



Online Peer and Self Assessment in the Teaching of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism and Events

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Introduction

Group work remains a fundamental part of teaching in hospitality, leisure, sport, tourism and events and it continues to present opportunities and challenges for students and teaching staff (Hassanien, 2006). Group work helps to develop key transferable employability skills but it is often accompanied by tensions arising from interpersonal conflicts, disproportionate levels of participation and perceived unfairness of marks (Sivan et al., 1995; Knowd and Daruwalla, 2003). One way to manage these issues and learn from the processes of group work is through self and peer assessment (SPA) (Johnston and Miles, 2004; Zhang et al., 2008). SPA is a recognised pedagogic strategy that helps to identify individual contributions to group work and helps students to gain a better understanding of both the processes and outcomes of group work (Williams, 1992; Hughes and Large, 1993; Somervell, 1993).

Numerous studies have offered practical advice on best practice in managing group work and peer and self-assessment (cf., Conway et al., 1993; Goldfinch, 1994; Ireland et al., 2003). This project builds on and adds to this body of knowledge by contributing to the successful development of a software tool that aids in the administration of SPA. Moreover, it provides guidance on the effective use of the tool within learning, teaching and assessment.

The CASPAR project

A key challenge in managing the SPA process is the allocation and administration of marks and feedback, which lecturers use in their assessment and students can use in the development of transferable employability skills. Computer Assisted Self and Peer Assessment Ratings (CASPAR) is an internet based software tool developed to manage the administration and assessment of group work more efficiently. CASPAR allows lecturers to set up group projects and students to participate in online SPA throughout the life of the project. It also allows students to provide qualitative feedback and quantitative marks, and it has a number of features that help to facilitate the group work process e.g. a project journal and live messaging service. Lecturers can monitor progress, moderate marks and collect feedback, which can be used within formative and summative assessment.

CASPAR V1 was developed as a result of the HEFCE funded Group Work Assessment in Media Production (GWAMP) project (2000-4), which identified the need for more effective methods of managing the SPA process. CASPAR V1's development was funded by the Centre for Excellence in Media Practice, Bournemouth University (CEMP) as a separate follow-on project to GWAMP. CASPAR V1 used ".ASP", a Microsoft based software technology. Following a small-scale pilot test of CASPAR V1 (2005-6), a second version was developed using "PHP MySQL", a free, open-source software technology. CASPAR V2 required

live testing with end users to identify and fix technical and functionality issues. This testing phase was accompanied by an evaluation of the online SPA process to establish good practice for its use in learning and teaching.

Project aim and objectives

The project aimed to assist in the testing, evaluation and finalisation of CASPAR V2 prior to global distribution and the development of good practice for users

Its objectives were to:

1. Evaluate the experiences of students using CASPAR in group work and assessment.
2. Evaluate the experiences of staff using CASPAR in their teaching and in the management of group work.
3. Provide user feedback to support testing, validation and finalisation of CASPAR V2.
4. Provide guidance on the effective use of CASPAR in group work and self and peer assessment.

Methodology

The evaluation part of the study took place in the School of Services Management, Bournemouth University. Lecturers and students from six subject areas (Hospitality, Leisure, Sport, Tourism, Retail and Events) participated in the study. CASPAR was used on eight units (four second year undergraduate, three final year undergraduate and one masters), which had in total 288 enrolled students. The use of CASPAR was determined by the assessment schedule and the use of peer assessment and group work in the Spring and Summer term of the 2007-8 academic year.

User feedback on the use and functionality of the system was gathered throughout the project and relevant information was passed to the developer who made necessary changes and updates to the system. The evaluation used two methods of data collection: questionnaires, distributed on paper and electronically via the Bristol Online Survey system, and semi-structured interviews. Students were given a questionnaire that focused on four areas:

- 1) personal information, including age, sex, nationality, course, level and unit on which CASPAR was used;
- 2) the use and functionality of the system;
- 3) the norms of assessment, including the establishment of the marking criteria;
- 4) students' appraisal of the SPA/feedback process.

From the total target population (n=288) 146 usable responses were gathered, which represents a 50.69% response rate.

