



Using Peer and Self-assessment During Group Tasks

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The Case of First Year Communication and Study Skills Students of the University of Botswana

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- Increasing involvement of learners in group projects in order to cope with the large class sizes in institutions of higher learning;
- Peer and self assessment becoming influential practices in the promotion of learning in higher education;
- Learners involved in assessing themselves and their peers using a range of assessment methods;
- Lecturer provides guidance checks for reliability and arbitrates in the final allocation of marks;
- Learners however concerned about group mark awarded for the products of group projects;
- To address learners, educators compute marks combining self allocated mark, average mark by peers in the same group and mark for the group project.

Group task and assessment

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- The purpose was to engage students actively in learning about the types of writing in academic settings, and have them appreciate the benefits of cooperative learning.
- Ninety (90) students from the faculty of Humanities assigned a group project to be undertaken over three (3) weeks.
- Students did project in groups of four (4) or five (5) members.
- Each group assigned two types of academic writing, to research on, submit a written report to the lecturer and present findings to the whole class.
- Each student issued an *assignment form* to indicate roles each member would play during the project, and on which the final grade for the assignment was recorded.

Group task and assessment cont...

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- Students assessed their own and contributions made by their peers during the project process, following a given criteria and grading scale of 1 to 10 outlined on an *assessment sheet*;
- *Assignment form*, *assessment sheet* and a *group submission of written group presentation notes* submitted to teacher;
- Each group presented orally to whole class while the rest of students made observations and gave oral feedback to their peers;
- The oral presentation and supporting notes graded by the teacher who also awarded a group mark;
- For each students the group mark and the individual's average mark were computed to arrive at a CA mark.

Sample grading

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Possible Project Processes

- 1 Ideas and suggestions/active participation
- 2 Leadership and group organisation
- 3 Data collection/collation/analysis
- 4 Report writing and/or preparing/giving verbal presentation
- 5 Attendance at group meetings

Assessor	Assessee	Role	group	Proj Proc1	Proj Proc 2	Proj Proc 3	Proj Proc 4	Proj Proc 5	AV
Letsholathebe	Letsholathebe, K	AS	B1	10	9	9	9	10	9.4
	Bachinyi, D		B1	7	7	8	8	8	7.6
	Mokokwe, J		B1	7	6	9	9	7	7.6
	Nfila, I		B1	6	7	6	10	10	7.8
	Mothibi, G		B1	10	6	5	6	10	7.4
				8	7	7.4	8.4	9	

Obtaining student feedback on activity

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- Students completed a *questionnaire* to evaluate the process they went through and gave suggestions for improvement;
- Twenty five out of the ninety (90) students returned their evaluation forms;
- Responses analysed for the value the students got from working as a group;
- Responses also analyzed for
 - lessons coming from the process and
 - ideas for what could be done differently, when using the assessment approach in the future.

Key organising areas for findings

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- Peer and self assessment are aspects of participatory learning aimed at deepening students' understanding of their learning material, developing their evaluative and reflective skills and consolidating their group work and task management skills.
- Reasons why students should be involved in the assessment of their own and each other's work include - Puhl (1997) and Muirhead (2002) :
 - to develop a whole range of transferable skills, valuable to students during their course and in subsequent employment, and facilitate lifelong learning;
 - to help students to become more autonomous learners, better able to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their own work;
 - to improve skills of collaboration and negotiation, and also increase confidence.
 - to help students to examine their own work critically, taking an "outsider's" point of view.
- The key findings of the study highlighted three major areas:
 - Attitudes of learners towards peer and self assessment;
 - Perceptions of learners towards grades allocation during peer and self assessment;
 - Skills developed from peer and self assessment.

