Heidi Scott
Sefydliai Daeryddiaeth a Gwyddorau Daear | Institute of Geography and Earth Science

2008

SYLWER: O ganlyniad i newidiadau yng ngofynion portffolio’r TUAAU, nid oes gan bob cylch dysgu a lwythir i CADAIR yr un nodwedddion. Mae’n bwysig bod y cylchoedd dysgu hyn yn cael eu defnyddio fel adnoddau yn unig, ac nid fel canllawiau i’r hyn sydd ei angen i fodloni gofynion y TUAAU. Os oes gennych ymholiadau, cysylltwch â thestaff@aber.ac.uk.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to changes in the requirements of the PGCTHE portfolio, not all teaching cycles uploaded to CADAIR share the same properties. It is important that these teaching cycles are only used as a resource and not a guide to what is needed to fulfil the requirements of the PGCTHE. If you have any queries, please contact thestaff@aber.ac.uk.

TYSTYSGRIF UWCHRADDEGIG ADDYSGU MEWN ADDYSG UWCH

POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Cylch Dysgu 1 | Teaching Cycle 1

Formative Assessment Through Two-Way Feedback

PRIFYSGOL
ABERYSTWYTH
UNIVERSITY

Mae’r Cylch Dysgu hwn o’r portffolio TUAAU wedi’i gyflwyno i CADAIR gyda chaniatâd yr awdur uchod. Adnodd i’w ddefnyddio gan ymgeiswyr y TUAAU yn y dyfodol a staff eraill ydyw, fel rhan o’u datblygu proffesiynol ym Mhrifysgol Aberystwyth. Erys yn ei ddo i’r awdur a Phrifysgol Aberystwyth. Os hoffech dyfynnu’r gwaith hwn neu gyfeirio ato, cysylltwch â’r awdur. Ceir y manylion cyswllt yn http://www.aber.ac.uk/cy/directory/

This Teaching Cycle of the PGCTHE portfolio has been submitted to CADAIR with the permission of the author detailed above. It is to be used as a resource for future PGCTHE candidates and other staff as part of their professional development at Aberystwyth University. It remains the property of the author and Aberystwyth University. If you wish to cite this work then please contact the author. Contact details can be found at http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/directory/.
Teaching Development I: Formative assessment through two-way feedback

"One does not teach what one does not know. But neither, in a democratic perspective, ought one to teach what one knows without, first, knowing what those one is about to teach know and on what level they know it; and second, without respecting this knowledge." (Freire, 1994, page 113)

Introduction

Understandably, pedagogic literature has much to say about the crucial role that university teachers must play in student learning by providing feedback that is timely, constructive and comprehensible to the recipients. Without high quality feedback from teachers to students, the ultimate purpose of formative assessment - to enable students to learn as the course progresses - is inevitably lost (see e.g. Biggs and Tang, 2007; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Pitts, 2005; Yorke, 2003). It is equally clear, however, that teachers must first find ways of obtaining useful and useable feedback from students about their learning in order to allow formative assessment to take place. As Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, page 214) observe, "Good feedback practice is not only about providing accessible and usable information that helps students improve their learning, but it is also about providing good information to teachers."

A widespread problem highlighted by recent studies of teaching in Higher Education is the perpetuation of assessment methods that are no longer compatible with today's prevailing pedagogic philosophies. In other words, while the majority of institutions and individual lecturers have begun to embrace student-centred learning and teaching models, summative assessment in the form of unseen examinations at the end of a course of

---

1 While summative assessment is a 'high-stakes' form of assessment associated above all with testing student learning, most typically at the end of a course of study, formative assessment instead seeks to assist the ongoing process of learning by providing both teachers and students with the information that they need to help the latter correct mistakes and develop their skills further. As Yorke (2003) points out, however, the binary distinction that is often made between the two forms of assessment is unhelpful, as the two are closely interlinked. Summative assessment, for instance, can also have a formative purpose, especially if it is used at an early stage in a given course of study. A similar point is made by Ramsden (2003, page 205, who argues that "the two separate worlds of assessment called 'formative' and 'summative' in the assessment manuals do not exist in reality."
study continues to be used as the principal or only method of evaluating student learning (Yorke, 2003, page 483). In many cases, assessment by examination - and especially unseen examination - fails to evaluate students on their understanding of a given subject, but tests instead their ability to memorise and recall pieces of information. These issues are pertinent to the two modules discussed below, as in each case summative assessment is based entirely on end of semester examinations.

The purpose of this teaching cycle, however, was not to explore how summative assessment may be designed in such a way that students are tested on the higher order critical skills that we wish them to learn. Instead, it constituted an attempt to implement formative assessment within the context of two modules that assess students exclusively by means of final examinations. As such, it sought to explore ways of gaining insight into student progress at an early stage in the modules and, by means of this information, of providing feedback to students that would productively assist their learning by allowing them to resolve misunderstandings well in advance of the exam. It also sought to obtain feedback from students about my teaching, to allow me to make any necessary changes or modifications while the module was still underway².

In carrying out this intervention in the context of a second year module entitled 'The Americas', I discovered that obtaining useful feedback from students - and in some cases obtaining feedback of any kind - was not always an easy process, and hence the focus of this teaching cycle was widened in order to address the problems that this involved. As a result of the difficulties that I encountered in attempting to collect feedback from students taking The Americas module, I took the decision to explore the issue further in a first year module to which I contributed in the first semester of 2006-7. My report is consequently divided into two sections, the first of which focuses on the second year module to which I contributed in semester 2 of 2005-6 and the second on the first year module taught in the following academic year.

² These aims resonate with Ramsden’s (2003, page 205) understanding of assessment as “being a) a means of helping students to learn, b) a way of reporting on student progress and c) a way of making decisions about teaching.”
The report concludes with two shorter sections that examine the advantages and limitations of my intervention and reflect on my personal learning.

**Part 1: Introducing formative assessment into 'The Americas' module**

**Overview**

Since the academic year 2005-6 I have co-taught a second year optional module entitled 'The Americas' that aims to introduce students to the varied social, cultural and political landscapes of Latin America and the United States from the colonial era until the present day. While the first five lectures (on the United States) were taught in 2005-6 by a colleague who was also the course co-ordinator, I was responsible for teaching the second set of five lectures (on Latin America). Taught over the course of one semester, this module is worth ten credits and, like a number of second year modules, is assessed exclusively by means of an end of term seen examination. (The exam paper is distributed to students by the module co-ordinator at the end of the final lecture a few weeks in advance of the examination). 3

In 2005-6 I was contributing to this module for the first time, and hence I realised that it was especially important to gauge students' understandings of the materials that my lectures dealt with to allow me to address points of difficulty and, if necessary, change my approach or emphasis well in advance of the examinations. The content of my lectures on Latin America, moreover, drew rather heavily on my own specialist research areas, and consequently I was very much aware of the risk that I ran of overloading students with excessive detail and complexity. In addition, the module is taught in ten two-hour lectures but is unsupported by seminars, tutorials or by coursework that is submitted mid-term, making it very difficult, within the formal structures of the module, to gain insight into student learning as the course progresses.

