Assessing online group work

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Background and aims

• Importance of online group work:
  – Develop teamwork skills
  – Learning with others

• The challenges:
  – For students
  – For educators

• Context:
  – Distance, part-time learning at the UK Open University
  – Group project in the module: Communication and information technologies

• Aims of the research:
  – Investigate the challenge of implementing an online group project
  – Gain perspectives of students and tutors
  – Design group projects which are engaging to students and fairly assessed
Today’s presentation

• Introduction to the online group project:
  – Website development
  – Work in a wiki
  – How the project work is marked

• Research methods

• Findings
  – From students
  – From tutors

• Framework for assessing online group projects
  – Individual marks versus group marks
  – Product versus process
The module: 
*Communication and Information technologies*

**Key facts:**

- 9-month part-time study
- Integrates a wide range of technical topics with generic skills development
- 60 credits at level 2
- 400-600 students per presentation
- The assignment for one of the five study blocks is a group project
- Students work in groups of 6-8 for the project

**Block 3: Creating & collaborating**

Online collaboration technologies and approaches

Large element of group work in the assessment

- Creating a group website (40%)
  
  *Focus of the research presented here*

- Collaborative working in a wiki (50%)
  
  *Previous research – some results included here*

- Reporting and reflecting on the collaboration (10%)
Creating a group website

WordPress for the website:
- Groups develop a website for a given scenario & client e.g. a holiday company, a walking club
- They use WordPress, forums, wiki, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:
- product (the website); and process (collaboration)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:
- the website and WordPress dashboard
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Marks for product (website)</th>
<th>Marks for process (collaboration)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual marks</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group marks</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaborative working in a wiki

Wikis for peer feedback:
- Each student writes a wiki page about an aspect of online communication and collaboration
- Each student gives/receives feedback to/from two group members; then improves their own page
- They use wiki, forums, web conferencing (optional)

Marks allocated for:
- product (wiki page); and process (giving/receiving feedback)
- group as a whole; and individual contributions

Marked by viewing:
- wiki page and feedback (copied into assignment)
- wiki history
- discussions in the forum
- documented decisions in the wiki

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Marks for product (wiki page)</th>
<th>Marks for process (peer feedback)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual marks</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group marks</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research methods

- Undertaken as two separate projects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website research:</th>
<th>Wiki research:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student data (qualitative):</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student data (qualitative and quantitative)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 students via six online focus groups</td>
<td>74 students via an online survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open ended questions to explore students’ experiences:</td>
<td>Closed questions with open comment boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Did they find it rewarding? What were the frustrations? How did they feel about the assessment?</td>
<td>e.g. did the wiki provide all the features needed? Did group members contribute equally?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group data transcribed and coded.</td>
<td>Quantitative data analysed; qualitative data coded and analysed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergent themes identified.</td>
<td>Tutor data (qualitative):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21 tutors in online discussion forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open ended questions to explore tutors’ experiences and views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coded and analysed.</td>
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</table>

Forms the basis of the following findings. Results previously published – fed into following findings where appropriate.
Research on the website collaboration

Three key elements were considered for the website research:

- **The collaboration**
  - how students interact and work together

- **The task**
  - what students are required to do/produce

- **The assessment**
  - how students’ work is graded
Emergent Themes

**PARTICIPATION**
- Absent
- Active (core)
- Peripheral

**SKILLS/ABILITIES**
- Technical
- Organisational
- Experience

**TASK**
- Authenticity
- Product (quality)
- Brief (instructions)

**RELATIONSHIPS**
- Friendliness
- Dominating
- Personalities
- Getting on
- Helping
- Social presence
- Group dynamics
- Working with strangers

**FAIRNESS**
- Division of work
- Marks

**FEELINGS**
- Motivation
- Frustration
- Reward
- Challenge
- Enjoyment

**ORGANISATION**
- Deadlines
- Decision making
- Division of work
- Timings

**TIMING**
- Asynchronous
- Holiday
- Domestic
- Jobs

**TOOLS**
- Forums
- OULive
- WordPress
- Wiki

**TUTORS**
- Tutor strategies – supporting students
- Tutor strategies – marking
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main findings - <em>The collaboration</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For the majority, the group project was an enjoyable experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The collaboration was the most challenging element of the project, but also the most rewarding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some, but not all groups had leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaboration was a cause of anxiety for some students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Evidence of cooperation rather than collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agreed that the majority of students enjoyed the group work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Agreed that the collaboration, rather than the task, was the biggest challenge for students but also the most rewarding aspect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Felt that in most groups an ‘unofficial’ leader emerged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tutors’ own challenges were mainly related to assessing the collaboration.</td>
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</table>
# Main findings - *The task*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Students</strong></th>
<th><strong>Tutors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most students were proud of their final product and would like to showcase it.</td>
<td>Agreed that the students were proud of what they achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tools (both wiki and website) were fairly intuitive and easy to use.</td>
<td>Agreed that more technically experienced students complained about the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More technically experienced students were frustrated with the task – the limitations of the tools.</td>
<td>Felt that the task was authentic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More technically experienced students felt the task was not ‘authentic’ enough, and wanted to include other content (e.g. twitter feeds).</td>
<td>Said that less technically experienced students learnt new skills, but often let others do the work.</td>
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</table>
# Main findings - *The assessment*

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<tr>
<td>• Even balance of opinions on whether work was divided fairly in groups.</td>
<td>• Felt that work was not divided fairly in groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some students felt they were ‘carrying’ others.</td>
<td>• Agreed that some students ‘carry’ others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Even balance of opinions on whether the group marks were fair.</td>
<td>• Did not like allocating group marks, despite the bias towards individual marks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Felt individual input was recognised, but would have liked to know what marks others in their group were awarded.</td>
<td>• Found marking group work time consuming and difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some students were worried/anxious about group marks.</td>
<td>• Marking strategies involved keeping on top of forum postings, and making notes on group dynamics.</td>
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</table>
Website question
• How important are the technical (vs. group working) skills?
• Opportunity to showcase products.
• Relatively easy to mark.
• Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for product).

• How to challenge ALL students?
• Freedom to undertake more complex technical tasks – more authentic?
• Can be relatively easy to mark.
• Difficult to differentiate between students at both ends of the scale.

• Assigning a group leader - more authentic? How would this affect marking?
• Time consuming for tutors to mark.
• Monitoring group dynamics.
• Tutors unhappy about awarding group marks (for process).

• How to support students who struggle and how to reduce anxiety?
• Time consuming for tutors to mark.
• How to effectively monitor an individual’s input and mark accurately?
Thank you

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