The Use of Formative Peer Assessment as Feedback in a Tutorial Context

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Chapter 3: The use of formative peer assessment as feedback in a tutorial context

3.1: Introduction

The tHE portfolio requires a variety of formats for the submission of individual teaching development reports, including a report, a poster and an academic paper. I decided to present this particular innovation as a poster. A reduced A4 version is presented here, but an A1 copy has also been submitted and will be displayed at the presentation session in mid-June. A brief outline of the development follows, but the poster should be referred to for further details.

Following discussion of my proposed teaching development as part of the induction assignments outlined in the previous chapter, I developed the idea of using formative peer assessment in the tutorial context. Initially, I had planned to carry out the exercise using a module-related tutorial essay. However, during my first year of teaching, I had noticed a particular issue that this development may help with. In the second semester, the focus of the second year tutorial programme is on dissertation preparation. This is a major piece of independent research undertaken over the summer vacation between second and third year and contributes to one eighth of the overall degree assessment. Students were often overwhelmed at the seeming enormity of the task ahead. Initially, identifying a research topic was problematic and the first tutorial assignment in Semester 2 of the IGES syllabus is to write a short proposal on three potential topics. This is followed up by taking one of the project ideas and completing a literature review. I found in my first year of teaching, through marking these tutorial assignments and dissertation drafts, that students struggled with the concept of the literature review. I had also been asked for advice on “what is meant by a literature review?” by two third year tutees, who were completing literature reviews for other modules.

There seemed to be a common problem amongst students in finding an appropriate structure, with sources often presented in turn, rather like a list. Furthermore, many students tended to present information that they had read, rather taking the step towards critical evaluation. Some of these points were addressed in a brief guide to essay writing that I produced in 2002 with one of my colleagues, Dr. Deborah Dixon.
that is used as a discussion aid in first year tutorials (see Appendix 2). Due to the more specific remit when asked to do a "literature review" as opposed to an essay, I felt that this tutorial assignment was an ideal problem to which my proposed development could be applied.

The poster in the following section outlines the four different stages of the teaching development:

- Identification of the issue
- Plan of how the development will be implemented and how feedback will be obtained
- Implementation of the development
- Evaluation and reflection

Examples of students draft and final essays are included in Appendix 3 along with the feedback that was provided electronically.
Formative peer assessment as feedback in a tutorial context

Sarah J. Davies
Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wales, Aberystwyth
(sjd@aber.ac.uk)

Introduction: identifying the problem(s)

- Previous experience as a tutor indicated that prospective physical geography dissertation students in Year 2 struggled with the concept of 'the literature review.'
- It was noticed that students did not always incorporate feedback on tutorial essays – did they have problems relating tutor's comments to their own work?
- Limited opportunities to practice essay writing skills at Level One, but by Level Two it is an increasingly important form of assessment.
- Can more effective feedback be offered to students that helps improve general essay writing skills and addresses the specific issue concerning the literature review?

The Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutorial Discussion</th>
<th>What is a literature review?</th>
<th>How will it be assessed?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of Draft</td>
<td>Dependent research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-review of Draft</td>
<td>Initial reflections on own submission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial Discussion</td>
<td>Tutor also provides feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of Draft</td>
<td>Deeper reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Submission</td>
<td>Improved understanding?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Plan to incorporate peer review into the tutorial context (yellow shading indicates feedback opportunities for both students and the author)

The Learning and Teaching Context

- Effective use of literature in project planning is a key research skill (Figure 2) and provides an explicit link between teaching and research
- Active learning is promoted through self-assessment and through reflection on strengths and aspects that need further work (Bransford et al., 2000).
- The peer review element of this exercise encourages reflective practices amongst students.

![Critical Evaluation of Published Material](image)

Engages with academic debates identified in the literature
Identification of perceived gaps in knowledge
Provides opinions on the quality of the material consulted
Effective identification of dissertation research questions

Figure 2: The role of the literature review in effective dissertation planning

Acknowledgements

- I would like to thank Rose Lonsdale in the Staff Development Office for her helpful comments on my initial ideas about this teaching development. I am grateful to the four second year physical geography students who kindly agreed to participate in this exercise and provided very useful feedback.

References


Implementation

- A group of four students agreed in advance to take part in the assessment
- The initial tutorial focused on the nature of literature reviews and a discussion of the IGES essay marking criteria
- In addition to peer review, I also annotated the essays and gave a guide mark
- Student feedback on the exercise was obtained at three stages

Evaluation and Reflection

- Participants welcomed the discussion of marking criteria, which some commented they were not familiar with; although there was some initial apprehension about marking work, e.g.
  "Having never marked essays or assignments before, let alone at such a high level, it initially appears rather difficult to assess fellow students work." This student found the marking criteria helped and he concluded...marking assignments materialized to be quite straightforward with adequate knowledge of what my personal views are...complemented with help from assessment criteria."

- Another student, however, remarked "I would say this essay is a good literature review and by looking at the assessment criteria (which is very hard to follow in this case)."

- When asked if the peer review process was valuable, all four students agreed, one even going so far as to suggest that this should be done for every tutorial essay. One student said that it was easier to identify weaknesses in their own work through looking at a range of examples in this way.

- When I received the final submissions, two students displayed a clear improvement whilst the other two indicated minimal reflection on the peer review comments – perhaps giving a provisional mark was a disincentive to make further efforts, or the feedback may have been unclear.

Conclusions and future focus

- The student response to the exercise was very positive. I will definitely use this exercise in the future. It provides a link between teaching and research through use of the peer review process and encourages deeper learning through reflection. I would not provide a guide mark next time to assess whether this has an impact on the response to feedback. I will also consider the possibility of students developing the marking criteria as some found the detailed matrix rather confusing for their first experience of marking essays.

Additional Source:

Figure 3: Adaptation of the Kolb learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). The implementation of this exercise involves reflective learning on the part of the students, through the development of their literature review and on my part as I evaluate the effectiveness of this development.