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Assessing 'Alternative Media' Elements is there a Generic Model?

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Executive Summary

Nowadays, new digital technologies provide educators with increasingly diverse opportunities for assessing students' understanding through media other than conventional text – for example web pages, videos, posters, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts and graphics, all of which can be submitted electronically for assessment at a distance. However, educators often struggle to develop an appropriate assessment model for these non-text media artefacts.

The initial motivations for this research work stem from our first experiments on developing and using a common assessment model for assessing both text-based and non-text based artefacts (video production) in T215 'Communication and Information Technologies'. The module team developed a new assessment model which is applied on each of the five TMAs. This assessment model is interesting because it provides a consistent framework within which students can work and critique their own assessment outputs as well as a consistent way for teaching staff to assess text-based and non-text based artefacts.

This research project investigated whether the T215's assessment model could be applied equally as well in these other contexts too, and if not whether an alternative generic model could be developed.

The research consisted of two main tasks, the data collection and data analysis. Data collection consisted of identifying several modules which assess alternative media artefacts, carrying out literature surveys and conducting two online surveys, a focus group and a set of interviews. The data analysis consisted of the statistical and comparative analysis of the collected data as well as a tentative mapping of some of the surveyed assessment models onto the T215's one

The main findings are that the T215 model has potential to provide a flexible and consistent way of assessing a wide range of alternative media artefacts. In its current form it lacks the facility to assess the artefacts holistically but this can be addressed by slightly modifying the existing model's criteria. However, the T215 model can be difficult to retrofit and is not easily applicable to process-based assessments. These shortcomings are worth further investigation in a future eSTeEM project.

Aims and scope of the project

New digital technologies provide educators with increasingly diverse opportunities for assessing students' understanding through media other than conventional text – for example web pages, videos, posters, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts and graphics, all of which can be submitted electronically for assessment at a distance. However, educators often struggle to develop an appropriate assessment model for these 'alternative media' artefacts.

During the production of T215 'Communication and information technologies', the module team developed a new criterion based assessment model which is applied on each of the five tutor marked assignments. This model proved valuable because it has been adapted for both text-based and multimedia-based assessment and it provides a consistent framework within which students can work and critique their own assessment outputs.

This project was undertaken to explore the potential of T215's assessment model in the assessment of other alternative media artefacts and then to investigate the feasibility of developing a common assessment model that can be applied across a range of assessments using different media. A secondary aim was to begin to bring together the body of relevant knowledge that is emerging as new technology provides opportunities for more innovative assessment.

Activities

The main activities of this project consisted of the following tasks:

- Investigating the current practices in assessing alternative media elements through a literature review.
- Identifying a range of alternative media assessment tasks currently in use and evaluating the potential of applying the T215 model in their assessment.
- Selecting a subset of these alternative media tasks and interviewing module teams involved in their design to identify the rationale behind their decisions. (A copy of the interview questions is given in Appendix I.)
- Conducting online surveys of both tutors and students who have worked with the T215 model, to investigate their experiences. (Copies of the questions for these surveys are given in Appendices II and III.)
- Conducting a focus group for testing the T215's model potential for assessing different alternative media artefacts.
- Making any necessary modifications to the T215 model that emerge from the above cited investigations.

Our initial plans had been to survey only T215 tutors but we realised that, by surveying the previous year's cohort of T215 students, we could investigate the extent of their use of the model in terms of its application outside the context of the module.

Project's findings and outcomes

The literature review provided many examples of criterion-based models for assessing

alternative media elements but we were unable to find any that were sufficiently generic to be applied in a range of different contexts.

We identified many examples of the assessment of alternative media artefacts, and from these selected a subset of eleven to study in more detail. These artefacts included a computer program, photography, music, a PowerPoint presentation and a process map. For each of these we identified the deliverables and the assessment criteria and then analysed the potential for mapping the assessment onto the T215 model. We judged seven to have high potential, one to have high to medium potential and three to have low potential. The types of assessment artefact that were judged to have high potential included a music track, a presentation and a photographic image. Those judged to have low potential included the assessment of a design process, an assessment that called for a very detailed breakdown of marks and an assessment that that was very open in specifying its deliverables (a set of photographs).

From the selected subset of alternative media tasks, we conducted face-to-face interviews with module team members. We used a set of five questions to draw out the rationale behind assessing students through alternative media artefacts, to identify the essential elements they wanted to assess, and to explore the potential of the T215 assessment model in this context. The outcome confirmed the judgements we had made in our own investigations of these assessment tasks: that the T215 assessment model may be useful for some assessment tasks but could present some problems when attempting to retro fit it to existing assessment models.

