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Improving the Student Learning Experience through Dialogic Feed-Forward Assessment

JGHE Celebration of Learning & Teaching in HE Geography

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Research context

Assessment – central to the student experience:

- ‘frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behaviour’ (Gibbs, 2006: 23)

Feedback – central to learning from assessment:

- ‘feedback quantity and quality are the probably the most important factors in enhancing students’ learning’ (Race, 1999: 27)

However:

- ‘the literature on student experiences of feedback tells a sorry tale’ (Handley et al., 2007: 1)
- ‘many students commented on ‘cryptic’ feedback which often posed questions, but gave no indication of where they went wrong’ (GfK, 2008: 8)

Research context

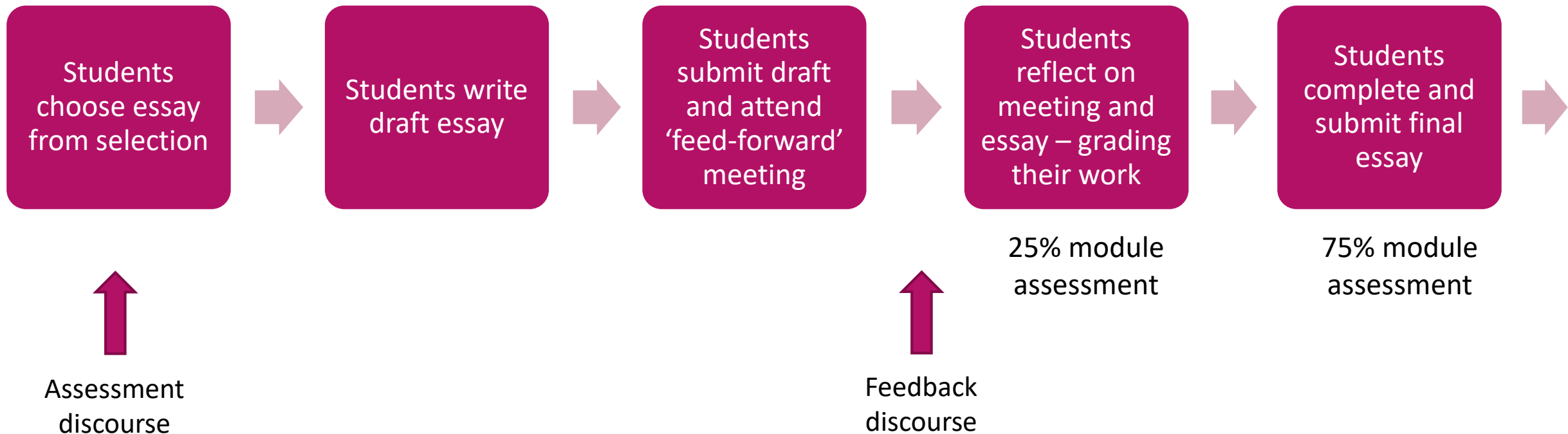
- feedback should help students to:
 - understand current performance
 - understand how to close the 'performance gap' in future assignments
 - have the confidence and belief they have control over their success
 - maintain motivation throughout their degree
- our research based on premise that feedback should occupy a central position within a **dialogic** approach to learning and teaching (Alexander, 2004; Sutton, 2009) and be **future-oriented** (Sadler, 2010; Beaumont *et al.*, 2011)

Research aims

- Test theory that if academic staff and students discuss feedback together students might learn to actively reflect upon feedback, developing their capacity to 'feed forward' this learning
- Examine whether this process asserts a positive influence on the student learning experience, supports student performance/achievement, and potentially raise NSS scores related to feedback

Module assessment structure

Supporting Lectures



Data collection

- qualitative case study approach
- semi-structured interviews from two consecutive cohorts
- second year ug optional physical geography module in a British university
- 24 interviews conducted so far from one cohort
- response rate of 67% : Male = 10 Female = 14
- full-time students, most aged 18-21 years

Results

Enhanced learning process

- **Time management** is improved and more time is put into assessment:

*'you don't just have the hand-in at the end of the semester. You have **something a bit earlier on to make you get more work done**, which I find really good because **it's more of a motivation and driver to get work done early**' R6*

'the meeting made me plan ahead and work towards a good draft early on' R7

'it pushes you to get more work done before the deadline and then you can have lots of feedback and then have more time to improve. I don't think I would have done as well without the meeting' R21

Results

Enhanced learning process

- **conversation** important in **engaging students 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*

*‘the meeting is good, because 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 quite important I think. You get that progress and can **discuss how you can change it as opposed to just saying this is wrong**’ R9*

Results

Enhanced learning process

- **Motivational due to pertinent application:**

*'the bit inbetween 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*

Results

Enhanced learning process

- changes **working practice** and improves **self-efficacy**:

*‘in ‘Climate Change’ you have the option to hand in a draft. And **this has made me want to submit a very full draft to get feedback**’ R3*

*‘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*

Results

Enhanced learning process

- delivers skills for **employability**:


*'there are skills that can be used elsewhere, like **splitting a task into planning and then evaluating** for yourself' R4*

*'just having a meeting with a professional academic, that's going to help you. That's going to **help you to act more formally**' R14*

*'it's always useful to **be reflective** and think about what you are doing. Whenever decisions are to be made you should think that way. **It's good for careers**' R16*

Results

Enhanced student performance



Band (%)	2011-2012 (%)	2012-2013 (%)	2015-2016 (%)	2016-2017 (%)
0-39 (inc. NS)	18	16	0	??
40-49	9	7	3	??
50-59	33	40	28	??
60-69	40	32	58	??
70-100	0	5	11	??
Number (n)	33	43	36	??

