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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT: SHARING WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES OF THE CHALLENGES OF INNOVATION AND NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT.

Abstract:

Increasingly universities are exploring ways in which the workplace can be more effectively integrated into the university experience. 'Authentic' assessment and workplace based assessment enable closer links between assessment in university programs and the type of activities that would be performed in the workplace. Workplace based assessment addresses both the relevance concerns of students and recognises that they have a more complex identity than just that of a student. It allows students to draw on existing experience and capabilities but have their worldview challenged and broadened through engagement with a range of theoretical perspectives. Further, locating assessment in authentic settings recognises the social practice of learning and effectively provides both an opportunity and a structure for students to situate their new learning in their local workplace.

In this paper we report on the assessment design of a series of workplace based assessment tasks for an innovation and new product development subject in a postgraduate marketing program offered by a regional Australian university. The transforming effect of information and communication technologies has presented a myriad of new possibilities for assessment including online assessment with immediate feedback, asynchronous discussion based activities and use of social networking tools such as blogs and wikis to give students a greater control over assessment tasks. However, as yet the opportunities for "authentic" collaborative learning facilitated by sharing of findings of workplace related assessment remain under examined.

Our focus here is to demonstrate how the careful blending of a series of synchronous and asynchronous assessment activities can create rich and complex possibilities for individual and collaborative learning. This approach reflects our view that assessment needs to engage students, shape their learning and provide experiences to extend and deepen their understanding. It should also contribute to their capacity to learn both currently and into the future. In evaluating one aspect of student work - comparing individual reflections completed before and after the sharing of experiences - there were significant shifts in their learning and perspectives on innovation and new product development.

Keywords:

collaborative learning, online learning, assessment, marketing education, higher education