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A LIVE AUDIT TO ENABLE PARTICIPANTS TO ENHANCE THEIR FEEDBACK PRACTICE TO PROMOTE SELF-REGULATED LEARNING.

Abstract:

This session will provide the opportunity for reflection on individual and institutional feedback practices within the HE sector. The session allows participants to complete a live online self-assessment audit of their current feedback practices. The audit questions are based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's 7 principles (2006), and these are mapped to the stages of assessment (pre, during and post). These questions will consider the extent to which teachers are supporting students during the production of an assessment (Boud, 2000). Following the audit, the data regarding the trends of participants' feedback strengths and weaknesses will be available to provide an opportunity for group discussion. This will facilitate the group in sharing examples of good feedback practice from the HE institutions represented. The Meetoo app will allow real-time impromptu questioning to gather further qualitative responses. Finally, participants will be asked to consider whether their assessment is 'fit for purpose' and suitably aligned to the learning outcomes (Biggs and Tang, 2007). Following the session, the individual audit will be available and linked with practical suggestions for the enhancement of practice from the HEA Feedback Toolkit (2013). This will provide opportunity for participants' continued reflection and could benefit cross-programme discussions on feedback practices within institutions on their return. All data collected within this session will contribute to our ongoing research project, but will remain anonymous and confidential.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Participants will take part in a live online self-assessment audit based on Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) 7 principles of good practice to encourage self-regulated learners. The Meetoo conference app will be utilised (10-14 mins).
- Small group discussion reflecting on individual strengths and weaknesses of good feedback practice (10 mins).
- Facilitated group discussions around the trends available from the live audit (20 mins) with opportunities for smaller focus group discussion on feedback practices within the different stages of curriculum delivery.
- Complete session evaluation using the Meetoo conference app (1 mins).
- Data related to individual's strengths and weaknesses highlighted through the audit will be available to individual participants to enable the completion of an action plan on return to their institutions (Day 2).
- With the permission of the participants, the audit data will contribute to our ongoing research on identifying opportunities for enhancing feedback to encourage self-regulated learning.

Keywords:

feedback; reflection; self-regulated learning; evaluation; assessment

JEL Classification: I23

Introduction

Formative feedback is widely acknowledged as an essential component of student learning (Hattie, Biggs & Purdue, 1996; Yorke, 2001; Hounsell, 2003; Carless, 2006; Race, 2015). Gibbs and Simpson (2004-05) acknowledge the significance of feedback being timely, however, the contemporary challenge of increasing commodification of Higher Education has led to modularization and larger class sizes which impact upon tutors' capacity to offer timely and effective feedback to support students' progress (Yorke, 2001; Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002). These are not the only challenges facing tutors; there has been recent government emphasis on retention issues, widening participation and the attainment of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students. Improving assessment and feedback practices could form part of the solution to these complex problems.

Therefore, this research examines ways of engaging tutors in reflecting on their current feedback practice, so that they can make informed decisions regarding embedding more effective feedback practices into their curriculum. The development of tutors' feedback also has the potential to enhance students' motivation and impact on their self-regulated learning (SRL), thereby, improving both attainment (Black et al., 2003; Sadler, 2013) and retention (Yorke, 2001).

This article will provide an exploration of our research of tutors' feedback framed by the concepts of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006) 7 principles of effective feedback. These principles have been mapped to the three stages at which tutors have the potential to influence or develop their assessment and feedback practices: curriculum planning (pre-delivery); the delivery (during); and using feedback for reflection following delivery (post). The findings from the initial pilot study will be reported here.

