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Student perceptions of self-generated feedback: “It made the course make sense”.

Abstract

**Willie McGuire, David Nicol, and Gemma Haywood
University of Glasgow**

In the Professional Enquiry and Decision-Making course at the University of Glasgow, part of the MEd in Professional Practice, students write a 1500-word assignment, which they often find challenging. The task is new and complex; their work must be original, and they are often unclear about requirements associated with each assessment criterion. Rubrics, descriptions of what is required, are of limited help. Existing support, where students received peer and tutor feedback prior to assignment submission improves outcomes but incurs high staff workload and does not necessarily foster independence. Therefore, a complementary intervention was devised in which students generated their own feedback (Nicol, 2021).

International studies have shown that feedback is an area of European or even global concern for students even though they can create their own feedback by comparing their work against rubrics, exemplars, or peers' work (e.g., Lipnevich *et al*, 2014; Nicol and McCallum, 2022). Indeed, Nicol (2021) has developed a model to explain this in which the core feedback generation mechanism is comparison, thus arguing that capacity-building for self-regulation requires student development of inner feedback capability *via* explicit comparisons. (Nicol and Selveretnam, 2022).

Prior research gives exemplars *before* student work to clarify requirements, although recently some have argued for their use *after* student work: a form of post-production feedback (To, Panadero and Carless, 2021). However, we argue that both modes support self-feedback production. Exemplars can be similar in presentation format and subject topic to the work the student has produced or similar in format but different in topic. With this assignment, the latter enables a focus on writing (e.g., structure, argument) without distraction from content.

Five aspects of the MEd assignment served as focus for feedback improvements: the writing of literature search strategies, literature review, ethics application, research dissemination and limitations in research designs. For each, students: (i) compared exemplars of quality work (different topic/similar format) selected from students in previous years and identified common principles; (ii) produced their own work; and (iii) compared their findings from (1) with own work. The tutor guided students through the first comparison in class with second completed individually out of class (Nicol, 2021).

An online survey was deployed to generate quantitative data on the students' perceptions of the extent of learning from the different comparison processes. The survey was constructed based on the findings two focus groups. The process of reflexive thematic analysis designed by (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2014, 2019) and developed in (Braun and Clark 2020) was deployed to identify, analyse, and report on emergent themes within the data sets. (Braun and Clarke 2006:79). The use of a Big Q approach enabled us to use both qualitative and quantitative data which mapped onto our research design to test a theory and to let the data lead.

Students were extremely positive about this approach. The *before* comparison clarified understanding of task requirements thereby reducing anxiety and enabled them to generate feedback while producing their own work, although this did reduce the need for the second comparison. We will discuss how to address this issue. Most reported that delineating the comparison process raised awareness that they could take more agency over feedback processes.

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