

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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Moving Feedback Forwards: Comparing Student Satisfaction For Transmission-Focused And Learning-Focused Feedback Designs

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

### **Abstract:**

Previous research has explored students' interpretations of the NSS questions, suggesting that students' own experiences lead them to interpret the NSS items in different ways (e.g. Bennet & Kane, 2014). In this study, we took a novel approach: rather than focusing on students' interpretations of questions, 252 Students from two UK Higher Education Institutions completed an online survey where they were presented with a series of vignettes describing fictitious students' experiences of 'learning-focused' or 'transmission-focused' assessment and feedback practices. Students were given the corresponding NSS question, asked to predict what rating the character would give, explain their answer and describe how they thought the character's experience could have been different, leading them to give a higher rating. Statistical comparisons between the two vignette conditions, alongside students' open-ended responses, indicate that students' experiences of assessment and feedback could be enhanced through learning-focused feedback designs.

### **Paper:**

#### **Introduction**

Within the UK, the NSS has a dominant place in the discourse surrounding assessment and feedback, not least because of its inclusion in the Teaching Excellence Framework. Since the inception of the NSS in 2005, assessment and feedback emerges consistently as the area of their experience with which students are least satisfied (Pitt & Norton, 2017). Universities often respond by making changes to the promptness, quality, and utility of feedback, without really knowing whether these initiatives are likely to lead to higher satisfaction, and perhaps more importantly, enhance students' learning (Winstone & Pitt, 2017). Making changes to the delivery of feedback is aligned with an outdated, transmission-focused model of feedback, rather than a more contemporary learning-focused approach where emphasis is placed on student engagement with feedback and the resulting impact (Winstone & Carless, 2019).

Previous research has explored students' interpretations of the NSS questions, with findings confirming that students' own experiences lead them to interpret the NSS items in different ways (e.g. Bennet & Kane, 2014). In this study we took a novel approach: rather than focusing on students' interpretations of questions, we used a vignette design to understand how different pedagogic models of feedback might influence students' ratings against the NSS questions. In particular, we were interested in whether pedagogic models that align with a learning-focused, rather than transmission-focused, approach to feedback were perceived more or less favourably by students.

## Methods

A total of 252 undergraduate students (164 females) from two UK Higher Education Institutions completed an online survey. The participants represented a wide range of disciplines as coded according to the Becher-Biglan (Becher, 1989) typology (Hard Pure: 30; Hard Applied: 36; Soft Pure: 117; Soft Applied: 69). Institutional ethical approval was granted and all students provided informed consent for their participation.

Students were presented with a series of vignettes describing the assessment and feedback experiences of fictitious students. Students were randomly assigned to see either a 'learning-focused' or 'transmission-focused' version of each vignette. The two different conditions aimed to disentangle dimensions of experience which, on the basis of the literature, might be expected to influence students' perceptions of the quality of their experience (see Table 1).

After reading each vignette, students were told that the character was asked to rate their experience. Students were given the corresponding NSS question and asked to predict what rating the character would give. Students were then asked to explain their answer and describe how they thought the character's experience could have been different, leading them to give a higher rating.

We employed nested randomisation so that in addition to being randomly assigned to see either the 'learning-focused' or 'transmission-focused' experience version of each vignette, the vignettes were presented in a random order for each participant.

Clarity of criteria
Fairness
Timing of feedback
Utility of feedback comments

*Table 1.* NSS Assessment and Feedback Dimensions and associated vignette designs.

## Findings and implications

We used independent-samples t-tests to compare students' ratings across the two vignette conditions in each case (see Figure 1), and students' open-ended responses were analysed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2005).