Background

As previously outlined, feedback has long been demonstrated to impact on students' learning process and their achievement. Effective feedback should provide the guidance to help students achieve their learning goals (Sadler, 2010; Patel et al., 2015). However, since the National Student Survey started in 2005, assessment and feedback scores for student satisfaction have consistently been rated the lowest (Surrige, 2008). The NUS Charter completed in 2010 was an attempt to understand feedback practice within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the reasons for continuing student dissatisfaction (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2014). Despite some changes in practice, it still remains an area of concern within HEIs. One possible explanation for student dissatisfaction could be the mismatch between tutors' and students' perspectives on feedback. Carless' (2006) research highlights that tutors' perception is that they are offering more detailed feedback than students believe they receive. In addition, Higgins (2000) and Sadler (2010) argue that due to the academic discourse in which feedback is presented, students may be unable to correctly interpret their tutor's feedback; this may result in them being unable to action the comments. Orsmond and Merry (2011) agree that students may not be able to understand or act upon feedback, however, they identified

that this may be due to a lack of tutor guidance on how to reflect on the implications for their wider learning (Rossiter, 2016). The consequences of this incongruity is that students may be selective in the feedback they action (Orsmond et al., 2013) which means they may deal with easy to fix aspects rather than addressing key higher order aspects of the feedback.

One way to address this would be to promote self-regulated learning (SRL) through the 7 principles of effective feedback (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). These include helping students to understand the expectations of the assessment, in order to know what good performance is. For example, Huxham (2007) demonstrates that the use of model answers is effective in helping students achieve higher grades. Feedback should also engage the students in self-reflection and monitoring their development towards their academic goals (Race, 2015). This should be supplemented with tutor feedback to help identify and internalise means of progressing (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Tutors have an essential role in providing high quality feedback as an external source to facilitate students' SRL. The quality could be determined by a focus on higher order indicators of performance rather than superficial aspects (HEA, 2013); for example, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the critical analysis within an essay. Feedback should focus on praising a student's progress towards their learning goals rather than intelligence (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). This in turn will impact on the student's self-belief and motivation. Feedback on assessments should provide the opportunity for a student to identify their present level of performance and adopt the standards required (Sadler, 1989). Boud (2000) suggests that the response to this feedback could be evaluated by giving the opportunity to submit a subsequent draft of improved work. This would also allow the student to understand how feedback can be used in future assessments. Finally, teachers need access to information concerning students' progress in order to inform their teaching practice (Yorke, 2003).

The tutor's dilemma is how to produce this type of effective feedback under institutional constraints (Bailey & Garner, 2010), such as those mentioned earlier of increasing modularisation and larger class sizes. Given this dilemma, the question is how can tutors evaluate their assessments and whether they are fit for purpose (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Therefore, it is essential that decisions of when and how feedback should be given throughout the module should be considered at the curriculum design stage (Nicol, 2009; HEA, 2013). These evaluations should maximise feedback opportunities to scaffold assessments throughout modules and across their programme by including formative and in-class feedback. These decisions should take into account the need to embed the development of students' assessment literacy skills through the use of exemplars and models to clarify good performance (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002; Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005; Handley, Outer & Price, 2013). This will overcome the problem identified by Rust, Price and O'Donovan (2003) who state that the criteria used to evaluate assignments are tacit, and therefore giving students a copy of the criteria is insufficient for them to understand a tutor's requirements. Dialogue could also be used to bridge this gap in students' knowledge

and to develop a shared understanding (Carless et al. 2011; HEA, 2012) which will make the tutors' implicit interpretation explicit. Embedding the opportunity for students to mark samples or peer mark assignments would further enhance the development of this tacit knowledge (Nicol, Thompson & Breslin, 2014). Hence, assessment literacy skills can be encouraged through dialogues between both tutor and students, as well as peer to peer dialogue which promotes self-reflection (Nicol, 2010; Orsmond et al., 2013). Therefore, this initial research will encourage individual tutor reflection upon current feedback practice and identify opportunities for enhancement. The reflection will provide a practical application of the pedagogic research whilst considering curriculum and institutions requirements.