In the previous semester (which was my first semester of full-time teaching) I soon became aware that students were generally reluctant to ask questions to clarify doubts, not only in front of other students during the lecture, but also at the end of the lecture on a one-to-one basis. I therefore

---

3 See Appendix 1.1 for a copy of the module description. This relates to the current year 2007-8; there have been a number of changes in terms of lecture topics since 2006, but otherwise the format of the module is the same as it was in 2006 when the development was carried out.
decided to implement a variant of what is often referred to as the 'muddiest point' exercise at the end of each lecture as a means of gaining insight into students' understanding of the material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary of module details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title:</strong> The Americas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semester:</strong> 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact hours:</strong> 10 x 2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of staff:</strong> 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credits:</strong> 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment:</strong> 100% end of semester seen exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of students registered in 2006-7:</strong> 68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Implementation**

The 'muddiest point' exercise involves requesting students, at the end of a teaching session, to note down on a Post-it note or other piece of paper the concept or area that they found least clear or comprehensible. These notes, which are collected as the students leave, should allow the lecturer to identify if particular aspects of what s/he has discussed require clarification.

The advantage of this approach, in contrast to asking students to feed back their queries verbally, is that they are able to convey their doubts and questions to the lecturer without having to express them in front of their peers - an experience which many find intimidating. At the same time, it is possible to obtain a much more comprehensive picture of student understanding because (in theory) all students who are present should participate in this exercise.

Because I was interested in obtaining feedback from students not only about those areas which they found least clear but also about their views on what the most significant points or concepts of my lectures were, I adapted the above model slightly. Rather than requesting them, therefore, to note

---

4 For a detailed discussion of this approach, with examples of its applications in various disciplines, see Angelo and Cross (1993).
down the 'muddiest point' on the Post-it notes that I distributed, I asked them to make a note of two things:

i) The key points of the lecture.
ii) Any questions or doubts about the lecture contents.\(^5\)

In addition, I was interested in obtaining timely feedback about my teaching (e.g. use of slides, pace, handouts etc.), and therefore I also encouraged the students to use the Post-it notes to record any comments or suggestions that they might have about the classes.

**Implementation**

**Day 1**

**Lecture topic: Conquest and colonisation**

**Note:** *The first half of the lecture was observed by Or Luke Oesforjes*

I initially tried out the technique described above at the end of the first of my five lectures on Latin America, but with rather limited success. Out of approximately 40 students, only nine used the Post-it notes that I had distributed.\(^6\) The reasons for this, I believe, were twofold. Firstly, my lecture overran slightly and students were clearly keen to leave (especially as the lecture was scheduled for 16:00-18:00!). Secondly, I conveyed my instructions verbally and, I believe, gave the impression that this was a wholly voluntary exercise rather than one in which I expected them all to participate (see Appendix 1.2 for examples of responses that students handed in on the Post-it notes).

In addition, only one of the nine responses actually included a question about the content of lecture: the remaining eight consisted of comments, questions and suggestions relating to issues such as reading lists, book

---

\(^5\) This approach may therefore been seen as a 'hybrid' of the 'muddiest point' and the 'one-minute paper' exercise which, as discussed by Stead (2005, page 119), generally requires students to write down answers to the following questions: "(1) What was the most important thing you learned in class today? (2) What question is unanswered?"

\(^6\) Although 68 students were registered, the number of students who attended was usually around 40.
Day 2
Lecture topic: The Spanish American City

In light of the limited response that I received on my first attempt, I decided to modify my approach on the second occasion. Rather than simply making an informal verbal request that students take a few moments at the end of the lecture to note down key points, I formalised this by putting my request in writing on a Powerpoint slide. I also decided to ask them, on this occasion, to respond to specific questions about the lecture topic, as I felt that this might encourage them to respond in greater detail. Students were asked to respond to the following questions and, as in the previous lecture to write their responses on a Post-it note:

- What were the key characteristics of the towns and cities that were founded in colonial Spanish America?
- In what ways did city/town foundation and urban space play a role in the colonisation of Spanish America?

Students were also invited (orally) to ask questions and make comments and suggestions on the Post-it notes.

This time, I received 33 responses, which represented the majority of the students present. The feedback from students was quite encouraging, both in terms of the detail with which the questions were answered, and also in terms of how they were answered. Overall, the students were able to identify those characteristics of colonial Spanish cities that were of particular social and cultural significance, and also to offer competent explanations of the role that

---

Four students pointed out that it would have been very helpful if I had written down the Spanish place-names that I mentioned in the lecture or pointed them out more clearly on a map. In response, I provided students with a glossary of Spanish terms and tried to ensure that place-names etc. were provided on my Powerpoint slides.
town foundation and urban space played in the process of colonisation. In particular, the feedback showed me that students understood that the significance of town foundation was not only economic and administrative, but ideological, as urban life was intimately associated with the Catholic faith and its propagation.

In addition to these responses, one student asked an interesting question about contemporary Spanish attitudes towards their colonial past, while another suggested that it might be helpful to cross-reference the historical aspects of my lecture with comparable modern situations. At the beginning of my third lecture, I provided verbal feedback to students about their responses. In particular, I summarised the main points that they had made, and indicated which of these points were especially significant. I also discussed the question about Spanish perceptions of the colonial past in Latin America.

**Day 3**

**Lecture topic: Landscapes of belief in colonial Spanish America**

**Note:** *The first half of this lecture was observed by Dr Michael Woods*

On the third occasion, I decided to vary my approach again, above all as a means of gauging which approach was more successful. Rather than being asked to respond to specific questions, students were asked to note down on their Post-it notes what they felt the key points of the lecture were. As in the previous lecture, this request was incorporated into the lecture slide as a means of indicating to students that the class had not yet ended. Again, I encouraged students to use the Post-it notes to ask any questions which they had about the material.

