Dialogic feed-forward assessment: re-energising the undergraduate essay

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Feedback Context

- Feedback should help students to:
  - understand current performance
  - understand how to close the ‘performance gap’ in future assignments
  - have the confidence and belief they have control over their success
  - maintain motivation throughout their degree

  (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

- But ... there is a recognised gap between staff perceptions of feedback and the student experience (Price et al., 2011)

- Low satisfaction scores for assessment/feedback in national student surveys
Feedback Intervention

• We implemented an assessment approach on a second year physical geography module to optimally support students’ use of feedback

• Traditional essay used innovatively to move students beyond ‘regurgitation’ of information

• Based on premise that feedback should occupy a central position within a **dialogic** approach to learning & teaching (Alexander, 2004; Sutton, 2009) and be **future-oriented** (Sadler, 2010; Beaumont *et al.*, 2011)
Definitions

- **Dialogic feedback** is the creation of meaning and understanding via spoken discourse between lecturer and student, or student to student (Nicol, 2010)

- **Feed-forward** refers specifically to feedback given by tutors that:
  - impacts upon an upcoming assignment
  - is given post-assignment with more specific direction on how this can be applied to future assignments (Carless, 2007)
Research Aims

1. Explore **student perceptions** of the dialogic feed-forward approach and whether it asserted a **positive influence on their learning experience**

2. Identify if and how the **task-specific behaviour** of students was altered by the assessment approach

3. Identify the extent to which students believed their **self-efficacy** and **self-regulation** skills were improved

4. Examine whether the assessment approach **enhanced student performance** and whether it could potentially raise **NSS scores** related to feedback
Module Assessment Structure

Students choose essay from selection
Students write draft essay
Students submit draft and attend ‘feed-forward’ meeting
Students reflect on meeting and essay – grading their work
Students complete and submit final essay

Supporting Lectures

25% module assessment
75% module assessment

Assessment discourse
Feedback discourse
Qualitative case study approach

• Individual semi-structured interviews ... two consecutive level 2 cohorts at end of module (2015-16 and 2016-17) ... analysed thematically via grounded theory

• Group semi-structured interviews with level 3 students elucidating post-assignment behaviour

• Essay performance data pre- and post-assessment intervention (inferential stats)

• Answers to NSS feedback questions
Conversation compels students to engage critically with their work:

‘when I have had drafts handed back to me and it’s just written over, either I don’t understand what they are trying to say, or it’s not clear enough. I can ask you questions if we’re talking to each other about it, it’s easier to see things ... It’s definitely better to talk about it’ R7

‘I’ve had it before where you get electronic feedback and you might not be sure what some of the comments mean ... being able to discuss it is important. You get that progress and can discuss how you can change it as opposed to just saying this is wrong’ R9
Motivational due to pertinent application:

‘the bit in between my draft and writing the final piece was the best bit because I knew what I was doing and could tweak it and I enjoyed that process of making it better. It gave me more confidence in my writing skills’ R7

‘my first draft was quite vague and I didn’t really know what direction I was going with it. Then, after speaking and having the feedback, I spent more time on it because I knew where I needed to go with it’ R8
‘it helped me to **realise how to critique my own essays** because I was able to sit down with you and go through the essay and know exactly why you were commenting on something ... **It allows me now to see in other essays the same things I’m doing**’ R10

‘**I never understood how good submitting a draft and getting feedback is** and now that I’ve done it I’m **definitely going to take advantage of it this year**’ R24
Students display increased self-efficacy: stronger beliefs in their capabilities to accomplish tasks in future

Believe learning is carried over to other level 2 assignments

Self-avow to altered level 3 behaviour:

‘I felt my critical analysis was improved through the feedback session and this has been helpful writing other essays and exam answers ... I was able to achieve higher 2:1s and 1sts at level 3 because my understanding of critical analysis had improved’
### Enhanced Student Performance

Significantly higher marks 2015-17 v 2011-13 (p = < 0.0001)

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Average Ecology mark 4.5% higher than average mark for other second year optional modules (p = 0.01)

Dialogic assessment

* Did not have a meeting
All students rated the module as giving them high quality feedback: detailed, conversational, personalised, timely (relevant application), multi-faceted.

All students said the feedback helped them clarify things they did not understand: proactive engagement with learning – they had to prepare for the meeting, think about their work, ask and answer questions.
Dialogic feed-forward assessment enhanced the student learning experience by:

- Increasing **motivation** to engage with current assignment
- Increasing **confidence** in their ability to complete the assignment
- Solidifying **good practice in-task** & supporting higher assignment **grades**
- Increasing **satisfaction** with the feedback process (potentially boosting NSS metrics)
- Encouraging feedback **proactive recipience** (Winstone *et al.*, 2017)
- Positively **changing behaviour** working towards future assignments (fostering self-efficacy & self-regulation)
References


Thank You For Listening

Questions?

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