Pilot study

The research questionnaire and usability of the Meeto application (app) was piloted with a limited sample of tutors from across four discipline areas, who in addition, all had language teaching backgrounds. The pilot was conducted with tutors drawn from the potential research population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). By using this sample of tutors, it was felt that their expertise could further add clarity to the question phraseology to align with our intended measures. This included checking for potential ambiguity in terminology such as 'module' being used instead of 'programme'. The feedback received also commented on expanding the range of some answers to be more inclusive across discipline areas. Two open questions were included but the app messaging option was challenging or too time consuming depending on what device the respondent was using. These were kept within the session but were altered to be focus group discussion points. It was important that the instructions given were clear due to the variety of answers required. A customised welcome page introducing ourselves and the aims of the session was developed following the pilot. The pilot instilled confidence on the ease of using the app and the time needed to download it and complete the questionnaire; it provided an indication of how long it would take to answer each question. Alternative compilation methods and apps were considered at the strategic planning stage of the research, however, the pilot demonstrated that the chosen app was fit for purpose. The data analysis from the pilot allowed initial gaging of internal reliability as well as speculative inferences from the data.

Methodology

A survey was used to obtain an overall reflection of each individual's feedback practices, which was further explored through focus groups. Participatory research, which works with people as a community rather than a 'top down' approach, was encouraged due to the reflective nature of the topic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This facilitated a more honest reflection during the conference session. Therefore, individuals only saw their own answers on their devices which further enhanced the anonymity required for authentic reflection. The session's aims and overview were included in the educational development conference manual, which prompted a self-selecting sample (Coolican, 1999). This further suited the

participatory research approach. It was important to combine quantitative with qualitative methodologies of data collection as this mixed method allowed us to examine the tutor's beliefs and values (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Though a small sample of 25, the data was from across HE institutions, disciplines and year groups, including both undergraduate and postgraduate tutors. Due to the setting of the session, it was believed that the participants mainly comprised of experienced educators rather than neophyte tutors. The data collected included perception based information related to the participants' views of their own feedback practice in relation to their values, assumptions, and beliefs. Open questions were used to collect quantitative data to identify current feedback practice and promoted a further discussion in the form of small focus groups. Cumulative and anonymised results projected to the group before each discussion point in order to allow a comparison of norms within practice across institutions.

The questionnaire design included 12 closed questions and the order of the questions was intentionally changed so as not to pre-empt any subsequent questions. The questionnaire answers were pre-coded to the 7 principles. Personal factual questions were asked regarding their feedback practice, which were supplemented with questions regarding normative beliefs and standards related to feedback practice. This provided some triangulation of the questions by correlating questions on practice in relation to beliefs. The opportunity to change their answer was offered before each question was closed and the answer recorded in Excel. A verbal warning was given to participants before each poll was closed.

Following the session, each participant was emailed with an individual feedback profile mapped to Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's 7 principles which guided tutors to additional resources such as seminal research and the HEA Feedback Toolkit (2013). This research informed pedagogy could help enhance their teaching. This mapping enabled practitioners to implement research informed feedback by highlighting the range of strategies considered good practice, which could be applied at different stages of their curriculum, thereby maximizing the use of effective feedback strategies within their module design; see Appendix 1 for an example of the pre- and during sections of a participant's anonymised module profile. However, the decisions as to whether these strategies were suitable for implementation within the module required the individual tutors' reflection; this approach supported individuals to be active developers of their own teaching practice (Bloxham, 2015). Price and Kirkwood (2014) state that tutors do not have time to take advantage of educational research and often rely on informal conversations with colleagues, and therefore the practicability of the questionnaire and the time required for completion (15-20 minutes) was an essential element considered in the design. After receiving the individual mapped profile, respondents were invited to verify whether it was an accurate representation of their current feedback practice. This allowed an informal insight into the reliability of the questionnaire. Repeated sessions are now being completed in order to use a correlation analysis to prove reliability.

Ethical considerations

In advance, details of the session were shared which clarified that active participation would be required. Those attending the session would therefore be agreeing to complete the questionnaire and all the data collected could be used anonymously within our research; this provided informed consent. Providing contact details gave participants the right to withdraw at a later date should they wish. To ensure confidentiality, the data collected would only be analysed by the two researchers who mapped the individual profiles. These profiles were blind checked by the two researchers.