As on the previous occasion, most student responses were encouraging in the sense that they identified the key themes of the lecture topic: above all, the important role that religion played in justifying the Spanish conquest and in shaping colonial society. I was especially encouraged to note that many students understood the connections that I had endeavoured to explain between landscape and religion, and how the former can become a site of struggle over the latter in colonial situations.
In terms of the detail that students provided, there was little to differentiate the responses to this lecture from those collected in the previous class. Indeed, rather than advocating either one or the other I would suggest that both may be used successfully depending on whether one wishes to focus on students' understanding of one particular area or to obtain a broader picture of how they have responded to the lecture.\(^8\)

Encouragingly, five questions were asked by students on this occasion, suggesting that a positive learning environment had been established in which they felt able to ask questions that would receive constructive replies. Below are two of the questions that were asked:

| What is the current state of religion in Latin America? E.g. do indigenous populations practice Christianity? |
| Could you say that the Inca state religion went underground like Christianity in China? In reference to the Bible and the indigenous [people] becoming Christians, did they have access to the book? And teach themselves? |

More encouraging than the number of questions was the fact that all five questions engaged with the lecture in a way that went beyond the immediate parameters of what had been discussed in the class and demonstrated that those students who had asked them were thinking \textit{actively} about the topic and were seeking to make outward connections and comparisons.\(^9\)

\(^8\) In order to be effective, particular teaching methods (whether this means straightforward lecturing, discussion groups, writing exercises etc.) must be selected and used in appropriate contexts with particular learning outcomes in mind. In other words, they cannot be indiscriminately applied if they are to have a positive effect on student learning. This idea is central to the work of Biggs and Tang (2007).

\(^9\) For comparison, see Angelo and Cross's (1993, pages 149-50) account of a history professor's experience of asking students to write down questions they had about Italy's role in the Renaissance. She found that, on the whole, the questions that students asked when given the opportunity to write them down were much more thoughtful than those they tended to ask in class - this is comparable with my own experience of questions that students have written down.
Because it would have taken too long to respond to all the questions verbally at the beginning of the fourth lecture, I chose instead to post my responses on Blackboard, along with some suggested reading (see Appendix 1.3).

**Day 4**

**Lecture topic: Independence and nation-building in Latin America**

This is a topic with which I was not very familiar before preparing the lecture. It therefore required a considerable amount of reading and, perhaps as a result of this, the lecture was overloaded with information and rather dull. In addition, I struggled to get through the material that I had prepared in the time available. I did not get the feeling that the students engaged as positively with this lecture as they had done with some previous topics. This was reflected, I feel, in the fact that the number of students who participated as requested in the end of lecture 'key points and questions' exercise dropped to sixteen, and several of these students did so only in a very cursory way. It also struck me that on this occasion none of the students asked questions about the topic.

**Day 5**

**Lecture topic: Imagining Amazonia**

On this occasion, I was unable to carry out the exercise successfully. In the second half of the lecture, I asked students to engage in an extended class-based exercise, and this was the first time I had tried out an activity of this kind lasting more than just a few minutes. Students were asked to read some textual extracts and discuss them in groups, and then feed back to the class as a whole. This took rather longer than expected and, as it was the final lecture in the module, the coordinator spent about ten minutes at the explaining the exam format to students at the end of the class and distributing the questions. Although Post-it notes had been distributed to students at the beginning of the class, only three used them to note down key points in a rather cursory way. Given that the class had over-run, their reluctance to engage in this exercise was understandable.
Preliminary conclusions

On the basis of the feedback that students produced by participating in the exercise, I felt that the intervention had been worthwhile as a means of gaining an insight into student understanding of particular topics and their perceptions of what was particularly significant. It also helped, I believe, to help establish a positive learning environment in which students felt able to ask questions - and in doing so to think beyond the immediate parameters of each topic in a way that they might not otherwise have done. It also proved useful as a way of gaining instant feedback on how students felt my teaching could be improved.

It was very noticeable, however, that after the second class, the number of students who made use of the Post-it notes declined steadily. While the lack of participation at the end of the final lecture can be attributed to the class overrunning, I feel that a certain ‘fatigue’ may have set in as a result of the repetition of the exercise in five consecutive weeks.

The exercise did not appear to have a noticeable positive impact on exam results. In addition, it is clear that a larger proportion of students chose to answer questions relating to my more experienced colleague’s lectures than those relating to mine. This suggests that students generally found his lectures more approachable and perhaps also more interesting. My weekly provision of verbal and/or written feedback to key points and questions, therefore, does not appear to have been sufficient as a means of clarifying students’ doubts about the content of my classes or of helping to stimulate their interest.

This conclusion is also borne out by student responses to the end of semester questionnaire: while 92% of students felt that my colleague had made the material understandable, only 64% expressed this view about my own teaching. Student views on my colleague’s use of visual aids were also more favourable, and I believe that this reflects my excessive use of text in the Powerpoint presentations that I prepared for this module.

---

10 It is in any case problematic to attribute differences in performance to one individual element, such as feedback.
Above I have briefly discussed my intervention in the light of general student feedback that was obtained by means of the end of semester questionnaire. As we have seen, a comparison of their evaluation of my colleague's teaching and of my own suggests that the effectiveness of my intervention was limited. But what opinions did students express specifically in relation to the 'key points and questions' exercise?

The end of semester questionnaire provides students with the opportunity to make written comments about any aspect of the module. One student commented positively on the exercise: "the regular written feedback and key points at the end of every Latin America lecture are really beneficial." (There were no negative comments relating to my intervention).

In addition to this comment, I obtained written feedback from three individuals after circulating a brief questionnaire via e-mail (see Appendix 1.4) to all students registered for the module. Their comments were uniformly positive:

1) Did you find it useful/not useful to summarise key points of the lecture in writing at the end of each lecture? Please explain.

   **Respondent 1:** "yes, if you had missed a point of the previous lecture it was reiterated and also brought the lectures together well."
   **Respondent 2:** "yes it was useful. Brought all the key points together."
   **Respondent 3:** "I found it very useful as it allowed for a better more detailed understanding of a particular area from the lecture."

2) Did you find the feedback on key points and questions helpful/not helpful? Please explain.

   **Respondent 1:** "If there was a common misunderstanding it was met well with an explanation, yet most of the content was fairly straightforward."
   **Respondent 2:** "Yes it was helpful to get further explanations."
It is clear that, for these three respondents, the exercises were regarded as useful, not only as a means of clarification but also as a way of synthesising the ideas, themes and concepts discussed in each lecture.