Attitudes of learners towards peer and self assessment

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- Most students positive about their experience with self and peer assessment processes they engaged in during their group work;
- Students noted that a group mark alone did not give a fair judgement of their individual input;
- A fair allocation of marks was important to them hence feedback such as:
 - *"We will be assessed by our classmates and get what we deserve".*
- The students raised issues of honesty and commitment to observing their peers, confirming that a greater sense of student commitment and fairness should accompany participatory assessment. Biggs (1999: 225) The students commented that:
 - *"I will grade other members fairly according to their contribution",*
 - *"I will be honest when awarding marks, not base[d] on friendship".*
 - *"I will be more attentive and show seriousness towards the activity"*
- Pessimists contended that:
 - *'groups should be awarded whole group marks',*
 - *'lecturers should grade' or 'the assessment must be changed and replaced with a fairer one'.*
 - *'I will choose members for myself who I know and trust'.*

Perceptions of learners towards grades allocation during peer and self assessment.

- About two thirds of the respondents felt that the marks they awarded themselves and their peers were in line with the amount of contribution made in the assignment
 - *"I was honest and fair about myself – gave myself what I deserved"*
 - *"deserved good marks, was committed to group work and contributed everything I knew"*
 - *"considered how much effort they put in the task, mostly they were committed"*
 - *"I looked at each member's strengths and weaknesses".*
- Some respondents indicated that they awarded marks not according to the contributions they or their peers made.
 - *"I was scared to give someone smaller marks considering the fact that the marks contribute towards the CA".*
 - *"Some did more than others - should have evaluated them according to their contribution".*
 - *"because still it will not be fair to other group members, they will think that I have given myself more marks so what I did was just to balance the amounts".*
- Some students doubted that the assessment process was fair because the marks they were awarded by their peers were not equal to the contributions that they made.
 - *"We contributed equally but my marks were less than others".*
 - *"Maybe it was just that I was the only male- feel that they cheated me. I deserved more for the role I played as [group] coordinator".*
 - *"when student have a beef they bring it out when grading. . . .".*

Skills developed from peer and self assessment

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- Students observed that the activity affected the way in which they related with others.
 - *"organise and manage a group"*,
 - *"... have the confidence to address and control others"*,
 - *"...am a good listener now"*.
- A majority of the students have attested to having acquired the skills of collaboration and teamwork hence their comments:
 - *"I found it easy to find information when working together to accomplish a task"*,
 - *"working jointly is better than working alone"*.
 - *"I have learnt to deal with different characteristics of people"*.
- Comments endorse the notion that "by comparing themselves with others and by identifying with peers in familiar and similar situations, students are opening themselves to a wider range of possible skills and behaviours." (Biggs, 1999: 217).
- This contributes towards closing the gap "that two of the most important skills for professional work (which are two of the most under-emphasised in higher education) are team work and the ability to assess one's own work". Boud (1991)

Conclusion

- Triangulation approach towards assessment in learning environments legitimises the use of the self and peer in addition to assessment by the teacher (self-peer-tutor), whereby learning achievement can be enhanced and skills for life-long learning developed;
- Only when they realise the gains of working in groups, do learners appreciate to meaningfully engage in such processes, such that their participation adds value to the completion of their given assignment;
- Hence, the need to apply self and peer assessment in making judgements of students' contributions to groups appears quite compelling given that the teacher would not have much idea of what individuals did during times they worked outside the classroom;
- The problems of “fairness and the ability to make valid judgments”, which are often the basis for rejecting self and peer assessment require redress so that assessment processes could be aligned to the teaching-learning process;

Conclusion cont...

- The positive views reflected by the students in this study indicate that capacity for learner engagement exists at UB and should be exploited while issues of validity, accuracy and fairness should be enhanced for the effective use of self and peer assessment.
- Grade allocation for group cooperation where a single submission of group product is made should retain value for both group and individual awards to accommodate the differences in the qualities of contribution made by individuals towards completion of their group assignment.
- Emotional undercurrents should be recognized and addressed to avoid tensions that may emerge among group members when they are required to assess each other. McLoughlin and Luca (2004) and Boud (1995)
- "We should share the power and responsibility to interpret what learning has taken place with our students who, after all are doing the learning!" Jain, P. K. (1997: 96)