

Title: Reimagining feedback as a reflective learning activity.

Abstract

Providing students with feedback is often seen as an integral component of the grading process that is provided often directive or corrective tone. We will explore re-conceiving feedback as an opportunity to encourage student learning. We will propose an approach to providing feedback that builds assessment capital. Shifting comments to a conversational tone facilitates thinking, students are then encouraged to engage with the feedback and reflect upon how their work is assessed. Further it builds self-efficacy to apply this knowledge to future assessment. This approach to feedback draws the student into learning mode and supports a growth mindset. The feedback is provided to engage the student, to broaden their thinking and perspective and engage in metacognition, rather than training them to ‘ace’ a single type of assessment.

Three Keywords

Feedback, engagement, learning

Learning Objectives, Engagement, & Takeaway.

Explore differing types of feedback and levels of subsequent engagement with a view to consider alternative forms.

Throughout this round table discussion participants will work in facilitated groups and independent groups to explore alternative feedback phrases.

Participants will leave with an extended feedback phrase-bank that can be incorporated into their own feedback repertoire to extend the learning opportunity for your students.

The purpose of this PDW

In times where more learning is being taken online and students feel more disconnected, we need to take advantage of any and all opportunities to engage with our students as learners. One opportunity for engaging our students that is often overlooked is assessment feedback. This PDW provides participants with the opportunity reimagine assessment feedback as channel to connect and engage with our students. We propose that by shifting the purpose of feedback from corrective to developmental through a ‘conversational approach’ not only increases student’s engagement but will build student assessment self-efficacy and confidence as well. Participants will leave with an extended feedback phrase-bank that can be incorporated into their own feedback repertoire to extend the learning opportunity for your students. This type of feedback creates reflective practice through facilitative questions.

Introduction

Never before has there been a greater need to identify opportunities to make connections and build opportunities to engage students with formal learning environments. The devastating effects of COVID-19 and the move to fully online learning by students around the globe has seen students reporting feeling disconnected and isolated from their studies, their cohort and their teachers. We propose that a facilitative approach to assessment feedback provides us with a (somewhat) overlooked opportunity to facilitate that connection between faculty and student. Pre-COVID-19 faculty and students built strong connections and engagement in learning via classroom activities and interpersonal interactions; other opportunities to engage / build relationships were often overlooked. Feedback on assessment could be given in a directive or corrective manner focusing on the specific assessment task. The shift to mass online learning in 2020 has left students and teachers feeling more disconnected from each other, and the process of learning more broadly. Personal connection, incidental interactions, opportunities for two-way dialogue and informal questions to be posed and answered are at risk of being lost or worse still never experienced in our COVID affected courses. Hence, we propose that we use the opportunity of providing feedback on assessment to ‘connect’ and engage with the student. In addition, this ‘engaging’ approach to assessment feedback will also

encourage students to see beyond an achievement focus on a single task, and to increase their confidence and self-efficacy when approaching assessment more broadly.

We posit that feedback should be a ‘conversation’ with the student, recognising them as a person, not a piece of assessment. The comments we provide need to challenge students to go beyond providing direction and correction alone. For example, students often struggle with writing a clear introduction and as such feedback on introductions that is directive may say, “this is generic and could be applied to any paper for this cohort” or even “this is a background not an introduction to your paper”. Facilitative feedback written in a conversational manner would say, “how can you be more specific about what your paper includes such as which model was applied?” Through encountering this type of feedback, the student’s self-efficacy for future learning is developed and supported and, in turn, their confidence for future learning and tasks is increased.

While our facilitative feedback approach is relevant to all students, online learners are more often disconnected and ‘lost’ in the crowd and may lack a learning community of their own. Just as classrooms in 2020 have been reimagined through video and voice, the relationships that can be built and maintained during face to face lessons have been diminished. Watching but not interacting can be likened to consuming but not ‘tasting’. A disassociated process which may or may not impact the student at a deep level. For learning to be effective, students need to be engaged and their thought processes focused not just on ‘knowledge acquisition’ but to encourage them to seek new ways of approaching their work and life’s problems.

Since lockdown, the discussions in the corridors have centred around the challenges of engaging the student as a learner with online courses and the reduced opportunity for relationship building. However, the student is a learner in all interactions; not just the classroom or activities but also through their assessment items. Hence, reimagining feedback as a learning and teaching process rather than a corrective process shifts the type of feedback given. Learning is a relational process as shown by the conversational framework (Laurillard, 2001) whereby the teacher and the student interact. A facilitated conversational piece of feedback seeks to engage the student as a learner by asking questions not just providing direction or correction. Instead by building a relationship between the student and the marker, the student feels heard, seen and acknowledged at this time of

disassociated learning. Further it improves their sense of engagement and community in these times of disruption.