Survey responses, which consisted of 17 questions, were received from 19 T215 tutors. There was a general agreement that the T215 model provided an appropriate framework for tutors to grade and comment on all the relevant elements of the students' answers. A substantial majority said they found it very easy or quite easy to adjust from using the model to assess written content to using it to assess multimedia content, and that they would be completely happy, or happy with some reservations to use the model to assess other types of alternative media activities.

103 responses were received from the student survey, which consisted of 15 questions. Through this survey we were seeking to discover to what extent students interacted with the T215 model, whether it helped them with their work on T215, whether they thought it could be applied in other contexts and whether they had used it since completing the module. The general consensus was that the assessment model was helpful.

After analysing the data, we made some minor modifications to the T215 assessment model and asked 15 academics in a focus group to apply the model to some alternative media assessment tasks. The participants were split into two groups, each of which was given two different tasks. Participants were then asked to report their findings to the group and a plenary discussion took place at the end of the focus group. The outcome was that, although flexible and offering consistency to assess different types of artefacts, the model is difficult to retro fit and also lacks the facility to undertake a holistic assessment of the artefact. Again, the point was made that it would be particularly difficult to apply the model to process-based assessment.

To summarise, the main findings from this project are that the T215 assessment model has several benefits but suffers from some drawbacks which may prevent its application, in its current form, to assess a wider range of alternative media artefacts.

Benefits

- *Consistency.*
The model offers a high degree of consistency when used to assess both text and non-text artefacts.

- *Flexibility.*
The model is flexible due to the level of generality offered by different criteria and the facility to adjust the weighting of the criteria.
- *Transferability.*
Tutors and students are able to transfer the model for use in different contexts.
- *Ease of use.*
Tutors and students generally found the model easy to apply.
- *Comprehensiveness.*
Tutors and students generally felt that the model covered all the required elements of assessment.

Drawbacks

- *Retro fitting.*
It was difficult to retrofit some existing assessment models to the T215 model, though it was also felt that the assessment task could be fitted to the T215 model at an early design state.
- *Holistic assessment.*
The T215 model does not cater for holistic assessment so there is a need to include an additional criteria to provide for this.
- *Process based assessment.*
T215's model is better suited to assessment of an artefact but is not easily adaptable to process-based assessment tasks.

Project publications

- Kouadri Mostéfaoui, Soraya; Ferreira, Giselle; Williams, Judith and Herman, Clem (2012). Using creative multimedia in teaching and learning ICTs: a case study. European Journal of Open Distance and eLearning (EURODL) pp. 1–11.
- Kouadri Mostéfaoui, Soraya and Williams, Judith (2012). Towards a generic model for assessing alternative media, the tutors' perspective. First eSTEEeM Conference, 6th March 2012, The Open University.
- Williams, Judith and Kouadri Mostefaoui Soraya (2012). Harnessing the creativity of digital multimedia tools in distance learning. Solstice'2012, 13th -14th June 2012, Edge Hill University.
- Kouadri Mostefaoui, Soraya (2012). Experiences using a common assessment model for text and non-text artefacts. IEEE International Conference in Education and E-Learning Innovations (ICEEL'2012), Sousse, Tunisia (Oral presentation)
- Williams, Judith and Kouadri Mostéfaoui, Soraya (2012). Paving the way for a generic assessment framework. The eLearning Community Workshop (eLC), 10th October 2012, The Open University.
- Kouadri Mostéfaoui, Soraya and Williams, Judith (2013). On Using Digital Multimedia Tools in Distance Learning: A case study. ATEE Winter Conference - Learning & Teaching with Media & Technology (ATEE'2013), Genoa, Italy.
- Walker, Mirabelle and Williams, Judith (2012). Critical evaluation as an aid to improved report writing: A case study. European Journal of Education Engineering (EJEE) pp (submitted awaiting notification)

Impact

The main impact of this project is strategic. The outcome of the discussions generated with the different module teams indicates there is some interest within the University in the development of a standard assessment model to be used across programmes. From the University's point of

view this is in line with the faculty's strategic goals and visions leading to programme assessment rather than module assessment.

This project has the potential to influence the teaching and learning experiences within the sphere of our research contacts, as both tutor and student surveys have highlighted important aspects that are worth taking into account when applying the model in different contexts. These aspects can be implemented in the future versions of the model offering better and easier understanding for both students and teaching staff.

The project has highlighted the benefits of using a consistent model for the assessment of different tasks, as well as using the same model for feedback and critical analysis. Additionally, through our publications, it has given us the opportunity to contribute to the debate on students' assessment in the UK and has enabled us to begin a collaboration with European countries that will involve further refinement of the assessment model and its application in different contexts. It is anticipated that this will converge towards a more robust and generic set of assessment criteria.