Findings and discussion

Often marking criterion contain implicit information that is not obvious to students, particularly in their early academic study (Jones et al., 2016). Research shows that dialogue provides clarification of assessment expectations and allows the students to 'close the gap' (HEA, 2012); the question is to what extent are such opportunities actually embedded in curriculum. Initial findings identified that 84% of tutors acknowledge the need to develop assessment literacy skills. However, this could indicate there is a gap between this belief and tutors actual practice. Dialogue between a tutor and the students will develop the students understanding of the tacit nature of marking criteria. Ali, Rose and Ahmed (2015) reinforces the need for early engagement of students with feedback and its importance for their assessment literacy. This research indicates that students' engagement with feedback deteriorates in subsequent years of study due to their negative perception of its usefulness. Therefore, the use of early interventions such as exemplars and models would provide the opportunity to bridge the gap between current and desired performance (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002; Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003; Rust, O'Donovan, & Price, 2005). However, this research highlights that these tutors are missing the opportunity to use exemplars and models with only 24% of the sample providing a range of models at different bands and only 36% giving students the opportunity to use criteria to mark examples. Yorke (2001), Black et al., (2003) and Sadler (2013) identify the importance of students' action of formative feedback points in order to demonstrate their engagement as self-regulated learners. Nonetheless, only 48% of these tutors offered draft - re-draft chances in their modules and only 60% gave students the opportunity to identify their assessments' strengths and weaknesses prior to submission.

Limitations

The small sample size used means the value of this study is more as a pilot programme preparing for future research rather than generalizable to all HEIs. Therefore, it is acknowledged that this data is for individual tutors to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their module feedback practice in order to provide research based insight for future curriculum development. Repeating the session to increase the sample size will allow further validation of the questionnaire and data. The internal reliability and validity of the questionnaire will be enhanced by completing

a correlation between questions once a larger sample of respondents is achieved; this will provide opportunity for more rigorous pattern analysis.

Future direction

Three key areas of this research will be developed. The research will consider the students' perspective on the feedback they receive. Ali, Rose and Ahmed (2015) suggest managing student expectations and aligning what is useful in feedback to what students want with early year interventions. Therefore, a questionnaire will be developed to compare students and tutors' perceptions on feedback to see ways in which it could be developed for greater alignment. In addition, a follow-up questionnaire or interview will be completed to evaluate the impact of the reflective exercise on tutors' actual feedback practice. This will establish what changes, if any have been made in practice following tutors' participation in the research and reflection on their individual feedback profile. Finally, the collection of further data and collaboration with other HEIs both nationally and internationally will allow for comparisons of feedback practices across different discipline areas, institutions and cultures.

Conclusion

This research focused on the necessity for tutors to design curriculum and assessments that allows for effective feedback to promote SRL whilst acknowledging the student and institutional perspectives and constraints. The completion of this reflective exercise allows tutors' beliefs and values to be measured against their actual practice. Initial findings indicate that there is a mismatch between individual tutor's feedback practices and their understanding and beliefs concerning good practice. The value of this research is that it allows tutors to become aware of missed opportunities for embedding effective feedback within their curriculum. The feedback profile provides opportunity for tutors to reflectively review their individual feedback practices measured against current research led recommendations. It offers tutors the opportunity to become active developers of their own feedback practice in order to align it with not only their own values and current research but also the needs of their particular students.