There is an opportunity for feedback to be explored as a means to connect with our students and create a learning opportunity. When assessment and feedback is conceptualised as a learning opportunity, a chance to connect and engage with the student, it can build their self-efficacy for learning and future assessment tasks. It becomes an intervention that directly teaches a growth mindset and can improve outcomes over time (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). By providing feedback that draws the student into a conversation through asking questions, the student engages beyond that 'moment in time' as an achievement (or lack thereof) to answer the question. This process facilitates their learning and builds a relationship between the student and the teacher. In considering feedback that is directive or corrective, it may fail to recognise the human behind the assessment, the one who has often spent hours preparing an answer or piece of work only to feel judged in isolation which leads to an achievement over growth mindset (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). It is now time to consider how the processes of feedback and teacher inputs can help support this shift in students.

There is, of course, temptation for both the student and the teacher to see an assessment as a moment in time – something measured and forgotten. This is a learning opportunity lost. Exams are often experienced this way with no or little feedback provided beyond what is wrong. The move to online teaching has, for many courses, reduced the use of exams and this too has created more work for markers, but also provided an opportunity to continue the learning beyond the classroom. Feedback can facilitate rather than direct and as a result support a student's growth. It invites them to think beyond their achievements as they shift from consuming the feedback to seeking to answer or resolve the question posed. This changes how they think – about the problems they may face, their proposed solutions and more importantly, the approaches they take to articulating these.

In talking with academics and markers their frustrations are often based upon the painstaking work they have done in trying to provide feedback and grade papers to demonstrate the level achieved and what could be done to increase this achievement. This is neither effective nor efficient because if it was, arguably all students could increase a grade scale each time they undertake an assessment item. Hence the reimagining of feedback can be conceived along Laurillard's (2009) conversational

framework to use facilitative questions to engage the student in cognition beyond consumption of comments. This also changes an assessment item to a learning item and the outcome of an assessment items shifts beyond achievement to a learning opportunity. In doing so, the role of feedback in assessment in another opportunity to focus the student on their development for the future.

Given Carless and Boud (2018) view of feedback as “*the process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies*”(p1315) it seems time to consider more closely the way feedback is written including the mindset of the markers who are providing it. It is unclear if many academics are ‘taught’ to provide assessment feedback. They may get some oversight if working in a coteaching/marking environment, however, like many tasks learning occurs as if by osmosis, modelled upon the academics who taught them. Thus, many markers were trained to give feedback in a manner more fitting for rewrite and resubmit than as a learning process to prepare them for non-academic careers. As markers, we too need to stop instructing /directing and start asking. Simply changing from a statement ‘this is descriptive’ to “instead of describing what happened, can you make meaning of why this is important?” achieves both an instruction of what to do a correction of what was needed and opens the possibility to engage the student to answer analyse by answering the posed question.

There are further problems in getting students to engage with the feedback given as in an academic context assessment may be seen as a situation to pass and move on from or where the grade meets the student’s expectations and needs, they see little or no desire to alter their approach. Thus, a great learning opportunity is lost. However, feedback that asks a question can lead the reader to more deeply engage as they seek to answer it. It is this engagement with the feedback where change can occur. It becomes a part of the learning not just a judgement of it. Enabling “them to internalise the feedback to become self-regulated learners “(Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) is the first part of such change.

Magkoufopoulou (2020:p2) argues that “to engage with the feedback they will need to identify its value, be able to decipher it and be in the right environment to engage with it.” Hence to gain engagement with our students we must seek to build relationship and humanise the feedback given. Just as a good performance appraisal will focus on asking probing questions to facilitate the

thinking behind the action and necessitate the change by connecting beyond a cognitive level to an emotional/relational need to change our feedback must do this too. We must be clear in our reasons and demonstrate to our students the value of it. We need to enable them to internalise the feedback leading them to be more self-regulated as learners (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). It is time to do more than evaluate or judge the outcome.

Facilitative feedback is clearly different. While directive feedback provides an instruction ‘do x’ to facilitative piece of feedback invites the student into a conversation asking them ‘what do you think needs to be done now?’ This approach encourages the student in the safety of their own space to engage more deeply and to make meaning. In doing so they will commence the change to their approach, thinking and often their behaviour. Facilitative feedback given as a conversational starter, becomes another lever for student learning. It encourages the student to be active within the process. It sees the student as part of the conversation, not consuming or receiving alone but as a sense making and engaged learner. It enables and allows the feedback to be acted upon developing capability through a process that is stimulated rather than passive and receptive.

Workshop Agenda

The workshop will involve a mix of small group/ breakout groups and ‘all participant’ debriefs and discussions. We will explore the ‘conversational framework’ approach to providing feedback and participants will enhance their personal feedback ‘phrase-bank’. The proposed agenda is as follows:

Time	Activity	Lead
5 mins	Welcome and introductions. The workshop facilitators start the considering the types of feedback they give, drivers for feedback and current outcomes.	Facilitators
10 mins	In breakout groups discuss examples of most common types of comments made. Challenges in providing feedback	Participants

	AIM: unpack the inherent comments made and nature of these.	
10 mins	Debrief the group discussions	All
10 mins	Changing the input to change the output. Building comment banks. Facilitating thinking to create learning	Facilitators
15 Mins	Participants will consider the 3 most commonly used pieces of feedback to students and look to build an educational resource to be shared.	Participants
10 mins	Debrief and the future of 'facilitative feedback' to develop both educational and learning capital. Summarise outcomes from the workshop, discuss next steps and possible opportunities and farewells	All

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