The use of a wiki-based assignment as an assessment tool
Mark A. Symmons
Monash University, Churchill, 3842, Australia
mark.symmons@muarc.monash.edu.au

Wikis

Use:
- Allow online collaboration
- Direct editing, with potential for reversion to previous state
- Easy to set up, simple to use

General advantages:
- Group tasks for peer-based learning
- Participation any time any where
- Physical meetings unnecessary (group members need not even meet)
- Students start assignment earlier and less likely to request an extension (to not let down other group members)
- Allows distance and on-campus students to collaborate as a single group
- Lecturer can check work in progress & provide feedback
- Unlike other group work there is not the need to apply the same mark for all students within group – individual effort can be rewarded. Thus a poorer student won’t drag whole group down, in fact they present opportunity for better students to assist weaker students and be rewarded for doing so.
- Capitalises on student interest in social networking software & trying something different
- Assignments proofread before submission
- Fewer assignments to mark
- Wiki software tracks all edits & contributions by group members so that each student’s true contribution can be fairly assessed
- Two modes of assessment can be run in parallel

Assignment

A case study in an undergrad abnormal psychology unit consisting of 3 parts:
1. Discuss Case from 1 paradigm (psychoanalytic, biological, humanistic, cognitive, behavioural, social)
2. Discuss methods that approach might use to diagnose & treat Case
3. Diagnose Case across all 5 axes of DSM-IV-TR

Students freely opted for wiki or traditional method for completing assignment

Wiki groups of 3, arranged by students themselves or by lecturer

Wiki student assessment based on their third of assignment and demonstrated collaborative effort – participation in online discussions, feedback to each other, direct editing of other sections, lack of repetition across assignment

Perceived advantage for students is not having to complete all 3 parts of assignment, seemingly equating to less work. In reality amount of work probably equivalent to traditional mode with requirement for collaboration.

Sample

After semester concluded, 57 students (66% of total) anonymously undertook an online questionnaire about their experience of completing the assignment.

35% of respondents were distance students (40% of class were distance students)

Age ranged from 18-60 years (M=27, SD=11)

13 respondents (23%) had used the wiki method, 44 traditional

Results

On average wiki students scored better on the assignment, but it is not possible to “blind” mark it

- On a 7-point scale wiki students rated the amount of interaction they had at 6, while the non-wiki students rated 3
- Wiki students were more likely to use email and Skype or IM to interact

- 16% of the non-wiki students did not interact with their classmates at all
- Little difference between groups in terms of perceived value for interaction for studying, completing work and maximising enjoyment
- Wiki students rated the difficulty of using the technology at moderate to easy