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Paper 102 – Poster

A peer-based method for managing group work

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Abstract

In higher education group working is a suitable method for developing teamwork skills in students, which are prized by employers. But students experience a number of issues whilst working in a group that disrupt their development of teamwork skills, such as dominance of team members and free riding. Best outcomes from group working arise in cases where the students in a group become self-sufficient in their organisation of both the team and the work to be completed. The use of some form of peer assessment can help to develop this self-sufficiency, when used in a formative way that encourages discussion of individual contributions within the group.

This poster presents a pragmatic but tested method for addressing many of the problematic issues associated with group work assessment. The method actively engages students in the process of self and peer assessment whilst relieving the tutor from many of the trivial aspects of group work management, and can be applied to distributed or distance learning groups. There is a process in place to cater for tutors' intervention as a mediator to resolve intermediate problems, and subsequently as an arbitrator, in the event the peer assessment process reaches a deadlock.

The method relies on a number of basic primary assumptions, designed to ensure fairness and equal-footing at the commencement of the project. Thenceforth, the participative peer-evaluation process paves the way for incremental consensus building, thus minimising the risk of both group conflict and gang-culture.

The method has been used for a number of years with significant success. Additional revealing results include impressive low numbers of cases where the tutor had to be invited to act as arbitrator. Further empirical live data are being collected for a more comprehensive and systematic analysis of the viability of the proposed method.