

OP20

Enabling Collaboration During Written Examinations: A Pilot Study in a Biomedical Sciences Examination

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Introduction: Typically, at least one of the learning outcomes from a university-level medical or health sciences course will include fostering collaboration and development of effective peer to peer communication. Traditional written examinations, which often make up the largest contribution to the final grade for the student, are unable to assess such outcomes. Two-stage examinations where the first stage is taken individually and the second stage is repeating challenging sections of the examination in small groups have previously been investigated in the North American physical sciences context and shown to improve student learning. Here, we have piloted a two-stage written examination in biomedical sciences and used quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the efficacy of the approach.

Method: A two-stage examination was designed, implemented and evaluated in an advanced final year undergraduate biomedical sciences course. The two-stage examination was evaluated by questionnaire and interview of the students.

Findings: Both high and low performing students benefitted from the two-stage examination by comparison of results from the two stages of the examination. Students particularly valued the immediate feedback and teamwork aspects of using a two-stage examination. The two-stage did not reduce stress amongst students. Students considered the assessment was fair when balanced at 85% of grade for individual stage and 15% of grade for group stage.

Conclusion: Two-stage examinations could have value as an innovative but simply implemented approach to improve student learning, improve feedback, and promote collaborative teamwork in a variety of medical or health sciences assessment contexts.