Appendix 1

Principle	Principle	Source	Active	
Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards expected).	P1*	(HEA, 2013, p. 8; Hatzipanagos & Warburton, 2009)		Pre-course – planning & module design phase
- Selection / design of models and exemplars		(Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005)	✓	
- Consider the range & weighting of assessment		(Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5; Yorke, 2005)	R ¹	
- Consideration is given to modes & methods of feedback when designing assessment to meet learning outcomes		(HEA, 2013, p. 11; Nichols, 2009)		
- Development of a student friendly version of the marking criteria				
- Selection & design of feedback tools		(HEA, 2013, p. 27; Millar, 2010)	Sufficient	
- Feedback tools include a range of modes of delivery (oral, aural & written)		(Beaumont, O'Doherty & Shannon, 2011)	O/W/A	
Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.	P3*	(McDonald & Boud, 2003)		
- Technology to encourage timely feedback		(Gibbs & Simpson, 2004-5)	Limited	
- Techniques to encourage timely feedback			Limited	
- Consideration is given to modes & methods of feedback when designing assessment				
Encourages teacher and peer dialogue	P4*	(HEA, 2013, p. 28)		
- Feedback tools selected to encourage opportunities for dialogue			Sufficient	
Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem	P5*	(HEA, 2013, p. 23)		
- Low stake assignments			R ¹	
- Incremental steps		(Dweck, 1999)	✓	
Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.	P7*			
- Reflect on choice of lower & higher order cognitive thinking skills to be demonstrated.		(Anderson et al., 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005)	3 HO 2 LO	
Lower order Describe Explain Define Interpret Identify Demonstrate	Higher order Examine Explore Analyse Reflect Critically evaluate Discuss		R ¹	
- Reflect on previous module evaluation questionnaires, if available.				
Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards expected).	P1*	(HEA, 2013, p. 11)		During – course delivery phase
- Class feedback prior to the assessment			✓	
- Tutor monitoring of milestones related to LOs				
- Identify common pitfalls of the assignment				
- Marking criteria clarified with the tutor in class				
- Marking criteria discussed with peers in class				
- Marking criteria used to mark good exemplars or models		(Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005)	✓	
- Marking criteria available as a hard copy or on the VLE				
- Marking criteria used to mark peer's work				
- Marking criteria developed into a student friendly version				
- Feedback relates back to the LOs		(HEA, 2013, p. 15)	✓	
Facilitates the development of self-assessing (reflection) in learning.	P2*	(HEA, 2013, p. 19)		
- The module offers a range of opportunities for formative feedback			Extensive	
- Individual reflection on draft progress			✓	
- Student reflection on in-class tasks				
- Peer feedback activities in class		(Nicol, Thompson & Breslin, 2014)	✓	
- Select their preferred types of feedback				
- Predict their expected grade before submission				
- Examine the challenges of the assignment			✓	
- Identify strengths and weaknesses before submission		(Price et al., 2012)		
- Provide draft - redraft opportunities				
- Marking criteria developed into a student friendly version				
- Feedback poses questions that encourage reflection			✓	
Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.	P3*	(HEA, 2013, p. 21; 24)		
- Focus on higher order rather than lower thinking skills				
- Tutor feedback to individuals prior to the assessment			✓	
Characteristics of formative & in-class feedback: Highlights strengths and weaknesses Written from a reader's perspective ✓ Gives action points Directs students towards the higher order learning goals ✓ Uses non-authoritative language Prioritises 2 or 3 elements for development Provides constructive advice for improvement ✓ Uses a template to standardise feedback		(HEA, 2013, p. 12; 42)		
Encourages teacher and peer dialogue	P4*	(HEA, 2013, p. 28; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Carless et al. 2011)		
- Discuss feedback with peers in class		(Tinto, 2006)	✓	
- Share previous helpful feedback comments				
- Face-to-face discussion regarding feedback			✓	
- Provide dialogue opportunities about the assignment			Limited	
Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem	P5*	(HEA, 2013, p. 23; Dweck, 1999)		
- Tutor designed tasks to consolidate and check learning		(Angelo & Cross, 1993)		
- Select their preferred types of feedback		(Ajajwi & Schofield, 2013)		
- Recognising a student's progress based on formative feedback		(Black & William, 1998)	✓	
- Feedback includes motivational comments		(Scott, 2011)		
Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance	P6*	(HEA, 2013, p. 21; Saclier, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007)		
- Students develop their own action points		(Race, 2007)		
- Tutor feedback to individuals prior to the assessment				
- Develop skills necessary for the assignment			✓	
- Feedback explains why the grade is not higher or lower				
- Feedback covers omissions as well as errors		(Irons, 2007)		
Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.	P7*	(Glover et al., 2015)		
- Examine the challenges of the assignment				
All in-class activities provide the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice to inform on-going development				

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