

***“Let’s talk”*: the value of dialogic feedback**

Formative feedback has great potential to add value by *“giving students information to improve learning and allowing them opportunities to show this improvement”* (Espasa et al, 2018, p502). Beyond the specific assignment-related content, the process of delivering feedback can also provide the opportunity to interact through dialogue and build students’ confidence. For example, O’Shea and Delahunty (2018) note how we can use feedback to reassure students that they are ‘successful’ in a way that numerical grades alone cannot. However, students do not always take full advantage of the opportunities to ask for advice which we provide; ‘office hours’ can seem daunting and seeking feedback to help with a future assessment is not always a busy student’s most pressing issue.

We set out to address this problem in a core second year accounting module with 36 students of whom 14 had joined the university with lower entry qualifications on the extended four year version of their programme. The assessment for the module was a three-stage portfolio of an initial individual report, group presentation and final individual report, the linked assignments facilitating useful feedback (Gibbs, 2015). In order to encourage student engagement in the formative feedback process, we designed a comprehensive schedule of feedback delivery: on the initial report both before and after submission; on the mock and then the assessed presentation; and on the draft final report. The intention was to give all students the opportunity to improve their work, improvement being measured via a higher grade. The first stage of feedback delivery was the offer of formative feedback via email on a student’s draft initial report. However, only 11% of students took advantage of this opportunity. We addressed this by allocating appointments for face-to-face feedback sessions on the mock presentation and draft final report. The latter were attended by 47% of students which was encouraging but there is room for improvement next year. A few students came to that appointment with no draft which led to personalised feedback through dialogue about as yet unwritten work, using questions and answers to offer feedback on ideas and plans and to stimulate engagement in the learning process.

Using dialogic feedback to improve assessment grades was not our only focus. The Teaching Excellence Framework is looking for excellent teaching and excellent outcomes (Office for Students, 2019). Students with considerable commitments outside of university are not always able to find the time to plan their careers despite the hope for a financially secure future upon joining their programmes (O’Shea and Delahunty, 2018). Therefore an employability consultant was brought into the module team. Specifically, she delivered the formative feedback on draft presentations (focussing on slide design, presentation skills and teamwork) in her office to build a bridge for students to the university’s career service. This dialogue has facilitated further opportunities for conversations about employability-related matters.

Written feedback is a clear and permanent source of reference. However, alongside that, as an addition and not a replacement, dialogic feedback has great potential to engage with all students from the weakest to the strongest in a vibrant interchange of ideas and comments. It is through conversation that relationships are developed, support offered and confidence built – so let’s talk.

References

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