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Making sense of expectations and feedback

David Carless
University of Hong Kong
Glasgow, June 9, 2015
Overview

1. Developing a ‘nose’ for quality
2. The research process
3. When feedback does not connect
4. Dialogic use of exemplars
Aim of paper

➢ To analyse students’ experiences of understanding assessment and feedback processes in the first year
Research process

- Classroom observations
- Interviews with teachers & students
Making History course

- Foundation level, year 1, 110 students

- ILOs:
  - Critical engagement with representations of past; interpret connections between past & present
History Assessment

- Fieldwork report (30%): Museum visit

- Individual project (40%): draft 10%, final 30%

- Participation (30%):
  - tutorial participation 15%
  - short weekly written responses 15%
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS
Student views on criteria

- “Assessment criteria are almost the same for every subject: key words like critical or analytic”

- “Such criteria are rather vague to me”

- “I didn’t look carefully at the criteria ... such descriptions are hard for me to understand”
Feedback on Juliet’s project

- “He provided me useful critical advice, such as more comparison”
- “I can remember the feedback well because I built it into my final paper”
Juliet’s outcomes

- Juliet’s grades: A+ (project); B (museum report)

- Uptake of specific feedback comments but ...

- “I never thought of applying a tutor’s advice to other assignments”
Link to literature

- Differing perceptions of feedback between staff & students (Adcroft, 2011; Carless, 2006)
- Students chasing what an individual teacher wants (Orsmond & Merry, 2013)
Feedback on Geoff’s project

- Feedback: “too narrative ...provide more evidence to support your arguments”

- Student action: reduce details, reduce narrative .. “make it like an essay”
Geoff’s confusion

- Outcome: grade C: student frustration
- “If I had known he wanted the details, I should have submitted the first draft ... I am confused about the criteria”
Link to theory

- Externally rather than internally regulated
- Feedback on drafts can lead to dependency
- Academic discourse often does not connect
POTENTIAL WAYS FORWARD
Use of Facebook

- Some students uploaded drafts of work in progress and received peer feedback
Peer feedback

- Potentially more plentiful ...

- But peers often viewed as lacking expertise
To give is better than to receive

Providing feedback more cognitively engaging

(Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Nicol et al., 2013)
Exemplars convey messages that nothing else can (Sadler, 2002)
Rationale for exemplar use

- Develop student understanding of criteria and standards (O’Donovan et al, 2004; Hendry et al, 2011)
Exemplars & Feedback

- Support students in understanding teacher feedback (Handley & Williams 2011; Orsmond et al. 2002; To & Carless, 2015)
Problem of copying ‘models’

Students seeing exemplars as models

Imitation may lead to plagiarism

"Wait! Wait! Listen to me! ... We don't HAVE to be just sheep!"
CONCLUSION
Nose for quality

- Dialogue around exemplars can support students in developing a feel for quality
Learning to make judgments

- Developing expertise in making judgments may help students decode and engage with feedback processes.
Closing feedback loops

➢ It’s only feedback if students take some action
Questions

or

Comments
My definition of feedback

“A dialogic process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies”.

The University of Hong Kong

Old paradigm
Feedback as monologic information transfer
Conventional feedback

New paradigm
Feedback as dialogic interaction
Sustainable feedback
## Shifts in feedback priorities

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<tr>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
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<tr>
<td>In-class dialogic feedback within module time</td>
<td>Unidirectional comments after completion of module</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written feedback comments on first assessment task of module</td>
<td>Written feedback comments on final task of module</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback for first year students</td>
<td>Feedback for final year students</td>
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