While these positive views are encouraging, the low number of respondents (under 0.5% of the total number of students registered) inevitably means that the usefulness of this feedback is very limited. Given that I had hoped to obtain feedback from a much higher number of students, I was very disappointed by the low response. Indeed, my decision to circulate a questionnaire by e-mail represented a second attempt to obtain direct student feedback on the exercises.

Following a suggestion made by Luke Desforges, I invited students to take part in a focus group discussion about my set of lectures for the Americas module. I sent out this invitation by e-mail (see Appendix 1.5) and also conveyed it verbally in lectures. Unfortunately, this idea had to be abandoned because only one student volunteered to take part. Although I had not expected such difficulties in obtaining student feedback, it is possible, on reflection, to identify a number of possible reasons for this:

- My requests for feedback came at a moment when students were beginning revision for the summer exams.
- Students were experiencing 'feedback fatigue' because they were also being asked at this time to complete evaluation questionnaires for all their semester 2 modules, in addition to an end of year evaluation relating to their overall experience in the second year of their degree.
- The view, held by many students, that their cooperation in providing feedback would not bring them any tangible benefits or advantages, or that academic staff would not act on their suggestions.
- My e-mail invitation to students to take part in a focus group discussion explained the use to which the data would be put (i.e. this portfolio) but
did not explicitly highlight any particular benefits that participants (or students in general) might gain from this exercise.

Although the implementation of the 'key points and questions' exercise provided some interesting insights, my dissatisfaction with the outcomes, particularly with regard to my collection of student feedback, prompted me to repeat the intervention in the following semester. In addition to modifying my intervention in an attempt to increase student engagement, I was interested in seeking a more productive way of obtaining student views on the value of the exercise in helping them to learn more effectively. In the section below I present the findings that relate to Part 2 of the teaching cycle and then conclude by reflecting on the overall insights that I have gained from carrying out this cycle.

**Part 2: Formative assessment and student feedback in a first-year module**

**Overview**

For purposes of comparison, it may have been preferable to repeat the exercise by focusing on another cohort of students taking the Americas module or on another comparable second year module. However, on the basis of the following reasons I decided instead to focus on a first year core module entitled 'Development and the Environment' (see Appendix 1.6 for a module description):

- Being a semester 1 module, the problems of 'feedback fatigue' and the pressure of imminent exams would be avoided, above all because my set of lectures within this module finishes well before the end of term.
- I felt that new first students might be less resistant than second years to the 'key points and questions' exercise.
- The large number of students taking the module, coupled with the inflexible layout of the lecture theatre, could make other forms of active learning, such as student discussion in groups, unwieldy and difficult to manage.
Like 'The Americas', this module is unsupported by tutorials or seminars and assessed entirely by means of an end of term examination, in this case unseen. Therefore, there was a clear pedagogic motive for focusing on this module - namely, the need to obtain information about student understanding and progress well in advance of the exam.

In addition, I felt that the exercise could have particular value in a first year module as a means of gaining insight into the level of knowledge and understanding about certain topics with which new students arrive. I taught this module for the first time in the previous academic year (2005-6) and was concerned that my level of teaching was aimed too high, above all because I knew that the themes presented in my lectures were largely unfamiliar to the majority of students.

In 2005-6, I co-taught the module along with two colleagues, one of whom acted as coordinator. As was the case with the Americas, therefore, my ability to make substantial changes to the overall module was limited because I was not responsible for its coordination. Divided into two parts, the first of which focuses on issues relating to 'Development' and the second to 'Environment', the module consists of a total of 20 one-hour lectures of which I usually teach 2-7. (The introductory lecture is given by the module coordinator).

Broadly outlined, my lectures discuss the historical background to 20th and 21st century development ideas and practices, and focus in particular on European colonial expansion and its legacy in the contemporary world. As such, the lectures encourage students to re-evaluate assumptions which they and other people in the West might have about contemporary global inequalities by showing the extent to which colonialism, and colonialist attitudes, played a role in producing them. Beginning with a discussion of Iberian conquest in the Americas in the sixteenth century, my lectures move on to discuss European expansion in Asia and Africa, the perceptions of non-Europeans that accompanied this expansion, decolonisation and the continued effects of colonisation in the twentieth century.
Implementation

When implementing my intervention for the second time, I decided to replace the Post-it notes with printed A4 feedback forms containing brief instructions and boxes for students to write their responses and questions (See Appendix 1.7. I varied the format over the course of the lectures and have included examples of each). I made this decision due to the considerable cost involved in repeatedly using Post-it notes in a class of well over 100 students, and also because Post-it notes take longer to distribute and collect than sheets of paper. More importantly, however, I felt that A4 handouts would be preferable because they provide considerably more space for students to write (within the limits of the text boxes) and, because they contain printed instructions and boxes, help to formalise the exercise. My hope was that this modification would encourage higher levels of student cooperation and produce feedback of a more detailed and hence more informative nature.

Day 1

Lecture topic: European expansionism in a global context

The purpose of this lecture was to introduce students to the theme of European colonial and imperial expansion in the world since the late 15th century. More specifically, it aimed to encourage students to question the frequently assumed inevitability of Europe's rise to a global position of economic and political power. As such, it dealt with numerous ideas, concepts and terms that were as yet unfamiliar to students.
As I had done in the Americas module, I circulated sheets to students at
the beginning of the lecture and, shortly before the end, I asked them to
complete the forms and explained the purpose - namely, to help me to gauge
their understanding, identify areas of uncertainty and to provide ongoing
feedback. On this occasion, students were requested to feed back on the
following .. .

- The key points that I remember from today's lecture are:
- Area(s) of today's lecture that I was least sure about:

... and also to write down any questions or comments that they had about the
lecture.

In dramatic contrast to my first attempt at doing this in the Americas
module, the vast majority of students engaged with the exercise, and a total of
115 feedback forms were handed in at the end of the lecture. All students
filled in the 'key points' box, although their answers varied considerably in
terms of detail and depth of reflection. While some merely provided a list of
keywords, the majority showed at least some evidence of reflection and
synthesis in that they attempted to identify and summarise the overarching
themes addressed in the lecture. Below I have included two examples of each
type of response:

'Keyword'responses

Example 1:
- Colonialism
- Imperialism
- European colonisation

Example 2:
- Colonialism and imperialism
- European miracle and diffusionism
- Blaut
Reflective responses

Example 1:
- Colonialism - Europe's taking over and enforcing itself on the new world. Not taking into account local culture.
- Why Europe - trade, communication - location, disease and weapons.

