

Combining Peer Assessment with Group Work to Achieve Educational Excellence

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Abstract:

In a climate of trying to do more (teaching) with less (resources) it is tempting to resort to group work assignments. Whilst this may be good for academics (less marking) it is sometimes unpopular with students. The main problem appears to arise when marks are automatically going to be equally shared by all group members which often results in the motivated and stronger students ending up 'carrying' the weaker or less engaged students. Can this situation be turned around to create a win-win situation, whereby students and academics alike benefit from group work? In this presentation a peer assessment process that I have used successfully within student groups over the last eight years will be explained. Students are introduced to the challenges of group work and the role of individuals within groups, including the different ways in which people can contribute to an effective team. At the end of a group work activity, students are asked to assess their own contribution to the group and performance and that of their team mates. Marks are provided to individual students based on a ranking derived from this peer assessment matched against the overall assessment of the group assignment. In this way high and low achieving students alike receive the marks they deserve. Interestingly though, in nearly all cases, group members end up receiving the same mark, indicating that they functioned as an effective team. It seems that simply knowing in advance that they will be subject to peer assessment improves student cooperation and performance in group work tasks. Hence this approach helps to achieve educational excellence by developing effective group work skills (often identified as an important attribute for university graduates) whilst also meeting content based assessment task objectives associated with the assignment task.

(292 words)

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Presenting an idea or experience