Dialogic assessment

Results

Enhanced NSS and TEF metrics

- **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

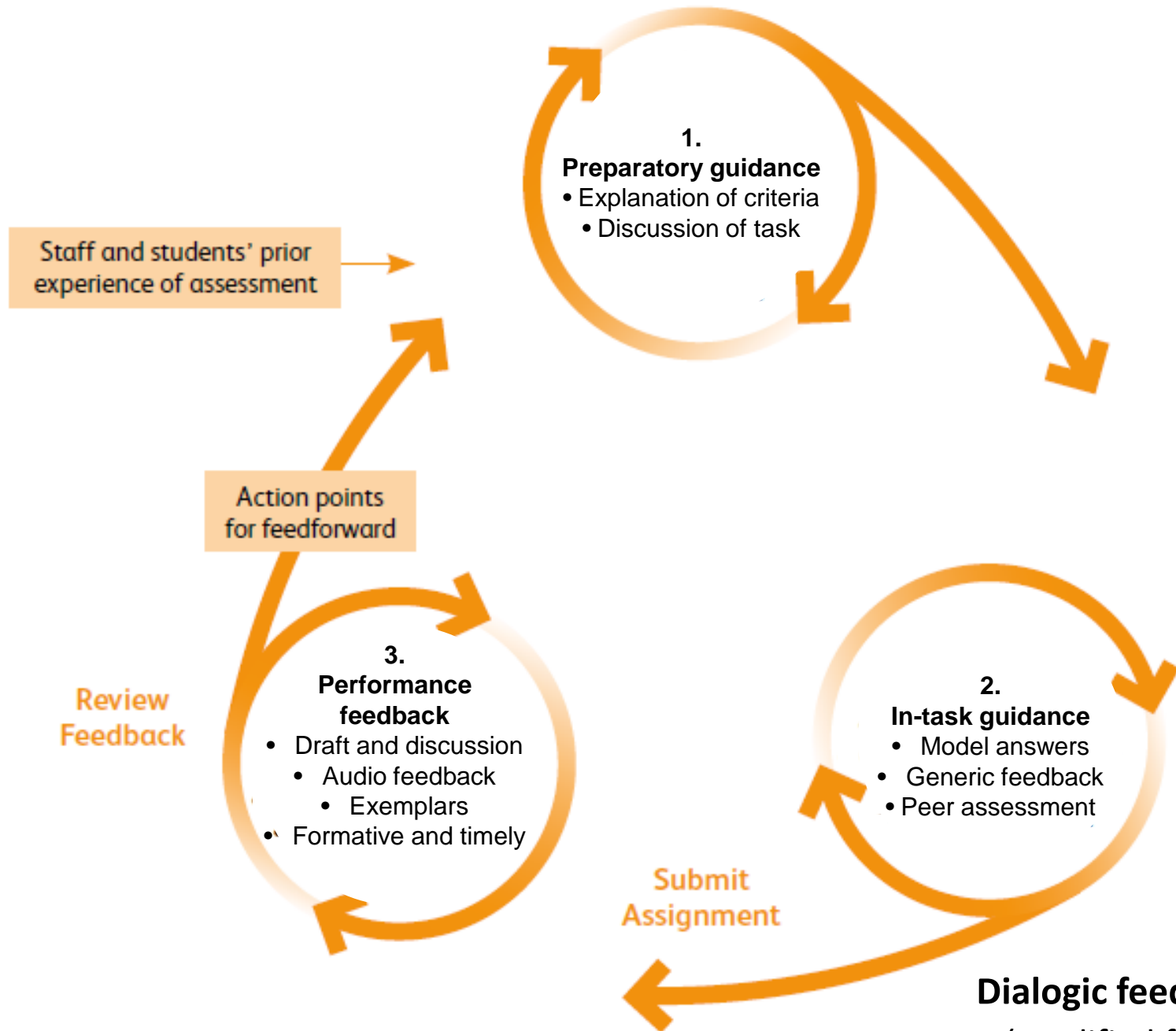


Conclusions

Dialogic feed-forward assessment enhanced the student learning experience by:

- Increasing motivation to engage with the assignment
- Increasing confidence in their ability to complete the assignment
- Solidifying good practice & supporting higher assignment grades
- Increasing satisfaction with the feedback process (potentially boosting NSS metrics)
- Positively changing behaviour in working towards future assignments (fostering self-efficacy) & boosting employability skills





Dialogic feed-forward assessment cycle
(Modified from Beaumont et al., 2011)

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