Feedback from lecturers piloting CASPAR on their units was gained through semi-structured interviews. Formal and informal discussions throughout the project considered the use and functionality of the system, as well as the context and processes of SPA, including the assessment aims, the establishment of the marking criteria and an appraisal of online SPA in teaching and assessment.

Findings and Discussion

The system

The testing of the CASPAR system in the eight units helped to identify a number of areas that needed further revision. The majority of these were technical issues, for example, for a short period in one unit the feedback was not anonymised by the system, the system was inaccessible at times, the graphs showing performance over time were not functional and the interface page for entering marks and comments occasionally slipped out of line. These were corrected through this phase of the project and CASPAR V2 is now available for general use (see project outputs).

Use and functionality

70.5% of student respondents claimed they found it easy or very easy to access CASPAR, and 66.4% claimed they found it easy or very easy to use the system. Only 9.6% (14) found it difficult to access CASPAR and 12.3% (18) found it difficult to use it. In the majority of those cases, the difficulties encountered were technical rather than functional. In other words, occasionally the system encountered technical difficulties and did not operate properly; but when it was operating the functions were easy to use. These technical problems have been resolved. No respondents had extreme difficulties either accessing or using the system. However, several students found to their detriment that once submitted they could not edit comments or marks.

Lecturers similarly noted that problems were largely technical rather than functional. However, there were three challenges faced by users. Firstly, lecturers required administrative support in gathering student information, which has to be uploaded to the system's database using a spreadsheet document. To do this, staff have to be assigned an admin status and have to enter the data in a ".csv" file format. Instructions for users are available via the CEMP website (see project outputs). Secondly, once a project is started it is not possible to move students to different groups or change marking criteria or assessment dates. Finally, lecturers could not discard a particular assessment. This became a problem with the initial SPA when several students submitted incorrect marks and/or inappropriate or incomplete comments.

Assessment procedures

With the exception of one unit, students did not participate in the setting up of the marking criteria. However, 39.7% said that in future they would like to participate actively in setting the marking criteria. 44.9% remained neutral,

while only 13.9% of respondents said they would not like to be involved. The majority of respondents (62.9%) felt the marking criteria were explained adequately and most respondents (69.4%) agreed with the marking criteria. 8.3% of respondents disagreed with the marking criteria and 16.1% felt the criteria were not explained in enough detail prior to assessment.

This highlights the potential for using the process of setting up CASPAR, and peer assessment in general, within the development of key transferable employability skills. In the hospitality management Production and Service Operations Management Unit, CASPAR had been piloted over two years rather than one. The unit has a practical and a theoretical element. Students studying this unit have to design operational plans for a commercial training restaurant, which includes menu planning, production planning, marketing, food production, service and data analysis, which is used to drive further improvement. In both years, students were asked to design their own assessment criteria for the development of the operational plan. The involvement of students in the design of the assessment has three purposes: firstly, this consultation exercise is conducted during the teaching of empowerment and thus illustrates the practicalities of different empowerment strategies. Secondly, it gives students the opportunity to engage in the entire assessment process. They can consequently develop a more nuanced understanding of the exact criteria used to assess their performance.

Thirdly, it can help students to think critically about what are assessable activities or traits and how those measures of assessment can be articulated and operationalised. Initial suggestions from students often included very general categories of assessment, for example, "attitude", "performance", "contribution." Through discussions in lectures and seminars these were refined and in some cases abandoned and replaced by more specific criteria. These included:

1. Contribution to group discussions (i.e. the amount, not the quality).
2. Reliability in carrying out allocated roles/tasks.
3. Quality of written work/work produced.
4. Acceptance of advice and criticism, including follow-up actions.
5. Punctuality.
6. Reliability in attendance.
7. Organisation and preparation for meetings (this includes knowledge of relevant operation management principles).

Involving students in the SPA process in this way can encourage the development of meta-cognition (i.e. learning how to learn). Moreover, it also responds to current calls for students to develop a broad set of employability skills (Yorke, 2004; People 1st, 2005) and for embedding employability in the curriculum (Yorke and Knight, 2006).

