

Assessment for Learning: the case for feedback construction



David Nicol

Professor of Higher Education

Centre for Academic Practice and Learning Enhancement (CAPLE)

Director, Peer project (www.reap.ac.uk/peer.aspx)

University of Strathclyde, Scotland

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Surveys of Feedback in higher education

- Dissatisfaction: local and national surveys
- UK National Student Survey [USS] -timeliness, detail and clarity of advice about how to improve

Institutional Remedies

- Faster turnaround times for assignments
- Electronic feedback, including audio feedback
- Feedback events and clinics to increase dialogue
- Improved feedback rubrics/criteria
- Feedback calendars to clarify timings
- Awareness raising campaigns to highlight student role in feedback
- Etc.

Peer feedback: augmenting teacher feedback

- Increasing quantity and variety of feedback
- No extra workload on teacher with software (e.g. PeerMark, Aropa)
- More timely - e.g. collaborative projects
- Simulates professional life - reconciling different feedback perspectives

Problems with feedback as ‘telling’

- Teachers can never know what students need
- Don't know extent of feedback use
- Students often passive - don't pick up or read
- Yet always want more feedback
- Feedback as ‘telling’ not good for developing ‘tacit’ expertise
- **Does not directly develop students’ own capacity to make evaluative judgments**

The argument

Not enough attention has been focused on the **potential of peer feedback** not just as a way of increasing the quantity and quality of the feedback students receive, but **as a way of giving students practice in constructing feedback.**

The focus

- Scenarios where students make evaluative judgements about the work of peers and provide a feedback commentary, usually written
- Not talking about scenarios involving
 -informal feedback in collaborative tasks
 -students evaluating each other's contribution to group working
 -students grading/marking each other's work, although some rating might be part of peer design

Benefits of feedback construction (1)

Constructivist rather than ‘telling’ paradigm

1. High-level cognitive activity: cannot be passive
2. Students actively exercise assessment criteria from many perspectives
3. Develops deep disciplinary expertise
4. Learn about different approaches and that quality is not a fixed attribute
5. Moves assessment from being a private activity

Benefits of feedback construction (2)

6. Learn to self-assess own work - the same skills are involved

Develops capacity to make evaluative judgements - necessary for life beyond university and underpins all graduate attribute development

Example 1: Peer feedback

Laboratory work

- Reason - poor quality of lab reports in science
- Strategy - students organised in groups and produce poster to represent their lab report
- Peer process - hang poster in class and all students individually walk round analyse posters and write feedback on them (e.g post-its): questions, suggestions, inaccuracies etc
- Result - significant improvements in lab work and reporting, positive competition in class, students did not want to look bad.
- Features - regular activity, public, opportunities to use learning in subsequent tasks



Example 2: peer feedback

Sociology class

- Students write essay on one topic from three
- Each student provides feedback on three essays in another topic anonymously using rubric
- The rubric: write a short summary of the essay, comment on and rate (four point scale) the structure, arguments, evidence, writing, suggest ways of improving the essay.
- Students receive peer reviews of own essays
- They then comment on and rate their own essay using same rubric.
- Finally, students rate 3 reviews (on others' work) and comment on how useful they think they would be to author.
- Grading: for participating in the task, for their own essay and for their review of it.



Learning opportunities in peer review

1. Producing the target assignment
2. Reviewing and producing peer feedback
3. Receiving feedback from peers
4. Responding to peer reviews (on own reviews of those given to others)
5. Self-reviewing one's own work (e.g. after peer review)
6. Receiving feedback from the teacher - e.g. on the assignment, peer review or self-review

1-3 comprise the essentials of peer review while 4-6 are further options.

Issues raised about peer feedback

- Students' don't know how to 'critique'
- Students too harsh and critical
- Students don't like to be identified
- Students will 'steal' each others' work
- Peer review takes up too much time
- Good students get nothing from peer review

- Marking and grading undermines learning from peer review

Principles of effective peer review

Peer review should

1. Engage students in active use of criteria and standards
2. Involve students in constructing commentaries in relation to peer judgements, not just marks
3. Involve practice in both analytic (componential) and holistic (configurational) judgements about quality
4. Facilitate dialogue around the object and quality of the review
5. Ensure an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect
6. Integrate self-review activities within peer review designs
7. Ensure that peer review is a regular activity and not a one-off event

Peer Review in Education Evaluation [PEER]

PEER project funded by JISC: led by University of Strathclyde

The aims are to:

- Review evidence base for peer review
- Develop educational designs for peer review
- Identify software support for peer review
- Pilot implementations of peer review with large student numbers
- Produce guidelines for higher education - why do it, how to do it, pitfalls and solutions and software possibilities.

see <http://www.reap.ac.uk/peer.aspx>



Questions and Discussion