Example 2:
- Need to look outside the Eurocentric viewpoints of development etc.
- Differences between colonialism and imperialism
- It wasn't just the Europeans who were exploring in the 15th century

Responses that fell within the first of these two categories were of limited use, given that they did not provide much insight into student understanding and mainly into student perceptions of which concepts and themes were most significant. Overall, however, the feedback was encouraging, as the vast majority of students did go beyond a basic listing of keywords and, in terms of what they wrote down, many also demonstrated that they understood the uniting theme and purpose of the lecture: namely, to question 'traditional' accounts of European expansionism and the factors that brought this about.

A smaller number of students - 80 in total (70%) - filled in the second box ('Area(s) of today's lecture that I was least sure about'). It is difficult to ascertain the reasons why 30 students chose not to complete this box: it may well be the case that they simply felt that they had understood all areas of the lecture equally well.

When sorting through the forms after the lecture had ended, it soon became clear that the most prominent area of concern for students was the concept of 'diffusionism.' This was very useful to discover, not least because I had assumed that this concept would be fairly straightforward for students to grasp, although I was aware that it would be new to most of them. It also struck me, however, that a considerable variety of other areas in the lecture were also highlighted by students. To make it easier to provide feedback to
students, I identified six principal areas of concern, the first being by far the most prominent:

- Diffusionism
- Differences between colonialism and imperialism
- Networks and long-distance trade and communication
- Capitalism and proto-capitalism
- The 'European Miracle'.
- Feudalism

In contrast to the high levels of student response to the first two boxes on the feedback form, only a small number (12 students, or 10%) filled in the third box 'Any questions or comments'? Most of the responses, moreover, related to comments about the inadequate lecture theatre (the allocated room was very cramped) rather than to the content of the lecture. This may well be because those who had questions about the lecture content felt that they had already had an opportunity to raise them when filling in the previous box ('Aspect(s) of today's lecture that I was least sure about'). In Appendix 1.8 I have included a copy of the feedback that I posted on Blackboard for students to read.

**Day 2**

**Lecture topic: Conquest, mining and plantations in the Americas**

This lecture elaborated on the theme of the previous class by focusing on the modes and impacts of European colonisation in a particular region, namely the Americas. As such, it dealt less with abstract concepts and more with an empirically-oriented discussion of colonialism in the early modern era. At the beginning of this lecture I again distributed a feedback form which students were asked to complete five minutes before the end. The questions were almost identical to those on the previous week's form.

On this occasion, a slightly lower number of feedback forms (98) were handed in by students. This can be attributed, however, to a lower attendance figure rather than to non-participation amongst students who were present at
the lecture. Once again, all students (with the exception of one) filled in the first box on the form relating to key points and, as before, student responses were encouraging in that they generally conveyed a competent grasp of the ideas that the lecture sought to convey.

The most striking difference between student feedback on this lecture and the previous one was that the number of students who completed the second box, relating to areas that required further clarification, had dropped considerably to just 39 (40%). The points made by those students who did complete this box were diverse, but for the purposes of providing feedback I was able to group them into three main categories (see Appendix 1.9 for my feedback to students):

- Atlantic slave trade and sugar plantations in the Caribbean
- Historical background to the conquest of the Americas
- Mining in colonial Spanish America, and its impact.

Ideally, I would have liked all students to complete this second box as well, but the reduced response rate may also be seen in a positive light, as it suggests that students were better able to understand the second lecture. This conclusion may also be drawn from the type of clarifications that students requested: while they predominantly sought explanations of various concepts in relation to the first lecture, they mainly requested additional details and background in relation to the themes discussed in the following lecture. Indeed, this is further backed up by the following comment made by one student on the feedback form:

"A good lecture, understood it! Last week you used really complex words and I got lost but this week was better."

Again, a relatively low number of students (13 in total, or 13%) used the box 'Any questions or comments'? Of these 13, 10 either consisted of positive comments about the lecture or involved general questions or comments about the module. Two students commented that they felt I went through the slides
rather too quickly and that they could not keep up very well. The remaining three related to the lecture content.

**Day 3**  
**Lecture topic: Early European expansion in Africa and Asia**

The purpose of this lecture was to introduce students to the processes of European colonial expansion in two distinct geographical arenas, Africa and Asia, and to encourage them to reflect on the similarities and differences between European colonisation in these two areas and in the Americas. As in previous lectures, students were encouraged to question 'traditional' Eurocentric accounts of these processes.

In implementing the feedback exercise I followed a similar format to that used in previous lectures by requesting students to use the last five minutes of the class to complete the forms. However, rather than requesting students to note down key points, I asked them to answer a specific question:

- 'What major differences can be identified by comparing the impact of early European expansion in Africa and Asia with early European expansion in the Americas?'

My decision to introduce some variation was firstly motivated by my concern that repetition of the exercise without any modifications would soon become tedious for students. I was also interested to find out to what extent students had gained awareness of the issues addressed by the question, given that these were central to that day’s lecture topic.

The overall number of feedback forms collected was again 80. All students provided a response to the above question. Although a few answered it only in a cursory manner, many answers (given the available space on the form) were fairly detailed, as the examples below indicate:

**Example 1**

- **Africa:**
  
  More widespread control territorially.
Control of resources and exports.
Had a massive, lasting impact on the continent (slavery).

Asia:
Scattered and fragile control.
Competing countries (Portugal, Dutch, English).
Control pushed to coasts.
Didn't control resources and export.
Power shift later.

Example 2

- Not as much power in Asia and Africa.
- Slave trade developed in Africa because of European weakness not power.
- Not as much political power in Africa as the Americas, not allowed to go inland.

Although difficult to discern for readers of this report who are not familiar with the precise content of my lecture, the above responses (and many others) show that the students grasped many of the key ideas that the lecture sought to convey. Increased levels of student understanding compared to their grasp of my first lecture may again also be reflected by the reduced number of responses (17, or 21%) to the second question ('Area(s) of today's lecture that I was least sure about'). Only six students (7.5%) used the box for additional questions and comments, mainly to thank me for arranging a change of venue to a larger lecture theatre or to comment that they had difficulties hearing me properly. For details of feedback provided to students, please see Appendix 1.10.

Day 4
Lecture topic: European expansionism from 1800 - an overview

NOTE: Lecture observed by Mark Whitehead
This lecture sketched out the nature and trajectories of European imperial expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries and, more specifically, introduced students to the argument that these processes were intimately linked to the creation of the so-called 'Third World'.