Peer and self-assessment

The peer assessment in the different units was conducted anonymously and 86% of respondents felt that peer feedback and marking should be

anonymous. Just over half (n=77, 53.9.1%) claimed they did not hold back from writing/marking truthfully in assessing their peers because they were worried about receiving negative marks or feedback. Roughly the same number of people (n=73, 51.1%) claimed they did not hold back from truthful peer assessment because of concerns that these would upset their colleagues. 60.3% agreed with the feedback they received from their colleagues, although only 45.3% (n=63) acted on the feedback.

Over half of those surveyed (65.5%) agreed with the statement that they 'found the process of writing qualitative feedback helpful in learning what makes good group work.' Only 6.3% disagreed and 5.6% disagreed strongly with this statement, while 21.8% claimed they neither agreed nor disagreed.

Student responses re-emphasise the usefulness of engaging in SPA within a broader process of reflective learning and development. As Moon (1999, 2004a) has argued, reflection provides important opportunities for growth and specifically the development of key employability skills (Moon, 2004b). Emphasising to students the role of SPA in the development of these skills may also help those unsure or unaware of their learning to appreciate the usefulness of such exercises. Furthermore, although many students claimed they were truthful in their assessment, it is apparent that peer assessment may still be perceived by many to be divisive. Addressing these concerns during briefing sessions with students can re-emphasise the need to be mature and sensitive in providing collegiate feedback. Moreover, it is useful to stress that feedback should be seen as an opportunity (for future self development) rather than a threat (to current status).

The need to use CASPAR within a broader process of reflective learning and skills development was highlighted by students' responses to the question of whether it had improved their ability to work in a group. 27.1% (n=38) felt that using CASPAR improved their ability, but for a further 37.9% (n=53) it was not clear whether it helped or not. 26.4% (n=37) disagreed with the notion that it helped, while 8.6% (n=5) disagreed strongly. The question is whether students actually did not benefit from using CASPAR, or peer assessment, or whether they were unaware of their development. If students are simply unaware then making the potential learning outcomes for this exercise more overt is a key challenge for lecturers. If it does not help them to develop employability skills, then lecturers have to question whether it is simply used as a Foucauldian (1991) form of surveillance and a tool with which students can assert power over colleagues. Alternatively, CASPAR may simply be used as a pedagogic tool that provides further insights into the contribution of particular students to group work.

Whether it is used as a pedagogic tool for fairer allocation of marks, a vehicle for reflective learning or a form of surveillance, the majority of respondents (69.4%) felt that peer assessment should take place at multiple points throughout the group project, with 30.6% claiming that peer assessment should take place at the end. Providing students with several assessment points helps to generate formative feedback throughout the life

of a group work project. Moreover, students also have opportunities to address emerging issues as well as improve their results.

Conclusion

The application and effectiveness of CASPAR, like that of any other online tool, is determined by how it is used within learning, teaching and assessment strategies. It is interesting to note that the students studying on the hospitality operations management unit, and who consequently used CASPAR as part of a broader reflective learning approach, had a greater tendency to agree that the marking criteria were clearly explained and they tended to feel more positive about the criteria used in their assessment. More of these students agreed with the statement that writing qualitative feedback helped them to develop group working skills and more of them claimed their ability to work in a group had improved through using CASPAR. There are numerous factors that may have influenced these results, which require further investigation. Nevertheless, if they are valid, they highlight the value of using CASPAR and SPA within a multifaceted pedagogic strategy.

CASPAR can provide insights into individual performance and group dynamics. It can also shed light on individuals' perceptions of their own capabilities, as well as the perceptions of their peers. For students CASPAR can provide a fairer and more transparent method for allocating marks for different group members. However, CASPAR can also be used within a more ambitious development process. As well as giving students a sense of empowerment, it can also be used to demonstrate the opportunities and challenges offered by different empowerment strategies. A critical awareness of this is undoubtedly an important quality for graduates. Moreover, both the processes and the outcomes of SPA (i.e. marks and qualitative feedback) can be used within a broader strategy of reflective learning through which students can develop key employability skills.

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