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Enhancing Student Engagement through Small Group Pedagogies in a Large Class Environment

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions all over the world have been increasing their student intake due to higher demands for education, creating larger and larger classes. The problems of teaching a large class are widely recognized and various solutions have been suggested. The pedagogy literature establishes that learning outcomes and engagement for students in large classes are improved when students feel that they belong to small groups within the classes. This article describes recent changes to a second year statistics unit with large practicals aimed initially at promoting group work, and more generally at conferring some of the benefits of smaller classes. Specifically, we aimed to increase students' interaction with tutors and each other, and to develop students' verbal communication skills and confidence through short unrehearsed presentations. Results of preliminary analysis of students' responses to survey questions on their learning habits and learning environment showed that students are generally happy with the new learning space regardless of their age, gender and whether they were local or international students. Although students felt less comfortable presenting their solutions to the class, they found it worthwhile to listen to peers' solution presentations. Overall, students found their peers and teaching staff to be supportive of their learning.

KEYWORDS

Student Engagement; Collaborative Learning; Learning Spaces; Large Class; Unrehearsed Student Presentations

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