

Radio Journalism at the Warrington Collegiate Institute, affiliated to the University of Manchester

The Situation

This video case study is part of a three year consortium project that is looking at Group Work Assessment in Media Production. Six higher education institutions have been involved in recording their method of assessing student groups involved in different areas of media production.

[Music sting]

Narrator: Warrington Collegiate Institute is a College of the University of Manchester and offers a range of degrees including Media Studies. David Grimshaw is the Senior Lecturer on the Radio Production Degree.

David Grimshaw: Yes, this module is called News and Magazine Programmes, and the idea of... the overall idea of the module is to bring to students who have done general studio operations and general studio productions in the first year, to bring a journalistic discipline to their programmes and I do that in two ways. One is to get them involved in what I would call a magazine programme, that's a programme of mixed music and speech, which has an over all general theme, but is still a general entertainment/information type of programme for a general, mainstream audience, and the other in contrast is to actually concentrate on a capsule of news, a news bulletin of the type that goes between three and five minutes at the top of an hour in local or music format network radio.

There are four assessments in this module, and this module carries double credits, so in comparison with their other modules on this degree course, that's like having two assignments per ten credit unit, we have four assignments in a twenty credit unit. I give them provisional marks and feedback as the assessments come along. I wait until all the year group has finished the assessments and then they get that back. It's provisional marks because it has to be second marked and I'm the only subject specialist here so I have to get somebody else to look over that, and of course it's subject to external examiners, so they know it's provisional. But we have a pro-forma which is adapted for each assignment in each module, which the assessment criteria which they've been given in the assignment brief, are then written down on a pro-forma sheet, I put comments against those and marks against those. At the preliminary meeting of the whole year group, then I will give out these sheets with my comments and the marks on and then I invite them to make a tutorial with me if there's anything they want to talk about, and it tends to be I get about 20, 25% of the group will then follow that up and say I don't understand what you mean or I think this was unfair or whatever.

Paul (student): Honestly, I don't think there is anything that needs changing in the way that people are marked on the course, I think it's pretty fair just now, I mean as I said, our lecturer Dave is pretty clued up and he knows what people are doing and how people are doing it and how much work people are actually putting in, so yeah, I think it's pretty fair.

[Music sting]

David Grimshaw: I've tried two different approaches to forming groups, one being where I decide who would be good to work with whom, who will set challenges, where there'll be synergies, where there's complementary personalities, characters and skills and so on. The problem with doing that is when it didn't work it was always blamed on me, it was always my fault, it was never the students' fault within the group, there was always an outside cause to it, and it became difficult to deal with, so I've kind of like, partly due to good reason, partly due to laziness, fallen back on the 'well form yourself into groups', 'do it amongst yourselves' and I see quite an interesting dynamic there. In the first year and the second year they will very often choose to work with friends. In the third year they're much more strategic and they're willing to have friendships existing outside their production groups and much more canny about who they choose to work with and to keep that, quite a distinct difference sometimes between that and their social life, and you can see it as they arrive for tutorials. They'll arrive in social groups and then split into work groups and of course when it works best is when you can combine both.

Lindsay (student): In the first year, right from the start we had to do group work and because you don't know anyone it basically is done... who do you get on with? Who are you friends with? Who do you live with as well, because we live in halls? So it's based on friends, and then it builds up from then. At the end of the second year you do a massive... so end of the first year you do a big group project which, I think Dave coordinated that more than he had the other ones, so we were sort of then set into groups so you worked with different people.

David Grimshaw: The biggest incentive I think to make sure that internal group communication happens, is the fact that it's in one of the assessment criteria, is the individual's contribution to the team and the group, and I make it quite clear to them, both in writing and verbally that that means they need to establish lines of communication. Fortunately we live in the days of widespread email and mobile phone and that does look after most of it.

Paul (student): I'm the kind of person that would sort of do all the work and just let people get away with it, because I don't like confrontation or conflict, but I think you know something I'm going to have to learn is...

David Grimshaw: The nature of production work in groups and the tutorials is such that if there is a problem with somebody not attending fairly regularly or missing key meetings, I generally get to know about it and then it's a quiet word with that individual.