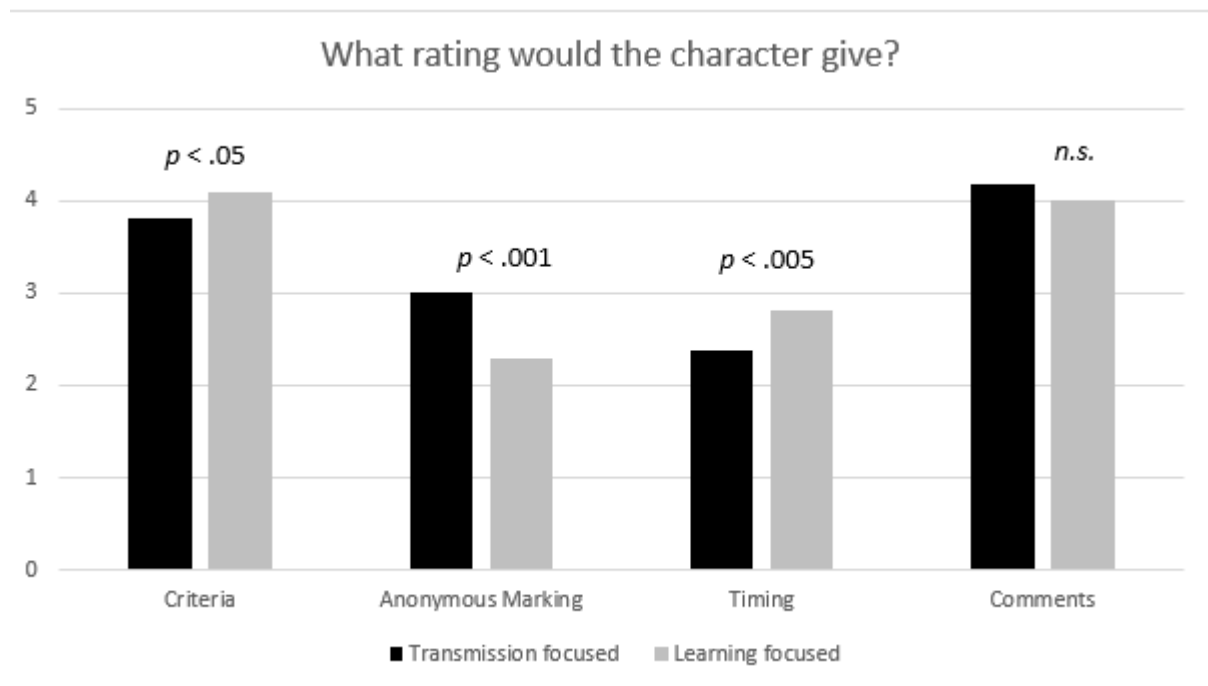


Figure 1. Ratings by vignette condition. p-values represent significance of independent-samples t-tests.

Statistical comparisons between the two vignette conditions, alongside students' open-ended responses, provided insight into practices that are seen as beneficial through the eyes of students. We summarise below the key messages emerging from our synthesis of our quantitative and qualitative analyses, pertaining to each NSS dimension

#### *Assessment criteria*

Students' qualitative and quantitative responses demonstrate the transmission of assessment criteria, no matter how 'clear' they are, without opportunities for further dialogue and working with criteria, is viewed as limited in value. These findings suggest that providing students with opportunities to work with criteria, engage in self/peer assessment, and engage with exemplars is likely to be beneficial not only from a pedagogic viewpoint, but also in terms of students' satisfaction with their experience.

#### *Perceived fairness of assessment*

Our data demonstrate that the character's experience was rated more positively where anonymous marking was employed. This finding is in contrast with recent research suggesting that students do not perceive anonymous marking to be any fairer than non-anonymous marking, despite the fact that they perceive it as less useful in facilitating their learning (Pitt & Winstone, 2018).

#### *Timeliness of feedback*

In both vignettes for this dimension, the institutional policy of a turnaround time of three weeks was adhered to. However, students rated the experience as more positive where there was time to apply comments to subsequent work. This finding was supported by our qualitative analysis, where

students made frequent reference to their frustration when feedback cannot be implemented. These findings underscore recent calls to look beyond the timing of feedback to assess its timeliness, where assessment design at a programmatic level is needed to ensure that students have the opportunity to engage with and use feedback (Winstone & Carless, 2019).

#### *Utility of feedback*

Students rated both experiences positively, regardless of the focus of comments. In both vignettes, the student had detailed feedback to work with. Students' open-ended responses revealed the value they ascribe to opportunities to engage in dialogue with teachers to understand and action comments. In this sense, the wording of the NSS item, which reflects the transmission of comments, does not seem to accurately represent what students desire in feedback, which is the opportunity for dialogue and a chance to implement comments.

Taken together, the data indicate that students appear to value elements of learning-focused feedback designs.

#### **References**

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