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Learning teams' diversity and innovative capacity: The case of gastronomy students

Gastronomy program at Kristianstad University has since many years been working with innovative processes and have created a number of courses aimed at developing innovative generic skills among their students. One of such courses is "Creative concept and product development in the foodstuff". The course presents the students an opportunity to develop new and exciting food stuff products in team of learners. The course has now run for 4 years and students have expressed satisfaction with their innovative skill development and the usefulness of skills acquired in their future career. While the course have received many positive evaluations, a systematic evaluation of its structure and implementation has not yet been performed. This project aimed at evaluating how different aspects of team work (e.g. diversity and experiences) relate to students' development of innovative skills within the course. The study's theoretical base lays in the field of collaborative learning (e.g. Bruffee, 1993), team learning (Slavin, 1978) and well as acquisition of generic skills in the collaborative and team learning processes. The project utilized an Input-Process-Output (Ilgen, et al. 2005) model where exploration diversity, team process and self-perceived outcomes and relationship between those have been investigated by the means of qualitative and quantitative methods. Relying on the surveys and reflective diaries of the course participants the study showed how various diversity aspects of the teams related to their processes and self-assessed outcomes, as well as show how students reason about collaboration in diverse groups. Based on the findings the study puts forward suggestion of how to manage the team work in increasingly diverse classes in the institutions of higher education and which method both students and instructors could employ to rip the benefits of this diversity.