afraid to participate in group-work discussions because they may be caught for collusion, they are not fully engaged. This means they may remain 'peripheral' rather than 'legitimate' members of the discourse communities appropriate to their fields of study. As linguistic fringe-dwellers, they are less likely to develop the linguistic capital needed to forge a positive sense of identity, which is necessary for students to fully engage in learning. These issues raise real challenges for universities espousing learning outcomes that enable their graduates to collaborate and work in groups.

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