Peer assessment is a form of review and assessment of submitted work conducted in a peer-to-peer learning environment such as at UoPeople. It involves the act of assigning peers (or students) in groups (usually groups of 4 where each student’s work is assessed by the remaining 3 students in the group) to assess each other’s work and provide feedback to one another about their work in the form of a grade (or rating) and commentary (or feedback).

Peer assessment is used at UoPeople as it is an online learning platform, perfectly suited for a peer-to-peer learning environment. UoPeople uses peer-to-peer learning for the multitude of benefits it provides in this environment, discussed below;

There is a multitude of benefits the peer-to-peer learning system provides in an online learning environment. It encourages cooperation and participation among students, it promotes self-reflection and aids in further understanding and absorbing the study material, and allows students to learn from one another and help each other, cumulating in an overall improvement in each student’s understanding of the topic at hand.

Providing feedback is a cornerstone of the peer-assessment method. There are many positive aspects to this, as well as many challenges. The challenges are two fold; there are challenges in giving feedback, and in receiving feedback. In both, language barriers can appear. Not every learner’s first language is English, and this can provide a multitude of challenges in feedback. A lack of understanding, poor interpretation, spelling and grammar errors, points not being carried across concisely, etc. It can pose communication challenges between students while attempting to peer asses one another’s work.

Giving feedback can be stressful as no student wants to be seen as bad, or be called a bully, for attempting to correct another student’s mistakes with the intention of helping them improve their work and grow and learn. How you phrase commentary and feedback seems very important to avoid this. On the flip side, it takes a very strong personality to provide constructive criticism and to point out another student's mistakes with the focus being on improvement. Many students will simply find something nice to say and leave it at that, not really contributing to the student whose work is being assessed growing and learning.

Receiving feedback can be just as stressful. It is not easy to receive constructive criticism. It can be very demotivating when your mistakes are pointed out, and again, how feedback is worded is very important here. If the wording of the feedback makes you feel stupid or incapable, it can have a long term negative impact on your study performance overall. On the flip side, it can also be frustrating when you want constructive criticism to grow and learn, but only receive positive feedback in the form of one line responses from students who are too afraid to call you out on your mistakes you cannot see yourself.

Written assignments in my opinion should be peer assessed using the rubric provided. The rubric contains guidelines for how grading should be done, and the commentary should explain in detail why you gave a specific grade chosen according to the rubric.

Discussion posts are no different, these too should be assessed as if they were written assignments, also following the rubric, providing a grade and adding commentary explaining why you chose that grade in detail. The commentary should include anything you have learnt or have to share for others to learn, a comparison between your work and the work you are assessing, and any reasons why you awarded the work being assessed a lower grade, like spelling mistakes or missing a discussion point given.

Peer assessment has its ups and downs, but it can be a very useful tool in an online learning environment.

Word Count (627)