Developing a framework for feedback literacy from a student perspective (0391)

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Abstract

There is an increasing focus on notions of feedback in which students are positioned as active players rather than recipients of information. These discussions have been either conceptual in character, or have an empirical focus on designs to support the active engagement of learners in feedback processes. There has been little emphasis on learners' perspectives on, and experiences of, the role they play in such processes and what they need in order to benefit from feedback. This study therefore seeks to identify the characteristics of feedback literacy—how students understand and can utilise feedback for their own learning— by analysing students' views of feedback processes drawing on a large data set derived from a study of feedback in two Australian universities. The paper explores the extent to which learners see it as their role to seek information, make judgements themselves and use information for their benefit of their future work.

Introduction

Educators and students typically enact feedback as if it were solely an input mechanism. Dawson et al (2018) identified that students predominantly hold this teacher-orientated view, and that educators, in contrast, are more likely to consider the importance of designing activities to enable learners to take up and use feedback to improve their subsequent work. However, this espoused belief appear at odds with often cited enactment of practices and consequently merely highlights the need for mechanisms to pursue a student-centred view.

A recent definition of feedback orientates it as a process that makes a difference to learning: "Feedback is a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for any given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work" (Boud and Molloy 2013 p 6). Implicit in this definition, is that learners seek, or undertake a subsequent task (an opportunity for similar work), to enable translation of newly constructed knowledge into practice.

Carless and Boud (2018) posited that student feedback literacy "denotes the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies". They presented four key features of student feedback literacy being: appreciating feedback; making judgments; managing affect; and taking action. We do not however have enough understanding of how learners themselves view and enact these competencies.

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In this paper, we take a learner-oriented view of feedback in which students are positioned as active participants in the feedback process. Our research question was: how can learners demonstrate feedback literate behaviours or approaches within their programs of study? Our aim is to further clarify what constitutes learner feedback literacy.

Methods

The data used is drawn from open-ended questions in a large-scale student survey (n=4514) supplemented with focus groups and interviews. It was conducted at two Australian universities to explore feedback perceptions and practices. A secondary analysis was undertaken on a subset of qualitative items which probed students about what they saw as the purposes of feedback, and what they saw as effective feedback. A Thematic Analysis approach was used in which the three authors analysed the data and through a sequence of iterations arrived at codes representing occasions or demonstration of components of learner feedback literacy (Feedback literacy framework 1). This did not seek to establish the extent of representation of items in the data, merely their presence. With the additional help of an external project evaluator, we added items missing empirically, but represented in the literature as 'important qualities for learners to assume or take on' (Feedback literacy framework 2).

Across the two universities, focus groups with 28 students were conducted to provide richer interpretations of the survey responses. Interviews with a further 20 students from a range of disciplines were also undertaken to seek their experiences of feedback in their current units of study. The researchers used the Feedback Literacy Framework 2 to analyse the transcripts and made final adjustments to produce the Feedback Literacy Framework 3 presented in this paper.

Results

The feedback literacy framework has 36 items in three categories:
1) *Understands feedback processes and purposes (12 items)*
2) *Initiates and participates in information sharing and processing (12 items)*
3) *Plans and acts (12 items)*

The full paper elaborates on these items and identifies which are empirically based, which are based on the literature and which find support from both.

Discussion and Conclusion

While the survey was not designed to collect data about students' feedback literacy, it was able to be used as a source for identifying characteristics of what *de facto* constitutes a competency framework for learner feedback literacy that could be subsequently used for program development and further research.

The creation of such a framework has obvious implications for course design. For instance, it may provide insight into the ways feedback literacy might be developed in courses.

Embedding activities in first year units would seem important, but so too progressive development over time, and accompanying summative assessment that helps point learners to the importance of these capabilities. A key challenge is curriculum crowding. The development of feedback literacy needs not to be an add-on but an embedded strategy particularly in first year courses to enable them to benefit more from the curriculum and not leave them dependent on very limited opportunities for input from staff.

In summary, the common perspective adopted by students in our data was that feedback was an act of teachers, not something that they initiated or influenced. This meant that eight items in the framework, which probably require most student agency, were prompted by the literature, not the empirical findings. The framework thus challenges commonly held assumptions and experiences of students when it comes to feedback. The advocated features imply an active student view of feedback and the consequences of so doing. The adoption of teaching and learning practices arising from the framework could encourage students to make the shift from making the most of what they are given (the old paradigm) to positioning students as active seekers and utilisers of feedback information. With clearer outcomes of student feedback literacy (what it looks like), we can embark on programs of research to explore the relationship between educational designs that position the learner as active and the development of these capabilities that have utility beyond university courses.

References

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