

Assessing an Individual's Contribution to Group Work

Dale Parsons
Otago Polytechnic
Dunedin, New Zealand
dale@tekotago.ac.nz

Abstract

Do your students groan when you mention group work? Are your colleagues uneasy about assessing group work? Working on the assumption that there is a need for more awareness of group assessment methods, this poster presents the six most widely used techniques.

Introduction

There are sound educational and vocation reasons for using group work in higher education. When all students in a group are awarded the same mark, many students have experienced the problem of 'passengers' or 'freeloaders' (Bourner *et al.* 2001). Often students feel this mark is not a fair reflection of each group member's contribution to the piece of work (Conway *et al.* 1993).

The problem areas for Lecturers are in assessing whether all students have contributed equally and on how valid and reliable a group mark is.

Methods for Assessing Group work

From my review of the literature I have found six main methods that people use for allocating group marks.

- **Equal Marks:** This is a method that most people have used, each group member receives the same mark.
- **Splitting of Group Tasks:** This is a common technique, each student contracts to do one of the tasks that make up the group activity and each student is marked individually.
- **Pool of Marks:** This method gives the group a group mark multiplied by how many members there are in the group and then lets the group members distribute the marks amongst themselves by a process of negotiation.
- **Base Mark Plus or Minus Contribution Mark:** Here each student receives a Lecturer generated base mark and then a peer generated effort mark, which is added or subtracted to the base mark.
- **Multiplication by Weighting Factor:** This method

devised by Conway *et al.* (1993) multiplies the Lecturer assigned group mark by a weighting factor. This weighting factor is peer generated.

- **Holistic Peer Assessment:** This is a variation on multiplication by a weighting factor. The weighting factor is generated by students awarding a grade that reflects the overall impression of each individual's contribution to the group effort.
- **Separation of Process and Product:** Here a clear distinction between the assessment of the product and the assessment of the process is made. The tutor assesses the product and the peers assess the process and the final mark is a combination of the two.

Recommendations

There is general agreement that there is no one best way of assessing all group work projects, you need to pick a method that best suits the task and the context, sometimes a combination of methods is suitable. (Isaacs, 1999; Bourner *et al.* 2001; Orsmond *et al.*, 1996)

Personally I like the idea of separating the product from the process, the Lecturer assesses the product and the students peer and self assess the process of working in the group. I would then average the results given to each student, this has a moderating and probably a bunching effect on the mark. This process mark would then be added or subtracted from the product mark. The ultimate aim is to acknowledge and reward individual's contributions to the group without introducing competition within the group.

References

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