

Main Project: Enhancing Teaching and Learning through Assessment
Sub-project: On-line Collaborative Assessment to Enhance Teaching and Learning

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Introduction/Background

This sub-project is concerned with investigating the impact of on-line collaborative assessment on teaching and learning.

The PolyU has been actively pursuing web-enabling and e-learning initiatives. In his memo dated 1 December 2001, the Vice President (Academic Planning) announced that, with the recent establishment of the On-line Programme Development Unit (OPD), the PolyU is actively developing on-line programmes to meet PolyU's Strategic Objective 1 and Strategic Action E1.3, i.e. 'to ensure that our capabilities, in terms of development of on-line programmes, to achieve our goal that about 8% of all undergraduate and postgraduate subjects will have an interactive "on-line" delivery version by end of FY 2003/4' (document *OPD/SubjectProp.v.1/ 011129*).

The Department of English (ENGL) has expressed an interest (e.g. in the previous and current Annual Business Plans) in putting a substantial proportion of its teaching (especially lectures for more theoretical subjects) on-line. This has yet to materialize and the use of WebCT in place of classroom teaching in ENGL is limited. In the second semester of 2003-2004, the investigators of this sub-project co-teach a subject to first-year students enrolled on two programmes, namely BA (Hons) Language Studies with Business and BA (Hons) English Language Teaching. All of the taught lectures of the subject will be replaced by on-line delivery of the instructional materials. Apart from on-line delivery of lecture materials, there will be weekly one-hour classroom-based seminars.

Compared to attending lectures and interacting with the lecturer, reading and learning from materials on-line and doing assessed tasks on-line require a much higher level of independence in learning. On-line learning also puts a greater demand on students regarding their cognitive, motivational and interpersonal abilities for learning. The assessment strategy will also need to be re-designed in order to better reflect the course aims, objectives and pedagogy in order to more effectively support students in new ways of studying, and to more appropriately assess the knowledge and skills students develop during the course.

The peculiarities and uniqueness of web-based learning should be maximally exploited. The increased interactivity afforded by on-line learning and teaching makes on-line collaborative assessment feasible (MacDonald et al. 2002: 9). MacDonald et al. (2002: 10) review a number of sub-projects which have practised collaborative formative evaluation of learning and teaching while the course is ongoing, including peer review of student's scripts posted electronically (Davis and Berrow 1998); model answers delivered to help students to see alternative approaches to written work (Mason 1995); process writing of assignments or 'iterative assignment development' (McConnell 1999); and students' involving in on-line negotiation of assessment criteria (Kwok and Ma 1999).

On-line collaborative assessment

On-line learning and teaching offers 'the potential for greater and more sustained interactivity' (MacDonald et al. 2002: 13). It makes innovative assessment practices possible. It allows for

interactivity between students and assessment tasks, between students, and between teacher and student or students. It gives students much greater access to the resources of the teacher, and particularly of fellow students, than they would have had in conventional, face-to-face mass lectures.

‘On-line collaborative assessment’ in this sub-project is defined as assessment of both the process and the product of assessment tasks by the teacher, the students, and peers that are carried out using the WebCT as a platform of learning, teaching and communication.

First semester, 2003-04

The Co-Principal Investigator will teach the subject ‘Intercultural Communication’ to more than 80 year 3 students of BA (Hons) Language Studies with Business (BALSb).

Second semester, 2003-04

The investigators will both teach the subject ‘Pragmatics’ to two groups of students:

1. Year 1 BA (Hons) English Language Teaching (BAELT), 30 students
2. Year 1 BA (Hons) Language Studies with Business (BALSb), 66 students

The subjects of ‘Intercultural Communication’ and ‘Pragmatics’ are mainly assessed by means of continuous assessment. Assignments do not only play a summative role, but also provide formative feedback to students to support their learning. In this sub-project, collaborative assessment performed on-line will consist of building on-line collaborative skills and producing a group project. At the beginning of the course, all students will experience and acquire on-line collaborative skills through involvement in on-line discussions and reflection on their experiences. The assessed group project will involve groups of students working collaboratively on-line to produce a joint project. Both the process and the product of collaboration will be assessed. The collaborative project will allow the students to reflect on their learning so that they can be encouraged to learn and build on their experiences.

The value of group work as a means to developing skills such as ‘communication, presentation, problem-solving, leadership, delegation and organization’ (Butcher et al. 1995: 165) is well established. The problem in an assessed course in which group work takes place is that the teacher needs to assign individual grades to the students rather than the same grade for every member of the group. In order to fairly measure individual students’ performance in the group work, the contribution of the individual to the group project will be established. One possible way to deal with this potential dilemma is to introduce an element of peer assessment to determine the contribution of individuals to a group project (see, Conway et al. 1993; Cheng and Warren 1999).

Peer assessment in on-line collaborative assessment in this sub-project refers to a system of assessment whereby students, through on-line discussion and negotiation, assess the peers’ contribution to both the process/conduct of the group work and the product/outcome of the group work. Students will also perform self-assessment of their own contribution to the collaborative project and then invite their peers to review and comment on the self-assessments. Teacher assessment of student’s effort in group projects through on-line feedback and discussion of the feedback will provide a different and important source of information.

On-line collaborative assessment proposed in this sub-project therefore aims to achieve these goals:

- encourage greater collaboration and interactivity;
- develop particular learning skills which can be reinforced through on-line collaborative assessment;

- assess process and product more fairly and consistently by providing opportunities for the teacher and students to negotiate ideas and comments;
- foster skills of peer-assessment and self-assessment;
- encourage active and flexible learning;
- facilitate a deep learning approach; and
- enhance relationships within group.

These specific goals relating to on-line collaborative assessment will be incorporated into the subject syllabus of 'Pragmatics'.

Methodology

Data will be collected from questionnaires, in-depth interviews and textual analysis of students' discussion postings. A pre- and a post-questionnaire ('Learning Pragmatics On-line') will be given to all students to find out their learning preferences. Focus group Interviews will be conducted to collect students' feedback regarding their experiences, approaches, abilities and attitudes regarding on-line collaborative assessment. Students will be asked to submit postings that they have made to assess themselves and their peers, and to give and respond to comments relating to the collaborative group work.

Aims and Objectives

This sub-project aims to establish students' approaches to, and students' views on, on-line collaborative assessment while they are following a course which is partially delivered on-line.

Specific objectives of the sub-project are:

1. To monitor and evaluate students' approaches to on-line collaborative assessment.
2. To investigate students' attitudes towards on-line collaborative assessment.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of on-line collaborative assessment in addressing subject objectives from both teacher and student perspectives.

Stages of Activities

1. Stage One: Review of existing assessment practices;
2. Stage Two: Develop action plans to devise assessment criteria consistent with the SOLO taxonomy;
3. Stage Three: Implementation;
4. Stage Four: Evaluation.

Schedule of Activities

Activities	2003		2004											
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1. Recruitment and training of Project Assistant														
2. Pre-questionnaire														
3. Students work on on-line collaborative assessment activities														
4. Post-questionnaire and focus group discussions														
5. Data analysis and writing up report														
6. Dissemination of findings on "Assessment project web-site" and through journal articles														

References

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