

Use of Moodle Discussion Forums in the Enhancement of Small Group Activities

**Re-Engineering assessment Practices (REAP) funded project
(<http://www.reap.ac.uk/assessment/pilotsGUBio.html>)**

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- L1 Biology 650-700 students (Modules 1X and 1Y)
- Lifestyle Project 20% Module 1Y (84 groups; 8-10 students per group; embedded in L1 curriculum)

Group Activities:

compare the lifestyles of humans in different countries and to investigate and evaluate the lifestyles of species other than humans

Generic Skills:

encourage students to develop team-working skills, acquire oral and visual presentational skills and to undertake independent research on topics of interest

Group tasks (Debate and poster) (12%)

Individual problem (8%)


Peer marking process to redistribute marks awarded by staff


Support the process:

- capture study time and effort outwith the timetabled course programme
- provide consistent structured information by releasing tasks progressively along a timeline and setting deadlines for specific deliverables
- introduce more effective tutor interaction and motivational feedback
- enable staff to identify dysfunctional groups at an early stage

Empower the students:

- enable students to participate in the group discussions regardless of their circumstances
- provide a permanent record of the group interactions for both students and staff
- enrich the students' learning experience (more active involvement in their own learning and improve the opportunities for discussion, reflection, self assessment and support)





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Turn editing on

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Evaluation of pilot study (February-May 2007):

- **examining Moodle usage logs**
- **relating group and individual marks to Moodle usage**
- **completion of a “Lifestyle Project” questionnaire and “Moodle” questionnaire by the students**
- **Focus Group run by an evaluation team from the Department of Psychology, University of Glasgow**

Results

(i) Moodle Usage Logs

Over the 5 weeks of the project:

- **Moodle took a total of 60728 'hits' (53406 from students and 7322 from staff).**
- **The average number of Moodle hits was 80.1 per student.**
- **There were a total of 3219 messages posted on Moodle.**

(ii) relating group and individual marks to Moodle usage

- there were weak correlations between:
 - (a) the group poster marks and both the student Moodle traffic and the number of messages posted on Moodle
 - (b) Moodle use by individual students and the peer mark they received from other group members
 - there was no correlation between measures of Moodle activity and the group debate marks
- No significant differences in attainment 2006 cf 2007 (class poster and debate marks and overall Module grade)**

**(iii) completion of a “Lifestyle Project”
questionnaire and “Moodle” questionnaire by the
students**

Lifestyle Project Questionnaire:

Many responses were very similar in 2006 and 2007

In 2007:

- 1. an increase of 7% (from 11% to 18%) in the numbers of students citing fellow students as a source of information.**
- 2. an increase of 8% (from 81% to 89%) in the numbers of students who said that they had used the peer marking criteria (and found them useful).**

Moodle Questionnaire:

- **87% of students said that they used Moodle to communicate with their group and 70% of students stated that they used the facility “often”**
- **80% of students felt that the Moodle forum helped them to conduct their project more effectively**
- **96% of students were aware of the deadlines set for specific tasks, and of these 90% found them useful**
- **64% of students were aware that Moodle could be viewed by a member of staff acting as a moderator, and of these 80% stated that this made no difference to way that they used the secure site**
- **63% of students reported that their group met face-to-face more than 3 times in the course of the project, and only 5% met only once**

(iv) Focus Group Responses

Record of individual effort

'I mean at least they can see without getting, I mean they can see properly if you've faked that you've done a whole load of work but if it's going on Moodle, it's pretty hard to be like, you can see who the real workers are, who's really putting in all the effort and who's just not and it makes people work'

Usefulness of discussion forum

'It's nice to know that everyone had the same data as well, that you would post something and that was for your group and that was a good way to collate everything'.

Focus Group Responses cont'd

Social aspect

(i) 'Yeah, it helps to feel connected sometimes in not so good ways but everybody connected one way or another so that was definitely a good thing. That was one of the best things about it I think. Like before that we would just walk past people and that and you knew that you went to the same lab but you didn't really know them at all but it really made you connect and bond with everyone'.

(ii) 'Yeah that really encouraged me to go to lab, definitely because you could just go and see people'.

Focus Group Responses cont'd

'I think that one of the benefits is that younger people, particularly I would say the boys, are a bit reticent and it made people get to know each other and talk to each other but the shame of it was, I think it would have been better if we had done it earlier on in the year'.

Conclusion

“Overall, the students appeared to have enjoyed a positive learning experience enhanced by the strong social cohesion enabled by the redesign.” (Focus Group Report)