Module 3-3 - Feedback for learning
Using technology to promote feedback dialogue

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Hello, my name is Rola Ajjawi. I'm from the Centre for Research and Assessment and Digital Learning at Deakin University.

I'm going to tell you about a project we did in my previous program using technology to promote feedback dialogue. I'd like to start by acknowledging the team our funding and also students and staff at the University of Dundee who are involved in this project.

This is the problem we wanted to address: There's a big feedback gap where staff spend a lot of time giving feedback and we don't really know whether students read the feedback, whether they understand it, whether they act on it and whether they can act on it. It's this sort of thing - the fact that you tell someone something doesn't mean that they can use it and then act on them and feedback is only feedback if there is an effect on the learner.

There is a lot of critique of this - the way that higher education has conceptualised feedback in that we tend to write a lot of comments for an assignment at the end of a module - and this is referred to as monolithic feedback, but what it does is it ignores the role of the learner in the feedback interaction. There's a lack of shared understanding of what feedback is and what it does. It creates dependency on the teacher. It also doesn't promote students evaluative judgement and it's that idea that students need to be able to make judgements about the quality of their work and that of others independent from the teacher. Its high teacher effort for low efficiency, especially if it doesn't result in any learning and it's less satisfying for us as teachers because we don't know whether it's helped improve their learning, whether it's contributed to student learning.

So we wanted to reconceptualise the way we did feedback so that our feedback helped develop our students' capacity to make evaluative judgements about their own work and that of others. We wanted our feedback to help progressively enable students to better monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning, so that someday they will be independent of the teacher.

This was the context that we were working within. So we wanted to see whether we could create feedback dialogue to address some of those issues about monologic feedback in a program that is non cohort, has over 2,500 students across the globe, delivered totally online with tutors across the globe as well, and could we do it in a way that was acceptable to all stakeholders.

So these were the educational principles that underpinned the redesign of our feedback processes. We wanted feedback to be dialogic in nature so that students could tell - share with us - their understandings and ask questions and so we could have a dialogue about it. We wanted our assessment design to be able to afford opportunities for feedback to be used in future assignments. If you design it that way, they become more likely to use the feedback and to learn from it. I wanted feedback to develop students' evaluative judgement and their ability to monitor their own work and we also wanted feedback to empower our students so that they can go out and seek feedback from different sources themselves. So these were the educational principles that underpinned our design.

We started by looking at where our assessment tasks were and actually what you see in the bottom half is the revised program where we built in sequencing between formative to summative tasks so that they could get feedback on a formative tasks that they could then use in the next piece of work that they had to submit. This is what the new model looked like. We start off here - on the left is the learning action - then the student is in the blue interfacing with the technology in purple - and then the tutors in orange - and our administrative staff in pink. So the student would start by reading the assignment criteria instructions and then they would upload a cover page - completed cover page - with their assignment and this was prompting them to develop their evaluative judgement through self-evaluation. They would then submit through our LMS as per usual. We would download it, mark it online, return it back to the student, and the student would then reflect on this feedback and answer four questions in a purpose-built feedback portfolio - which tried to get them to think through how to the tutor's feedback matched their own self evaluation so that they're starting to calibrate their judgements and also to reflect and build action plans. And then we could have a dialogue asynchronously through the LMS on their feedback portfolio in response to these questions.

So let me talk you through and show you the process a bit more. So what you see here is the cover page - really straightforward. They would add this at the top of their assignment and what they needed to do to do was self evaluate their work against the assessment criteria - and one of these was tailored for each individual assignment. They also told us which aspects of their assignment they would like feedback on, hence encouraging them to be more evaluative and also to seek feedback. And how did previous feedback inform this assignment - and this is about closing the feedback loop - so the students will put in their comments and then the tutor would add their comments in response to the self-evaluation but also anything additional they want us to add.

This is the next step - so that was the before that goes in with their assignment - and this is what they did after they got their feedback. This is just an image of one page in the feedback journal. The student had to answer four questions. They had to tell us how the tutor feedback matched their own self-evaluation, what did they learn from the feedback process, what actions - if any - they will take in response to the feedback process, and what if anything is unclear about the tutor feedback. So what you see here is us trying to scaffold them in terms of starting to calibrate their judgements - starting to get them to think about feedback or something that they can learn from, reflect on, build action plans towards their next piece of work, and also close the loop for us in case anything was unclear - and then we were alerted when they responded to these questions in their feedback portfolios and we would go in and respond.

And this is what the pages looked like. So we created templates for each single piece of work that they had to hand in across the whole program or course. And that way actually it was really good so we could see a development across the course and if we were teaching in a later unit, for example, we could go to the beginning and see whether other people have flagged certain issues around feedback.
One of the things we came to realise was that actually we needed to improve our students and staff assessment literacy because there wasn't a shared understanding around why we're doing this and what each person was expected to do in the process. And so we build that into induction for both students and staff. What is the purpose of feedback? Why are we doing this? How are we doing this? What they needed to do. And we also ran staff development opportunities as well.

So really quickly we did see some positive changes to feedback conceptualisation usage and seeking by some students. There were also positive changes by most staff. Feedback literacy did improve through prompts on the materials but also information and orientation. We did provide opportunities for them to make evaluative judgements and to calibrate these judgements. The workload is important here if this does add time but hopefully it's offset by the value that's perceived by the staff and the students and so we had to make shifts by

reducing the overall number of assignments we could then take some time from our staff in order to do some of this dialogue with our students. That was actually seen as really important. And timing of introducing such big curriculum change is also important, around getting buying from staff as well as students.

If you want to read more about this, this is the article we published and a link (https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-016-0562-z). It's an open-access article and here are some references.