

Through a combination of group work and individual work our resource which is a website containing study tips for students based on the VARK model is almost complete. At the beginning of the module I looked forward to the collaborative aspect of group work having completed our first module on an individual basis.

As part of the forming process of Tuckman's stages of group development our group looked at the scope of the task and how we would approach it. We decided against a group leader or coordinator feeling that we would share all the tasks as much as possible. We agreed we would communicate through a wiki and use it as a central repository for information and content. As we progressed to the storming stage we shared our ideas about the layout of the resource and the amount of content required. We seemed unable to progress our ideas within the timeframe that we had during class. To resolve this issue Debbie and I decided to meet to create a basic model of the resource for discussion. This allowed us to progress to the norming stage, focus on a mutual plan and decide on who would be responsible for each section of the web site. In the performing stage Tuckman suggests that team members are functioning as a unit and finding ways of getting the job done. This was very much the case within our group as members not only worked on their own content but also came up with ideas and suggestions for overcoming technical problems encountered by other group members. Without direction members looked at the project in general and completed significant work individually on items before bringing them back to the group for feedback.

Group work is not without its challenges. Initially I felt very frustrated as it seemed almost impossible to agree a time to meet outside of class. I felt this was important as any meetings at the end of class time were rushed and unproductive. When we did meet I felt that we didn't have a strict agenda and I wondered if it was wise not to have a group coordinator. However after the initial meetings it became apparent that whilst the meeting didn't have the strict structure that I am used to, work was being done and the storyboard and resource were starting to take shape. The meetings we had became question and answer sessions with those attending providing answers where possible or trying to achieve an alternative solution. I feel that the structure that evolved suited the group as members did not need to be motivated towards completing tasks, the majority of members shared the tasks as we had suggested in our initial meeting and the wiki seemed to work as the central coordinator, housing content and maintaining a record of discussions and decisions.

As a group we agreed a layout and colour scheme for the site and that we would develop the content for our web page individually with support from the group if it was necessary. Raftery (2010) suggests that it is better for students to be able to choose from a series of short clearly focused screencasts. As a group we felt that this should apply to all content created. The content I was responsible for was an overview of the visual learning style and study tips for the visual learner. To create this content I decided to use the screen capture application screenr and Articulate, I also looked at using some You Tube videos.

I started by creating a screencast of the overview by using screenr. I found this application easy to use. It has the advantage that the output may be viewed on smart phones which if the website was developed further would contribute significantly to the accessibility aspect of the site. I used the free version which has a limit of five minutes; this was sufficient for my purposes however reflecting that Raftery (2010) suggests that screen casts should include interactivity it would be interesting to review the ability of the upgraded version to include interactivity. I moved on to creating content on study tips for visual learners. Clarke and Mayer suggest that the use of some multimedia is more appropriate for the novice learner than the more advanced learner. With this in mind I decided to create content on mind mapping aimed at both the student who had not encountered the concept of mind mapping before and the student who may be familiar but wished to update their knowledge. Having located a suitable You Tube video that explained the concept of mind mapping for the more knowledgeable student, I moved to creating an introduction to mind mapping in Articulate for the novice student. The content consisted of a number of static images with narration explaining each image as suggested by Clarke and Mayer. After an evaluation of the content I felt that the novice student may need some additional help. I discussed this with a colleague who suggested that I could include verbal or visual signalling proposed by Mayer (2009). I updated the content using pointer words such as firstly; secondly etc in the overview to outline the topics being covered and then included title frames introducing each topic as the module progressed. Mayer suggests that an argument against signalling is that it does not add to the content being covered and can just make the module longer. However I felt it added a structure to the module and provided a clear pathway for the student. In view of this I re-evaluated the overview screencast I had completed and decided to re record it using the same verbal and visual signalling I had used. Again I felt it improved the content. When progressing to create other content I continued to use the signalling principle. While designing I felt that using signalling focussed me on the content at hand leading to any

extraneous content being removed. Having created a significant amount of content in Articulate I learned that it may not be possible to upload this content to our website. I wondered if this was an aspect that we had missed in the analyses stage of the design process in that we decided on how the resource would be hosted but not the possible constraints of hosting it on a free web site. Tabbers, Kester, Hummel and Nadolski (2004) suggest that a conceptual model should be created in which the list of objects and scenarios are set down. Whilst we had created a conceptual model I feel that for future practise I would add that in addition to the conceptual model, a live test model should be created to test the limitations of using certain applications. Thanks to Debbie a workaround was found that enabled us to use articulate content on our site. Whilst initially a setback this need for a workaround has provided me with an opportunity to become familiar with the usage of drop boxes and thus improved my technical knowledge.

In addition to content on mind mapping I have included content on the use of graphic organisers and the Cornell note taking system. In view of the time scale I was unable to develop content for these tips to the same level as that for mind maps but I felt that if there was further development I would develop this content on the same basis. At the stage of uploading content to the site I was conscious that the pages were starting to appear cluttered and disorganised. I looked to Tabbers et al (2004) and Gillani (2003) for guidelines on layout. The common theme from their guidelines is the need to keep things simple and avoid causing confusion for the user. This can be easier said than done. Gillani (2003) suggests that each element should be critically examined to determine if it is needed and it should be questioned if two or more can be combined. I feel that all elements are needed so I am currently reviewing the prospect of combining a number of elements to improve layout. Recently I encountered a resource created to help teachers and students with the challenges of group work. I was struck by the amount of information that was available in a format that was easy to navigate through. I wondered if I had come across this resource during our analyses stage would we have done anything differently. Tabbers et al (2004) suggest that the design of a good interface distinguishes itself predominantly by “invisibility” and the best designs are the ones that users never notice. For me during our initial analyses phase I don’t think I would have been able to detect why this resource was so effective due to that “invisibility”.

Within this reflection I have been unable to touch on all the learnings I have experienced during this module. However reflecting on the authors I have encountered in addition to those mentioned in the reflection I have become aware of the importance of the stance taken

by the designer as suggested by Seale, Boyle, Roberts & McAvinia (2007) and the Merrill's first principles of Instruction (2009). These are design guidelines that I intend to apply to future content design. In working with Debbie and Odette I have experienced their enthusiasm in trying out many new applications despite the enormity of the task ahead of us and thus increased my technical knowledge. In my turn my existing technical knowledge has been refreshed and updated through demonstrating and explaining applications I am familiar with.