

Using wikis for small-group assignments with large student numbers

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Background/overview

- Rapid growth in numbers enrolling on MSc in International Management
- 2009/10 cohort 465 individuals from 40 countries
- Change from teaching through weekly three hour lectures and 100% assessment via exam (classic behaviourist model) to lectures and case-study workshops with 30% of assessed marks for group work analysis (constructivist/collaborative model)
- Wikis seen as an interesting tool for social constructivist learning environments (Bruns and Humphreys, 2005)

Rationale

- Even in large cohorts (though most studies consider 100-200 large) students are more fully engaged in small group activities (Mulryan, 1995)
- Wikis are being used increasingly in workplaces as knowledge jobs proliferate (Andersen, 2004)
- Asynchronous nature of wiki interactions allows more time for reflection and practicing language skills (Trentin, 2008)
- Fits with role of Teaching Fellow as facilitator, manager and orchestrator (Schneider et al., 2003)

Design of the assignment

- Conceived primarily as a “collaborative writing” wiki with “knowledge repository” as secondary function (Tonkin, 2005)
- Students allocated to 59 diverse groups of 7 or 8 to give a facsimile (Almond, 2009) of working internationally on a strategy project
- 30% of summative assessment overall (with 75% for the product of the group work – a 1,500 word executive summary – and 25% for the group activity on the wiki) to ensure engagement (Cole, 2009)

