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Satisfying students' needs for timely, informative feedback with the constraints and issue of time, quality and consistency

by Andrea Ward
University of Sheffield

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to retrospectively review the provision of feedback for students challenged by the growth of cohorts and subsequent marking teams whilst still ensuring consistency in quality of marking. The obvious solution being technology but it was the choice of suitable technology for online assignments that became significant. This was to ensure that all tasks in the marking process were completed (standardisation, first marking, moderation and calibration of markers) to underpin the quality of feedback that was expected by students.

The student choice of higher education institution is strongly influenced by the UK National Student Survey (NSS) which documents the significance of feedback. Annual statistics would indicate that whilst there has been a growth in satisfaction ratings for feedback between 2010 and 2016, there is still a need for developing the approach institutions take for prompt, detailed and helpful feedback as well as fairness in the marking process (HEFCE, 2016). On average this satisfaction ranges between 58% to 72% across the key areas mentioned above. These factors were applied to a first year module on a Business Management programme with a diverse population of home and overseas students.

Literature Review

The literature review will give consideration to research already conducted in the areas of; feedback, technology and consistency in the marking process.

Research indicates that feedback is providing someone with the difference between performance goals and performance achievement (Sadler, 1989) with the overall aim to improve learning (Race, 2003). This is only the beginning of such a process giving considerations to; what feedback do you provide (Norton et al, 2012), clarification of what good performance has been achieved, providing information to set students up for future assignments, being supportive with the feedback process and building student confidence along the way (HEA, 2013). Equally important is the usability of the feedback from the student's perspective, understanding this information in a meaningful way to improve in future assessments. Furthermore, Race (2003) argued that written feedback was more enduring. Conversely, the challenge of not individualising feedback in the anonymous marking process in comparison to the benefits of face to face interaction of feedback (Hermsen et al.,2010). The growth of cohorts imposed further pressure on academics of complete and provide timely feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). Thus crafting the feedback plays an important role linked to its effectiveness (Hermsen 2006).

Well-chosen technology increases the chances of durable change through the feedback (Hermsen et al, 2006). The choice of Turnitin allowed students to view their feedback sited within the body of the assignment (Race, 2003). Recognising that Race argued there was a lack of personal touch when printed, Turnitin's functionality of writing comments as well as using preloaded comments was also an advantage. Online submission also provided convenience for the students so they didn't have to queue at the student office to hand in work. Also, confirming completion of upload direct to the student.

Balla & Boyle, (1994) tabled the view that unless there were agreements of the quality of marking then results could be questionable. Thus, being able to carefully design criteria and procedures can reduce inconsistency in marking (Saunders and Davis, 1998). Equally the provision of training for markers (Brown et al., 1995) and as interpretation of criteria can change over time, the use of online marking allowed the module leader to provide feedback during the marking process as it was all visible to the marking group (Race, 1995)

Implementation

Drawing comparisons between the experience of using Blackboard assignments and Turnitin assignments a decision was made to use Turnitin online assignment due to the ability to mark on an ipad and offline as well as the computer based version making it more accessible. Whilst it was not the perfect solution the benefits gained in reducing academic time spent checking for plagiarism at the same time as marking offered more benefits than its shortfalls. Blackboard didn't offer the ability to undertake plagiarism check and as such students would have had to uploaded assignments into Blackboard and then another version into Turnitin.

Once this decision was made the task was then to build the relevant quick marks and rubric to ensure that the use of a technical system did not erode the personal touch and yet provide better more enhanced feedback at the point in the script where it was associated. Previously, feedback was limited and on a separate sheet to the assignment submission and general in its construct. Building the library of quick marks from the priors' years' feedback was utilised and the

rubric template was transferred into Turnitin. Feedback comments were created to demonstrate missing performance areas of what should be included in order to reach the goals of providing feedback on what was done well and why, as well as providing reflective comments to help reinforce and sustain that cognitive process.

Further development in the quick marks allowed for the inclusion of symbols on quick marks, additional development areas tagged for students This not only aided the markers to ensure the most appropriate and relevant feedback was given but also the students were then able to act on this and further develop their skills.

Following implementation of this and using the analytics within Turnitin to provide feedback to students during the marking period further supported the literatures good practice guides. However, a pattern started to emerge as I reviewed which students looked at feedback and identified that some would not look at feedback or were not consistent with looking at feedback across the 3 assignments.

Additionally, development and training was given to markers on these assignments. Not only were the common practices of standardisation, moderation and calibration of marking undertaken but time was spent with markers to develop their understanding; of the system, marking expectations, the use of quick marks, overall summary of feedback and other functionality. Thus, ensuring the consistency of approach. Timely feedback could be given to markers early in the marking process due to the visibility of the scripts across the team of markers and module leader coupled with the added benefit of peer calibration during the marking period.

Student feedback has been positive with many benefits being observed consistent with how literature describes should be good practice. Students valued the provision of a detailed report, saving it for future use, the specificity of the comments, an improvement on what is given on other modules and its thoroughness to help student development. Additional benefits are gained where students have disability or a learning support plan as they can continue to read and understand feedback long after the date of issuing it.

Conclusion

It can be seen that the move to online submission, marking and provision of feedback with the Turnitin system has many benefits for students, markers and module leader. From a markers' perspective, the system ensures that the challenge of marking becomes easier and less burdensome whilst retaining the quality and purpose of feedback required by students.
After 3 years, what has been observed is the differences between students looking at the feedback, not looking at feedback and consistency of looking at feedback across all 3 assignments. Subsequently further research is ongoing to establish any relationships between the accessing of online feedback, student demography and grade performance.

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