In order to vary the exercise again, on this occasion I requested that students spend the last five minutes of the lecture discussing with a neighbour the following question:

- 'If Mike Davis' arguments about India are correct, what does his work tell us about the effects of Western imperial expansion on the world since the 19th century? Briefly note down your thoughts in the box below.'

As on previous occasions, the feedback sheet that was circulated at the beginning of the lecture also asked students to note down any points requiring clarification as well as any questions or comments.

Overall, the students appeared to engage fairly well with the five-minute discussion exercise, though it was clear that not all of them complied. At the end of the lecture, I received 45 feedback sheets. (The reduced number reflects the fact that many students were completing them in pairs). Responses to the question above showed that virtually all had grasped the basic concept of the lecture - namely, that Western imperialism arguably had a part to play in the creation of global inequalities that still persist today. The majority of students answered this question with a brief statement such as:

- "Western imperial expansion in the 19th century was at least partly responsible for the development gap, which defines today's third world."

Some, however, went into greater detail and gave examples of the kinds of arguments that Davis has put forward about the links between famine in late 19th century India and British imperial policy:
"Western imperialism held the rest of the world back in terms of economy and development and caused much damage. By taking cash crops and depriving local inhabitants of food and other resources they increased the vulnerability of the natives to famine etc."

On this occasion, only 8 feedback sheets requested clarification of points or themes discussed in the lecture. To some extent this probably reflects fairly high levels of student comprehension, a conclusion which is supported not only by student responses to the question, but also by the observer's assessment of the lecture as a "clear and concise overview of important theoretical and empirical material." (See portfolio section on Teaching Observations)

In the class, however, I also felt that I could sense a growing impatience or fatigue amongst students vis-a-vis the exercise, and I believe that this partly explains the reduced level of feedback in response to the second point on the form. It is also worth noting that five students (or possibly ten in total, if they were all working in pairs) did not provide a written response to the question about the effects of Western imperialism but took the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction about the fact that I did not provide access to my lecture slides on the Blackboard site until after the lecture had taken place. In total, seven students (or pairs of students) used the 'Any questions or comments' box to request access to lecture slides prior to the lecture taking place or to ask if they could access my written notes. For details of written feedback posted on Blackboard, please see Appendix 1.11.

Although I still had two lectures remaining for this module, I took the decision not to continue with the feedback exercise, firstly because I sensed that students were tiring of it and that its continued repetition would therefore be of limited value and secondly because I was struggling to keep up with the

11 Stead (2005) similarly reports a significant decline in student response rates to his 'one-minute paper' exercise, and warns of the dangers of overuse. This is a problem that is not addressed by Angelo and Cross's (1993, pages 154-8) discussion of the 'muddiest point' exercise. Indeed, they argue that regular use of the exercise is beneficial because "they tend to pay more attention to how well they are understanding the relevant session or assignment because they expect to be asked about it." (Page 157). Like Stead, however, I would suggest
provision of detailed feedback to students about areas of concern. The input of time involved, firstly in sorting through and categorising the areas that students identified, and secondly in preparing written feedback on these areas, took far longer than I had anticipated when I first planned the exercise. Because of the far smaller class size in the Americas module and the frequently limited number of responses obtained, this was a problem that only emerged when I implemented the exercise in the Development and Environment lectures.

Preliminary conclusions

Exam performance and module evaluation data

At the time of writing up this report I do not, unfortunately, have access to details of how the performance of students who answered my questions in the end of semester exam compared to the performance of students who answered questions relating to my colleagues' lectures\textsuperscript{12}. It is striking, however, that a very high proportion of students chose to answer questions from the Development section of the course that related to my set of lectures rather than to the lectures given by my colleague (Questions 1-4 related to my lectures and questions 5-6 to my those given by a colleague. See Appendix 1.12 for a copy of the exam paper).

I am not convinced, however, that the popularity of my questions reflects particularly high levels of student understanding in comparison to their understanding of the two questions set by my colleague. As I discussed above, the feedback received from students in the first two lectures reveals that they found the materials presented in my first lecture on colonialism and imperialism especially difficult to grasp. Moreover, student responses to the end of semester questionnaire show that the majority of respondents found my colleagues' lectures more easily understandable than my own, despite my efforts to carry our formative assessment and provide feedback:

\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately, the distribution of answers and breakdown of marks for the Development section of the exam paper was not recorded on the moderation sheet by the module co-ordinator, and I have been unable to locate the exam scripts in the store.
Q. 13: The lecturer made the material understandable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colleague 1</th>
<th>Colleague 2</th>
<th>Heidi Scott</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What other explanations can be found? I would suggest that students perceived my questions as ones that they could successfully answer by rote-learning the detailed information that I had made available on Blackboard. This is clearly an undesirable effect, and one which I will address in more detail in the overall conclusion to this report.

**Student views on the feedback exercise**

In my final lecture for the Development and Environment module, I distributed a questionnaire to students to give them the opportunity to express their views on the feedback exercise (an example of the questionnaires is included in Appendix 1.13). Because I asked students to complete the questionnaires during the class and return them to me at the end of the lecture I was able to obtain a much more detailed picture of student opinions about the exercise than had been possible for the Americas module. The 80 questionnaires that were returned provide some interesting statistics which are summarised below.

1). Overall, I found that the feedback forms were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Wholly unnecessary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of student responses (80 in total):</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of student responses:</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2). On the forms, you were asked to note down keypoints that you remembered from the lecture. As a means of helping you to reinforce what had learned, did you find th’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Not at all helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of student responses (80 in total):</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of student responses:</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3). Did you find the responses that have been posted on Blackboard and/or given in lectures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very helpful</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Not at all helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of student responses (80 in total):</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of student responses:</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4). Would you like to see similar feedback forms used in other modules, either in the same format or in a modified format?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>19</th>
<th>23.7%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5). If you found the feedback forms helpful, how frequently would you like to be given them in anyone module? (E.g. on a regular basis / occasionally / once for every set of lectures?) Please indicate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular basis</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>26.8%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once for every set of lectures</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of responses</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 80 students who responded to the questionnaire, just over half (55%) found the feedback forms useful overall. Of this 55%, a high proportion found them mildly rather than very useful. In addition, only 23% were sure that they wanted to see such forms used in other modules, while 56.25% were undecided and 20% sure that they did not. Despite these fairly lukewarm views, it is striking that students were predominantly positive about the 'key points' exercise (65% found it useful) and in particular about the feedback provided on Blackboard, which 80% found useful.