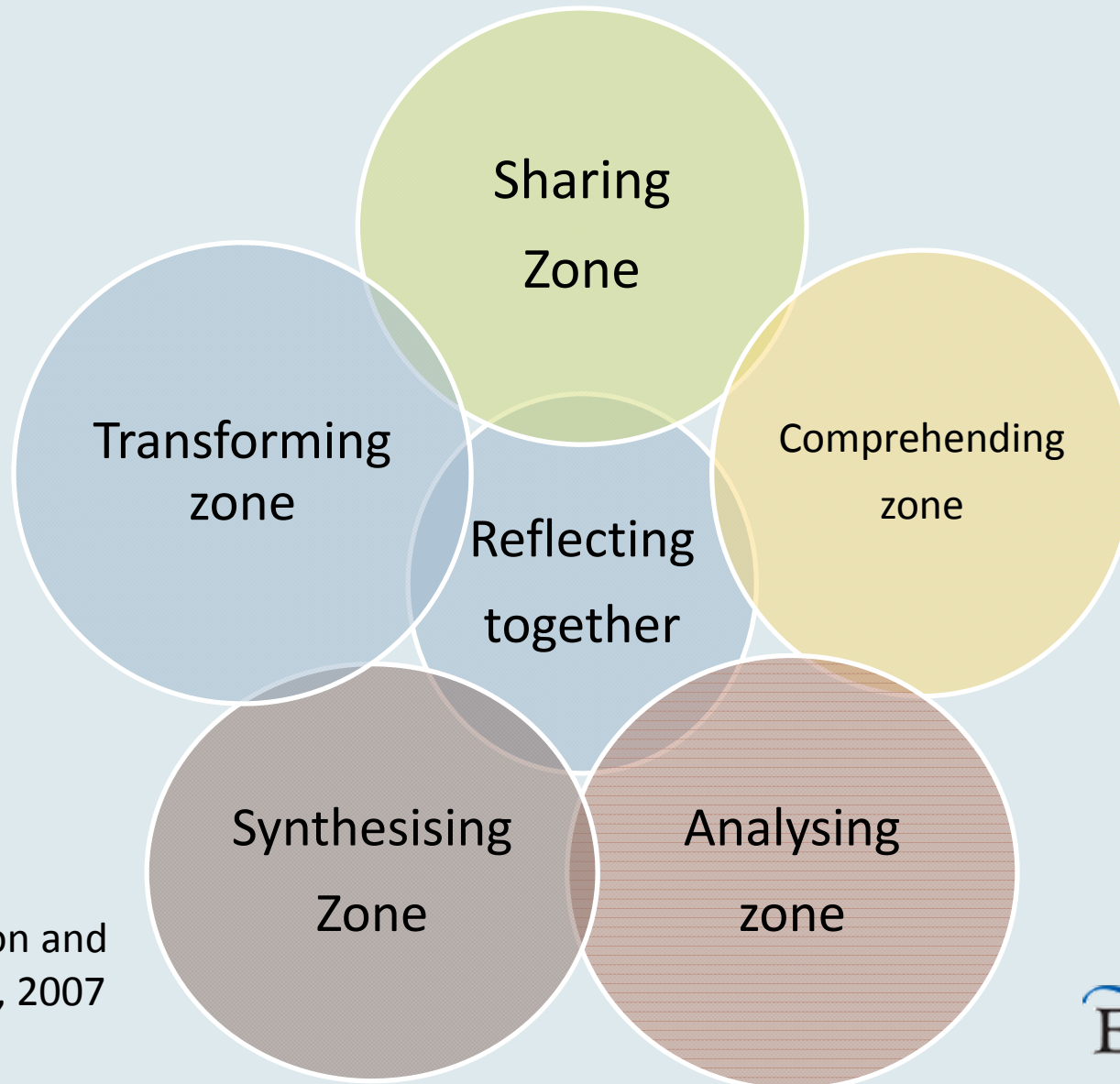
Technology and practical issues

- Confluence used for wiki
- Support from technical team in Educational Enhancement (JISC funded)
- Two Q&A sections on module forum in WebCT to ensure that tutor and technical team weren't swamped with individual emails
- Basic 9 page structure included to avoid students finding it difficult to start (Wheeler et al., 2008)

Methodology/Processes

- Action research (Kemmis, 1996), pragmatic approach using mixed methods (Cresswell, 2002)
- Initial survey on wiki use revealed similar results to Mirk et al. (2010) as very few had collaborated using wikis
- Guide on how to use the wiki on WebCT as Ramanau and Geng (2009) recommend and regular dialogue through lectures and tutorials, similar to Cole's approach (2009)
- Cyber-ethnography (Ward, 1999) approach used in observing interactions and this fed into tutor's weekly lectures and periodic emails
- Reflective statements on wiki will be analysed in depth
- Focus groups have proved problematic

Analysis of learning processes on-line



Source: Seddon and Postlethwaite, 2007

Assessment options

- Peer evaluation – rejected on the basis that it can inhibit co-operation in group work (Falchikov, 1995) and that group members will often not “shop” those who don’t contribute (Race, 2001)
- Grid and formulae technique to calculate participation and contribution such as Trentin (2008) used – rejected on the basis that the numbers were too large and automation was not possible
- Each individual awarded the same mark overall unless there is a specific objection and/or they don’t meet the 5 criteria suggested by Gammie and Matson (2007)

Assignment results

- All 59 groups submitted assignments on time and the majority were in the required format.
- Turnitin displayed very low level of duplication so no evidence of major plagiarism taking place
- Analysis, application and evaluation evident in most papers.
- Technology and wiki seems to have helped most students with structuring their work
- Marking the wiki element is proving very time-consuming for the tutor

Student feedback

- 452 reflective statements posted and currently being analysed in depth.
- Key issues identified so far support findings in literature:
 - Technical issues a major problem to begin with
 - Helps non-native English speakers to overcome communication barriers they may find in face-to-face meetings
 - For campus based courses many students still prefer face-to-face meetings for group work
 - The wiki created competition between members of the team – but did not necessarily produce better work

“The wiki has been an effective tool in the most part to share ideas (especially in sharing links with each other) and has been positive in the sense that it has encouraged everyone to contribute his or her opinions”

“The wiki simply confused people”

“As a group with a high proportion of members who came from non-English speaking countries, wiki can overcome some communication barriers. Even when you can not express yourself very well in the meeting, you also got an extra opportunity to say your opinion through wiki”

Challenges and redesign

- Focus on technical issues rather than module content
- Lack of time to monitor wikis effectively
- Reconsider how individual contributions to the team can be assessed as well as the team work and the final product
- Earlier and more proactive guidance in using all the wikis features effectively
- Add in some key features to the wiki in response to reflective statements (e.g. live chat)
- Further research into use of wikis in the workplace to give assessment increased validity
- Consider combining some of the group work assessment models to improve reliability