

Using Peer Assessment with International Distance Learners

Talking About... Learning and Teaching: Technology for Instruction Case Study 002

University of Birmingham

Programme of Study:
International MScs in DL

Modules: Critical Approaches to Development (CAD); and Making Policy (MP)

Discipline: International Development

Start Date: September 2009

Students: between 25 and 35 students for each module

Type: Distance

Technology: WebCT

Approach: eLearning,

Duration of Activity: Two weeks

Indicative Moderation / Facilitation Hours: Tutor to reflect with students at the end of the exercise

Assessment Link: No summative assessment for this module.

Rationale

Peer assessment is used as part of the continuous process of developing students' critical writing skills. It is aimed at introducing them to the culture of postgraduate writing in the UK – bearing in mind that these are international students who may have previously studied in different education systems.

Practice

The exercise takes two weeks. In week one, the students are given an article to read and then asked to write a 500 word report (addressing certain questions). They are given a marking partner 'ladder'. So, they not put into pairs: A is marked by B who is marked by C, etc.

They are given a set of marking criteria, and in week two are asked to pass their completed piece onto the marker, who marks it and produces feedback. The tutors then comment further.

E-Learning Advantage

Using peer assessment not only gives the student a chance to write without the result affecting their marks but also gives them an insight into what tutors are looking for when they are marking assignments.

Key Points for Effective Practice and Barriers

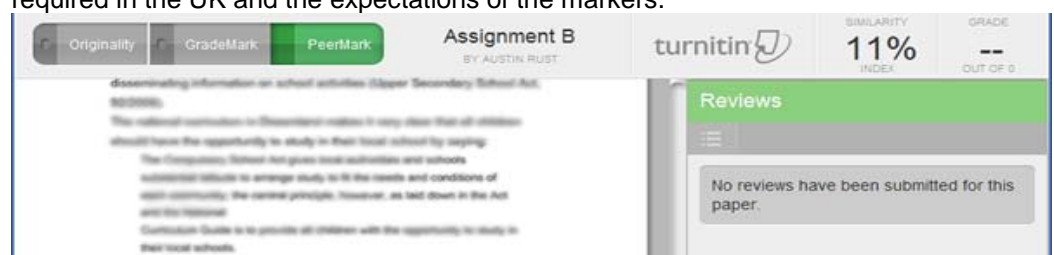
Turnitin offers a Peer Assessment tool which, in theory, allows students to deposit their assignments into an 'inbox' in the database. Markers then go into the 'inbox' and collect the assignment for marking. Once the marking has taken place they can deposit the mark and feedback back into the 'inbox' for the author to collect. As this is random, and the system allows students to deposit only one and collect only one assignment, it is not crucial if not all the students participate. It also means that, unless students put their names or ID numbers on their submission, the marking can be anonymous (a possible incentive for nervous or weaker students to participate).

One of the main problems with the ladder system used here at the moment is that it is a manually produced list. So, if a student does not participate, it can throw the whole ladder askew.

Unfortunately, one of the quirks of the current Turnitin system we are using is the unreliability of the peer assessment tool. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not. It is not advisable to use a system which has such unpredictability as it can be even more frustrating for the students.

Conclusion

Peer assessment is a good way to educate students in the style of critical writing required in the UK and the expectations of the markers.



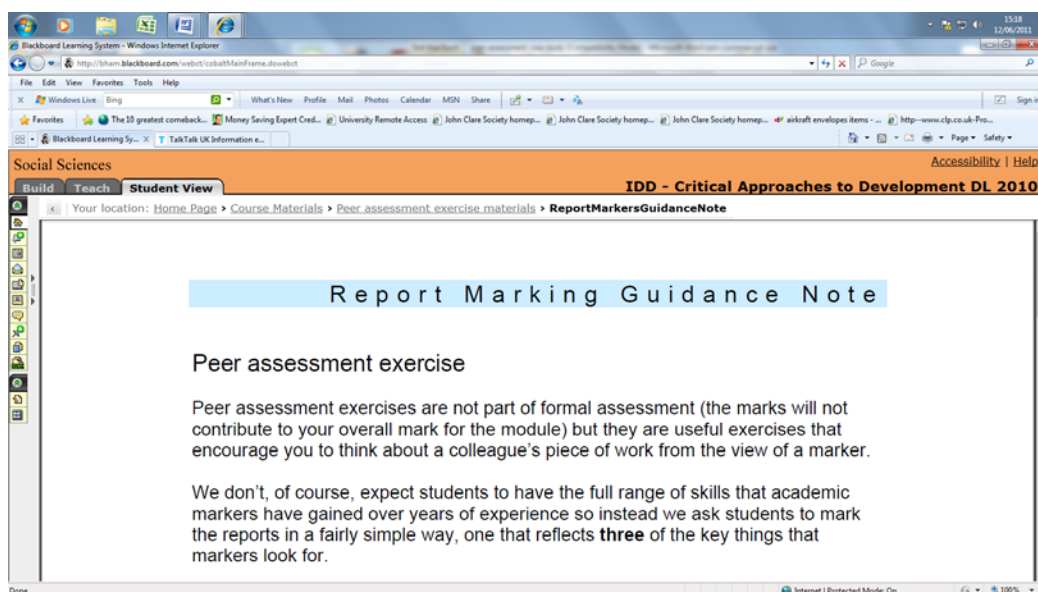
The screenshot displays the Turnitin PeerMark interface for 'Assignment B' by Austin Rust. It features tabs for 'Originality', 'GradeMark', and 'PeerMark'. The 'PeerMark' tab is active, showing a document preview with text about school activities. On the right, a 'turnitin' logo is visible along with a 'SIMILARITY INDEX' of 11% and a 'GRADE' of -- OUT OF 0. A 'Reviews' panel on the right indicates 'No reviews have been submitted for this paper.'

Showcase: Peer Assessment Exercise

This exercise takes place in weeks 4 and 5 of the six week module.

In week 4, the students are asked to read a World Development journal article (Easterly, W. (2008) **How the Millennium Development Goals are Unfair to Africa**). They then write a 500 word report critically reviewing Easterly's article, including a summary of the argument. They are given guidance in their module handbook on how to write a critical review.

In week 5, each student sends their report to their marking partner (as they appear on the marking ladder – with A marked by B and B marked by C etc.), using the Mail tool in WebCT.



Following the marking guidance note they are provided with, the marker then marks the report and sends the mark and feedback to their partner, copying in the tutors so that they can give further detailed comment on both the report and the marking.

In addition to the individual feedback which the tutors send to the students, they also post a '10 top tips in writing an essay' to the discussion boards.

So far, this has worked well. The majority of students engage with the exercise, and really appreciate the opportunity to have a practice run at writing critically without it counting towards their final mark.

Programme of Study:
Distance

Module: Critical
Approaches to
Development (DL)

Discipline: International
Development

Start Date for use of peer
assessment: 2009

Students: around 30 – 35
per module

Type: Distance

Technology: WebCT

Learning environment:
Mail tool on WebCT

Design Team: Dr Tom
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