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The Role of Assessment Feedback in Developing Students' Academic Buoyancy

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Leeds, September 2016

Structure

- 
- Why we carried out the research
 - Our research questions
 - Our methodology
 - Our theoretical framework
 - Our findings
 - The implications for our practice
 - Questions

Why do the research?

Overall NSS score for our Education Studies course was 100%




However, analysis of the feedback showed lower scores for assessment and feedback

Desire to explore this so conducted a small scale piece of action research to improve practice

(Feed forward to Teaching Excellence Framework)


Current feedback practice

Written feedback delivered electronically within 20 working days containing:

- 
- Shaded descriptors against each criteria
 - Box for running commentary comments
 - Box for general comments
 - Box for recommendations
 - Grade

Research Questions

What do students find most and least useful in their assessment feedback?



How do students use feedback to approach future assessments?

How do students respond to feedback in terms of what they think, feel and do?

What are the implications for our practice?

Methodology



**Pilot Survey
(Bristol Online Surveys)
20 undergraduate students**




**Survey
(Bristol Online Surveys)
10 questions
100 undergraduate students on
BA Education Studies course**

Theoretical Framework

Educational Resilience

'the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences'


Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1996 p.2)



Martin and Marsh (2006) define academic resilience as *students' capacity to effectively deal with setback, challenge, and adversity in the academic setting*

Martin (2013) and Martin & Marsh (2009) distinguished between academic buoyancy and academic resilience. Academic buoyancy relates to the more everyday setbacks during formal learning, which may lead to a low level negative outcome such as an isolated poor grade or anxiety at a particular task.


Academic Buoyancy



According to Martin (2013), academic buoyancy is the ability to deal with ‘everyday setbacks’ and ‘hassles’ and refers to all students whereas academic resilience refers more to the few who may suffer more extreme adverse circumstances who may be the ‘hard to reach’ students.


Data Findings

91 responses

- 
- 1. Students use their feedback more than initially thought**
 - 2. Student use feedback in a range of ways**
 - 3. A negative emotional reaction to academic adversity in the form of a disappointing grade does not necessarily mean a student is not academically buoyant**
 - 4. Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified**

Data Finding 1:


Students use their feedback more than initially thought



Students sought improvement points from their feedback and felt that the information provided helped them to develop: 80/91


‘Giving me the knowledge of how I can improve on the next assignment’

Data Finding 2: Students use feedback in a range of ways

- 
- returned to feedback when working on another assessment: (28/91)
 - sought advice from a tutor or other: (25/91)
 - made a plan for future assessments: (16/91)
 - took notes: (12/91)
 - sought help from a skills book or web source: (10/91)

Data Finding 3:

Students often have a deep emotional response to disappointing feedback



64/91 of responses were focused around the emotions of feeling down and disappointed and losing confidence

'I'm always really upset and my self esteem always deteriorates'

'Gutted, confidence knocked for the next assignment.'

'Shut off, go quiet, get upset, eat'

Data Finding 4:

Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified.

1 'internal locus of control'

Taking responsibility for the work



43/89 appeared to express an internal locus of control.

'It tells me what i have done well as well of what i can improve on'


6/89 expressed an external locus of control.

'I think that the assignment wasn't fully explained'

Data Finding 4:

Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified.

2 'understanding the grade'



Understanding the grading system and why this piece of work received the grade it did

'It shows how and why I didn't get the grade I was aiming for with a chance to work towards achieving higher in the future'

Data Finding 4:

Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified.

3 'being forward looking'

Thinking of feedback as a formative, ongoing process

36/91 had constructive thoughts in response to a disappointing grade. Of these, 16/36 (44%) comments were focused on looking forward towards subsequent assignments

'How can I improve in future work?'

Data Finding 4:

Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified.

4 'being improvement focused'

Taking it as an opportunity to see how to improve.

51/91 students said that feedback helped them to manage disappointment . Of these 36/51 responses were improvement focused

'Because it outlines the areas I need to improve in in order to get the grade I wanted next time in another module.'

Data Finding 4:

Five indicators for academically buoyant behaviours were identified.

5 'having action-orientated behaviour'

Taking action in response to the feedback


36/89 responses were action orientated.

'Disappointed in myself, go to marker to understand feedback and work from it'

'Create a plan in order to improve and note down any important notes given by the person who marked it.'

Implications for our practice 1

Skills sessions – explicit focus on buoyancy



5 key elements: internal locus of control, understanding the grade, looking forward, being improvement focused, and adopting action-orientated behaviour.


Sessions on:

- Ownership and taking responsibility
- The context of grades and how the grading system works
- The formative journey – to see learning as continuous and module content as transferable
- Reflective practice and looking for improvement
- Actions that can be taken eg where to get help

Implications for our practice 2

Feedback practice

5 Clear ingredients of feedback:

- 
- a) Explanation of why the grade was given
 - b) Overview of strengths
 - c) Suggestions for improvement
 - d) Mention of future assessments
 - e) Encouragement towards action

Summary

It's shown us that students

- do value feedback and do more than just look at the grade
- use feedback in different ways (take notes, refer back)
- value different elements of feedback (grade description, identification of strengths, pointers for improvement)
- often have a deep emotional response to feedback


But that **academic buoyancy** can help them deal with these emotional responses

That key factors of academic buoyancy are to

- Demonstrate an internal locus of control
- Understand the grade
- Look forward
- Be improvement focused
- Be action-orientated

- And that to support the process we should:
 1. **Help develop the five elements of academic buoyancy**
(internal locus of control, understanding of the grading system, forward thinking, improvement orientation, action orientation)
 2. **Structure feedback to support academic buoyancy**
(provide a clear rationale for grade, focus on strengths, focus on future assessments, focus on things to improve, provide suggestions for action)

The Next Stage

- 
- Implement changes to our practice
 - Monitor module evaluations and NSS responses
 - Conduct a further survey at the end of next academic year



Questions?



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