

Enhancing Students' Engagement with Group Writing Project by Optimizing Division of Labour

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Project Overview

One common complaint about group projects is that students feel that their group members are not contributing equally, and such feelings may have negative impacts. Thus, the success of the group projects is dependent on a fair division of labour among the group members. How to help students to find a suitable method to split group work, how to guide the group to follow the method effectively, and how to evaluate each member's contribution puts up a challenge to the students and the instructor. This project aims to explore how students divide tasks to complete a group essay writing assignment and to develop "best practice" recommendations that help students divide tasks among group members more effectively within upper year Chinese Literature courses.

The project has been delivered in CHIN 461 and CHIN 463 (Early Classical Chinese Poetry I and II), two advanced content literature courses in Chinese Language Program in Asian Studies enrolling 111 students in 2020W alone. The Group Project is a group research paper on a selected topic in the courses, and it involves a combination of formative and summative assessments of students' academic communication skills.

Research Questions

- How do students divide tasks (collaborative, cooperative or mixed)? What are the reasons for their choice?
- What are the pros and cons of those methods (collaborative, cooperative and mixed) in terms of division of labors when students are writing a group paper?
- If groups change their choice of methods in the middle of their project, why is this decision made?
- How does the group reach an agreement over a controversial division of labour, and what can the instructor do to facilitate the group work?

Reflections

- Engage help early!
- Action Research means endless journey
- Self-reflection on teaching philosophy
- Sharing and learning

Acknowledgement

- We acknowledge that the land on which we have designed and delivered our project is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam)
- We gratefully acknowledge the support for this project provided by UBC Vancouver students via the Scholarship of Teaching Learning Seed Program
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Key Considerations

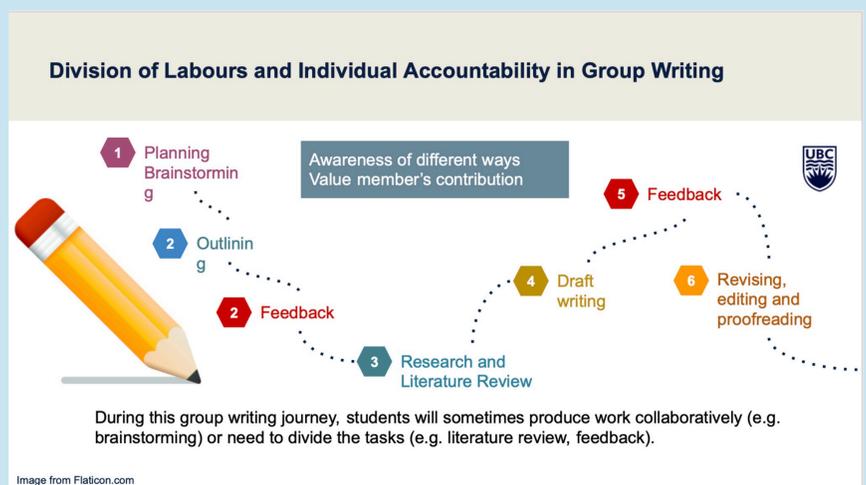


Figure 1 | Individual accountability

Before and After Project Timeline

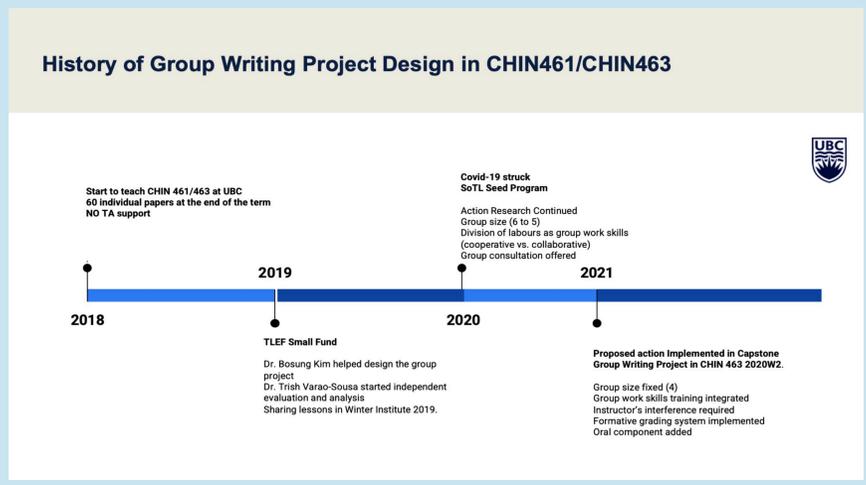


Figure 2 | Project Timeline

Evaluations

Evaluation Process and Timeline

November 2019 (oral feedback from 4 student groups)

- Difficulties came in the form of encouraging participation from all members; finding time to meet; allocating equal workloads

January-April 2020 (3 surveys: CHIN 463)

September-December 2020 (3 surveys: CHIN 461)

January-April 2021 (3 surveys: CHIN 463)

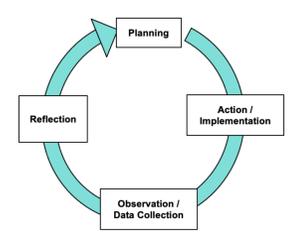


Figure 3 | Evaluation Process and Timeline

Proposed Solutions

How Did you Deal with the Conflict During the Peer Writing Assignment?

Conflict	Suggested solutions (provided by students)
Agreeing on topic	- Hear out everyone's opinion - Receive feedback from professor - Have a discussion to see if ideas can be combined
Different writing styles	- Review the whole paper as a team - "We have one team member who is responsible for finalizing the paper and make the writing style is consistent." - "We try to discuss which styles are better to reach consensus." - "We have different writing styles, we will try to follow the outline..."
Time conflicts	- Use online tools to chat (Canvas, google docs, WeChat) - If one person cannot attend, have the meeting and provide a message/update for the missing member - "Put comments beside their writing, so they can do corrections of their writing when they have time."
General communication issues	- Have a shared google doc - Listen to team members concerns and provide constructive feedback - Use a video call to avoid misunderstanding - Use WeChat to post questions, so everyone could respond
Dealing with lazy group members	- Nothing, no one wants to confront them / Harder working members take on more work - Provide a deadline to the team member and which part to complete

Figure 4 | Proposed Solutions

References

Fink, L. D. (2003). *A self-directed guide to designing courses for significant learning*. University of Oklahoma, 27(11), 1-33.

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