Paul (student): We have regular meetings with Dave on a weekly basis and you know we'll all put in our little bit and say what we've done and you know, they are individual meetings so they're not in the groups or you can say to Dave well such and such hasn't... I don't think he or she has done enough work and you know, Dave will say it's ok, I'll have a word with them or whatever, and that's easier that way, 'cause when you're in a group you don't want a division.

David Grimshaw: The problem with groups is always to do with somebody who's perceived to be a passenger not pulling their weight. I've never had in twelve years here, students coming to me and saying and complaining about other students' lack of ability or skill. It's always about effort and input.

Lindsay (student): I enjoy working in groups, but I get annoyed because some people, you know, are very slack, they don't do... they don't pull their weight, but in the same sense, because it's a small group and as a production module it's noticed.

David Grimshaw: I have a thing called an individual contribution sheet and it starts off with you put your name across the top and it's what I did for this assignment, and I get the students to... then it's a blank sheet of paper for most of the rest of the sheet. There's space at the bottom for the other members of the group to counter-sign it and the idea is if there's four in a group, each individual will write what they've done. The others then have to read that and put their signature on the bottom of it so there's three signatures on the bottom which are not your own, but somebody else's. I don't do it consistently I have to say which is because I'm badly organised, not because I think there's anything conceptually wrong with it, but it's very useful for me, if I've any doubt as to what's been happening within a group, it's very useful for me to actually get that as my written evidence.

Benjamin (student): The individual contribution forms are there to help the lecturer understand that the group worked well and fairly. I think if there was a problem in the group before that then it would have been said and we would have gone to the lecturer before that, so to be honest I think that's just to finalise that the group worked successfully well together.

[Music sting]

David Grimshaw: The news test, which was the first exercise, was really... because we're doing news and we're touching a bit on current affairs, they need to have a basic knowledge of the law and we don't actually do journalism formally as a subject, we don't do news, law, as a subject, so I have to find a way of motivating the students, looking at it that way, into doing the work for themselves as guided, and also a way of satisfying myself that they're ready for the practical news assessment by having done that preparatory work, so the first one is I try to make it as easy possible to do, but it is basically an exam.

Laura (student): I really enjoyed this module because it was a chance to look at news, which we've not really done before, and also I think it kind of revealed to me that it's something I

really enjoy doing, that I probably wouldn't have thought of before, as actually going into as a career maybe after university.

David Grimshaw: The next two assignments, one's a news bulletin exercise and the other one is a magazine programme, and very practically based. They're working in groups. For the news bulletin it's an individual assessment, everybody does a news bulletin, but it's... the news bulletin is compiled out of individual work. The magazine programme is a traditional group of people working together towards a single project, so that's where I have an issue of actually dividing up where the effort went to. I think I've come up with a format which lets me to do that quite easily. The last assessment, 10% of the marks, is on a reflective piece of writing.

Laura (student): Yeah, I think it was very fair, because, although we're working in groups, we got assessed individually, but also as part of that group, and what part you played as a member of that group, but yeah, I think it was very fair because it was able to identify as well, the roles that we all took on and although it was for like the magazine programme, we each did our own individual features, which I think was also good, because that's what we got marked on.

David Grimshaw: And then to have one group who were very slow to get down to actually doing the work, they were having a good social time together and so were fairly relaxed about what they were doing and not very disciplined, but not as regards assessment, no. They're very cooperative. They see the benefit, and I try and point out to them the fact that one of the assessment criteria is how well you work, how well you contribute towards the team, so there's benefit in doing the individual work, there's benefit in actually helping your colleagues along as well.

Benjamin (student): The assessment process I thought was very fair actually, because we did get an individual mark as well as a group mark, so it was the best of both worlds really because if you work in a group and someone in the group doesn't pull their weight and you suffer because of that, then that's not on really.

David Grimshaw: I have a debate in my mind about whether it's best to divide the assessment up into smaller components, thereby I can give students provisional marks and comments and feedback for their guidance and use, or whether it's best to actually let them work on it for the full length of time and then assess all at the end. The swings and roundabouts debates.

Benjamin (student): There's nothing I would change about the way that we're assessed, because I think, as I said, it represents the real industry and that's what you need, there's no point in pretending through university and then going into the real world and finding it's completely differently. That's not on, you're going to work in groups in the industry so you've got to work in groups in university and I don't think anything needs to be changed whatsoever in that department.

[Music sting]

[End of programme].