These figures suggest that, perhaps predictably, feedback was welcomed and valued by most students. To a lesser degree, the opportunity to actively revise key aspects of particular themes during class time was also welcomed by many students. However, a high proportion clearly felt that the forms were over-used: there is a high level of correlation between those students who were unsure whether they wished to see such forms used in other modules, and those who felt that they should be used occasionally rather than on a regular basis.

**General conclusions: advantages and limitations**

Carried out over two semesters in two separate modules, the intervention proved useful for rapidly obtaining a picture of whether students had grasped the key themes and ideas that a given lecture sought to address. The modifications that were introduced in the second half of the cycle - namely, the formalisation of the exercise through the use of forms rather than Post-it notes - also proved to be helpful in terms of maximising student participation. Moreover, student evaluations of the feedback forms for the Development and the Environment module reveal that well over half of all students who responded found the 'key points' exercise helpful in terms of their learning.

Especially valuable, I suggest, was the feedback obtained from students with regard to ideas or themes about which they felt least sure. Feedback from the first Development and Environment lecture, for example, dramatically revealed that students felt overwhelmed by the many new concepts and terms to which they had been introduced - something of which I was unaware when I gave this lecture for the first time in 2005 - and allowed
me to address student concerns by means of verbal feedback at the beginning of classes and by means of written feedback posted on Blackboard.

Very encouragingly, the exercise also appeared to play a positive role in helping to establish a supportive environment in which students felt able to ask questions and make comments and suggestions relating to the module. Although relatively few students took the opportunity to use the forms to ask questions about the materials discussed in the lecture, I am fairly confident that they would not have raised these questions at all without the forms.

In addition, many of the questions asked by second year students taking the Americas module showed that they were actively engaging with the lecture topics and thinking about related issues that went beyond the immediate boundaries of the materials discussed in class. There are, however, also numerous limitations to the exercise that I would like to discuss in greater detail below before I go on to reflect on personal learning and to outline the approaches to formative feedback that I hope to adopt in the future.

* * *

A striking outcome of the implementation of this exercise in both modules was the fact that, despite my attempts to introduce small variations into the format, students clearly found it tedious to repeat it at the end of each lecture. In the Americas module, this was apparent in the rapid decline in student participation and, in the Development and Environment module, in student responses to my questionnaire. This illustrates clearly the need to ensure significant variation in teaching methods, not simply in order to keep students 'entertained', but for sound pedagogic reasons. If students tire of an exercise, it is likely that the objectives of its implementation - in this case, to facilitate meaningful formative assessment - will not be successfully achieved.

Unavoidably, the brevity of the exercise also means that, in many cases, the feedback obtained from students does not provide meaningful insight into the

13 As Yorke points out, some studies of formative assessment conceptualise it as being inherently ongoing. However, "there is no necessity that it be continuous: formative assessment can be very occasional, yet still embody the essential supportiveness towards student learning." (Yorke, 2003, page 479).
extent to which they have understood the concepts or themes to which they refer, but only shows that they are able to identify those which are particularly significant within the context of the lecture theme.

Building on this observation, I would suggest that my intervention reveals the ways in which 'surface' approaches to learning can unintentionally be encouraged by a lecturer's approaches to teaching. As Biggs and Tang (2007) demonstrate, the ways in which students learn are intimately linked to the ways in which they are taught. In hindsight, I feel that the 'key points' element of the exercise might well have had the undesirable effect of pushing students towards surface approaches by conveying the message that I was looking for evidence of memorisation rather than of comprehension. In other words, rather than showing that they were able to explain certain ideas or concepts, they were simply asked to demonstrate that they could correctly identify those which were central to the lectures.

Although some students actually provided evidence of active reflection in their responses, many simply gave a list of themes or concepts such as 'colonialism' or 'diffusionism'. Clearly, such an outcome is of limited value where formative assessment is concerned, as it does not provide meaningful insight into student comprehension of how and why particular ideas might be significant. In Yorke's terms, then, the long-term effects or "consequential validity" of the feedback was low, because it appears to have promoted undesirable approaches to learning - namely, 'surface' learning (Yorke, 2003, page 483).

In a previous section of this report, I drew attention to the fact that my exam questions were particularly popular, even though the end of semester module questionnaire shows that most students did not find my lectures as comprehensible as those given by my colleagues. The explanation for this apparent paradox lies, I would suggest, in the nature of the written feedback that I posted on Blackboard. Because students expressed concerns about how to define particular terms such as 'colonialism' and 'imperialism', I sought to address these concerns by providing detailed written clarifications that were posted on Blackboard for students to access in their own time.

Clearly, student responses to the questionnaire survey show that the majority found this feedback useful. However, it is likely that it also had the
undesirable outcome of fostering the belief amongst some students that
memorisation and repetition of this information would ensure success in the
exam. Rather than being focused, then, on encouraging autonomous student
learning, my feedback instead emphasised the transmission of detailed pieces
of information. As such, it may have had the effect of encouraging what Yorke
(2003, page 489) terms ‘learned dependence’ amongst students - namely, an
excessive dependence on direction from lecturers that in this case involves a
reliance on being given the 'right answer' to a particular question. This
danger has been acknowledged by educators for decades. Writing in the
1960s, Bruner (cited in Light and Cox, 2001, page 178) observed that:

"the tutor must correct a learner in a fashion that eventually makes it
possible for the learner to take over the correcting function himself [sic],
otherwise the result of instruction is to create a form of mastery that is
contingent on the perpetual presence of the teacher."

My purpose in drawing attention to this problem is not to question the value of
feedback to students, but rather to highlight the need to consider very
carefully how and in what form feedback is given if the objective of fostering
'deep' approaches to learning are to be encouraged rather than undermined.

**Personal learning and implications for future teaching**

If the success of my intervention was varied in terms of its intended pedagogic
outcome, it nevertheless constituted an invaluable learning exercise in terms
of helping me to develop my own understanding of and approaches to
teaching. Without doubt, it has made me keenly aware of the many
complexities that are involved in implementing formative assessment:
although on the surface it appears to be a straightforward process, the
realities of putting it into practice bring to light a range of challenges and
potential pitfalls.

Most importantly, it has drawn my attention to the ways in which
'surface' approaches to learning can inadvertently be fostered by teaching
strategies that are intended to encourage the opposite and, consequently, it has encouraged me to think much more carefully about the potential consequences when planning new elements of teaching. Although I embarked on this teaching cycle with an understanding of formative feedback as an ongoing two-way process between students and lecturers, I became perhaps overly concerned with the question of how to obtain responses from students. Consequently, I did not consider carefully enough how students would put to use the feedback I provided, or how feedback should be given in a way that does not undermine but contributes to active learning.

