Assessment design for teaching of personal and team interaction skills

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Science educators recognise that science is often a collaborative activity and consequently design their courses to include a significant group work component. Group work may have advantages in terms of peer assisted learning, time saving, safety and resource use. While in many courses students spend a significant amount of time in groups, little is provided in the way of useful tools for students in learning how to interact or successfully navigate group situations. Teaching group skills often consists of "go and work in a group" which can result in a negative experience for students and teaches them little about successful group interaction.

In this paper we present a range of peer and self assessment activities which we have developed to assist students in engaging successfully in groups. The assessment activities are situated within authentic learning contexts i.e. model scenarios and activities which 'real scientists' engage in as collaborative groups. The tools include a range of formative and summative components and require students to analyse the behaviour and contribution of group members including themselves, whilst simultaneously encouraging skill development in assessing the academic/scientific quality of group products. The tools are simple to use and may be easily introduced and adapted to many group scenarios. Benefits and pitfalls from our experience in implementing the tools are discussed as well as feedback on student perceptions.