In addition, the experience has allowed me to see first-hand that problems in student comprehension of particular topics or concepts may be due as much to the way in which they are taught as to the intrinsic difficulty of those topics or to simple misunderstanding on the part of the students. While I agree wholeheartedly with Biggs and Tang (2007, page 164) that the provision of feedback to students is a crucial element of teaching that allows errors in student learning to be corrected, it is not adequate to rely on feedback exercises (even when they are carried out effectively) as a means of compensating for problems that are rooted in the way in which a topic is taught in the first place.

This is eloquently demonstrated by student responses to the module evaluation questionnaire for the Development and the Environment module: although (to my knowledge) I solicited and provided considerably more feedback than my colleagues, students found the topics that I taught least understandable. Thus, it is crucial that feedback exercises are used not in a remedial way but as a means of constantly improving overall teaching - and, by extension, student learning and comprehension.

 Despite the problems that were encountered - some of which I only gained full awareness of after the exams had taken place - I suggest that, if used carefully and sparingly, the feedback forms provide a useful tool for carrying out formative assessment. In the future, I plan to continue using them

---

14 This is a phenomenon acknowledged by Ramsden (2003, page 63).
15 As Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006, page 210) suggest, “External feedback as a transmission process involving ‘telling’ ignores the active role the student must play in constructing meaning from feedback messages, and of using this to regulate performance.”
in the Development and Environment module, perhaps once at the beginning of my set of lectures to help me gauge the level of knowledge amongst new students, to encourage a learning environment in which students feel able to ask me questions, and to obtain feedback on issues of a more practical nature. I also intend to use them on one further occasion towards the end of my teaching slot in order to bring to light any areas of difficulty in the preceding lectures. Above all, I suggest that they are useful in large first-year classes in which it is especially helpful to obtain 'snapshot' views of student progress and, furthermore, in which it is difficult to carry out in-depth class-based exercises involving student discussion in groups.

In the Americas module, the exercise appeared to be most useful in terms of encouraging students to ask questions about the lecture materials, but especially at second year level, where class sizes are generally much smaller, I feel this might be more effectively achieved by incorporating class-based exercises in writing and discussion into the classes. (See my second teaching cycle for a discussion on the use of such exercises). Nevertheless, feedback forms - perhaps made available for students to use on a voluntary basis - might still have a useful role to play, especially as a means of obtaining timely feedback about my teaching.

In future years, I will remove the 'key points' question from the feedback form and, in the Development and Environment module, attempt to incorporate short in-class activities that could involve, for example, pairs of students identifying what they feel are the most important aspects of the lecture and then explaining why this is the case to another pair of students. Hopefully, this approach will help to circumvent the danger of inadvertently encouraging passive surface learning in the form of mere repetition and memorising and instead encourage students to move towards active reflection and deep learning.

When using feedback forms in the future, I will seek to ensure that I explain to students (especially in first year classes) what kind of responses I expect from them by providing them with examples of answers that show clear evidence of reflection (as opposed to one-word answers). At the same time, I will explicitly link this activity to the stated learning outcomes of the modules concerned. Finally, when providing my own feedback to student
responses and questions, I will try to ensure that I do not inadvertently encourage 'learned dependence' (Yorke, 2003). Rather than giving students large quantities of detailed information - information which they could in any case find out for themselves - I will instead emphasise the general thematic areas that they need to pay greater attention to and, just as importantly, the approaches to learning that they need to work on in order to achieve the module learning outcomes.
You should discuss your planned development with your Mentor, and consider how you plan to gather feedback and evaluate what happened.

Class/Module
The module description (intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods may be attached).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers in class</td>
<td>ca. 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings (timetable)</td>
<td>5 2-hr lectures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semester 1 (Autumn 2006)
Venue

The intended development:-
Purpose
This semester (semester 1, 2005) I contributed five two-hour lectures to the module Historical Geographies of the Modern World, which I co-ordinate and co-teach with a colleague. This module has been wholly revised, and all the lectures and lecture content presented for the first time. In teaching this module, I experienced particular difficulties attempting to introduce elements of class and group discussion into the lectures: I felt unsure about how to implement this and hence only tried it on a few occasions. I would therefore like to carry out a development that allows this to be introduced as a more prominent element in these two-hour lectures.

Once I have received feedback at the end of this semester, I will also have a clearer idea of where other problematic areas lie in this module and will build my second teaching development around attempting to resolve these problems. This may mean adjusting both content and style of teaching.

Expected outcomes
- More effective incorporation of elements of seminar-style teaching in these lectures.
- In particular, I regard this exercise as a potentially useful way of encouraging students to reflect on theories/ideas presented to them in lectures in the context of historical source materials that they might otherwise not read, and hopefully help them to gain a better understanding of how primary materials might be critically analysed.
- General overall improvements to the module (areas for improvement/adjustment will be clearer once feedback has been received and exams have taken place).

Approach
- Introduce into each lecture an element of discussion that will be carried out either in pairs/groups at the level of the class as a whole. Each discussion, which will last about 15-20 minutes, will focus on particular texts/images, and predominantly on primary materials (e.g. extracts from Columbus' diary) that relate to the theme of the lecture.
- Most probably, I will provide the students with a number of points for discussion relating to the text/image and may then ask a representative from each group to report back at the end of their discussion.
- I believe it is necessary to make the purpose of these exercises very clear to the students at the beginning of the module, and to emphasise that they will be a regular feature of the lectures. I did not do this when teaching the module this semester, and feel that many of the problems that arose in attempting to introduce a discussion element

tHE UWA revised Sep'05
stemmed from the fact that I did not convey clearly to the students what the purpose of these discussions was.

**Evaluation Strategy and Criteria**

- Although it will not be the focus of the second teaching cycle, I may again (if proves successful in the first cycle) ask students to write down points of difficulty at the end of each lecture, and this should provide me with some insight into how well the discussions work as a teaching strategy.
- General feedback will be used to gain insight into how the students received this approach. I may also e-mail the students via Blackboard to request specific feedback on the discussion element of the module.
- Comparison of feedback and also of examination results with those of previous year.
- At the end of each lecture, I will take notes on students’ responses to each discussion exercise (e.g. what comments did they make in relation to the material? Levels of interest, participation and understanding?)

Please ask your Mentor to countersign this form.
The top sheet should be kept in your Portfolio
A copy should be given to your Mentor.

THE UWA revised Sep'05