



Rethinking feedback in higher education:

an assessment for learning perspective

Kay Sambell, Northumbria University

escalate.ac.uk



**Subject
Centre for
Education
ESCalate**

About the author

Kay Sambell currently works at Northumbria University, where she is Professor of Learning & Teaching within the School of Health, Community and Education Studies. She teaches and undertakes research in the interdisciplinary area of Childhood Studies and is co-author of *Studying Childhood and Early Childhood at University: a guide for students* (Sage, 2nd edition, 2010).

Kay has a long-standing interest in enhancing assessment to promote learning in higher education and has published widely on the impact of assessment on students' experiences of learning. She was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2002 for her practice and scholarship in this field and continues to use her own classrooms as sites for ongoing pedagogic development, enquiry, critique and evaluation.

As Director of Assessment for Learning (AfL) Enhancement in Northumbria University's Centre for Excellence in AfL Kay recently led the development of a range of innovative approaches to assessment for learning practice. In 2009 she was invited to contribute to the work of the Osney Grange Group, a group of 23 researchers and writers with specialist expertise in the field of assessment, who were brought together by Oxford Brookes' Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe) Centre for Excellence to produce an *Agenda for Change* with regard to feedback policy and practice.

Kay is an experienced conference speaker and is often invited to offer keynotes, seminars and workshops at universities across and beyond the UK. Her particular interests currently include: improving the first-year experience of teaching, learning, assessment & feedback; involving experienced students as 'learning leaders'; student engagement; student publications and staff-student partnerships.

Published by

ESCalate
HEA Subject Centre for Education
University of Bristol
Graduate School of Education
35 Berkeley Square
Bristol, BS8 1JA
Email: heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk
www.escalate.ac.uk

© Kay Sambell and ESCalate July 2011

ESCalate production team - Lyndsay Grant and Teresa Nurser

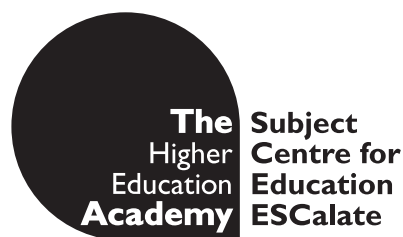
Permission is granted to copy and distribute this document in unaltered form only, for the purposes of teaching, research, private study, criticism and review, provided that the original author and publisher is acknowledged.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of ESCalate.

Rethinking feedback in higher education: an assessment for learning perspective

Kay Sambell

Northumbria University
kay.sambell@northumbria.ac.uk



Contents

Introduction	4
Section 1 – An agenda for change	6
Rethinking assessment to promote learning	6
Towards Assessment for Learning in HE	7
Models of feedback in HE	8
The Northumbria CETL's model of Assessment for Learning	9
Some common misconceptions and mistaken assumptions about feedback	11
Section 2 – Putting formal feedback into practice	16
Formal feedback and peer review	16
<i>Peer-review feedback strategies</i>	17
<i>Students' views of the feedback strategies</i>	19
Formal feedback and self-review	22
<i>Self-review feedback strategy: developing students' awareness of self-review</i>	22
<i>Students' views of the feedback strategies</i>	23
Section 3 – Putting informal feedback into practice	25
Improving informal feedback by redesigning classroom activities	25
<i>Redesigning classroom activities (Example 1): Students working collaboratively to build graffiti posters in class time to enhance informal feedback</i>	26
<i>Redesigning classroom activities (Example 2): Building group summaries of required reading to enhance informal feedback</i>	28
<i>Redesigning classroom activities (Example 3): Structuring project-work to enhance informal feedback</i>	29
Informal feedback beyond the classroom	31
<i>Using authentic assessment to enhance informal feedback</i>	32
<i>Using student mentoring to enhance informal feedback</i>	33
Section 4 – Beyond feedback	36
Using exemplars: a case study	38
Teachers' views of the illustrative value of the exemplars	39
Teachers' views of the importance of students' active engagement and participation	40
Students' views of the value of working on exemplars	41
The value of peer feedback and discussion	42
Conclusions	46
References	48
Appendix	52

Introduction



Kay Sambell, Northumbria University

University tutors spend a lot of time producing written feedback on students' assessed work but are often disappointed with the result. Conversely, surveys often indicate that feedback is a problem from the student point of view (Krause et al, 2005; Carless, 2006; National Student Survey, 2009). This discussion paper suggests that to improve the student experience of feedback we need to move beyond the traditional view of feedback as the written comments that tutors provide, often 'at the end' of a module, on student work submitted for assessment.

The discussion takes place in the context of growing arguments to reframe assessment in higher education (HE) so as to focus on learning rather than simply measurement. In particular, it will focus on feedback from the viewpoint of the holistic model of Assessment for Learning (AfL) developed at Northumbria University (McDowell, Sambell et al, 2006). Our model of AfL is based on our own

empirical research into the student experience of assessment over a number of years (Sambell, McDowell and Brown 1997; Sambell and McDowell 1998; McDowell and Sambell, 1998). This identified aspects of assessment that can support learning.

In 2005 we were awarded CETL status¹, which enabled us to take this work forward across the university. Over the last five years our model of AfL has underpinned the review and development of assessment practice in a wide range of disciplinary areas. Many of the lecturers who used the model to develop their assessment practices were very keen to improve their students' experiences of feedback. This paper will briefly indicate some of the different ways in which staff redesigned their feedback practice as a result. This will be done to highlight some of the themes, issues and challenges which relate to the re-engineering of feedback practice in the context of AfL.

¹ 72 Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLs) were established and funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2005.

The paper broadly suggests that achieving an overall shift towards AfL requires the development of new perspectives on feedback, amongst staff and students alike. A wealth of research into AfL in HE proposes that:

- high level and complex learning is best developed when feedback is viewed as a relational process that takes place over time, is dialogic, and is integral to the whole process of learning and teaching itself
- valuable and effective feedback can emanate from a variety of sources, but if students do not learn to evaluate their own work, they will remain completely dependent on others. The abilities and disposition to review one's own work, and that of others, are essential graduate attributes which HE should foster, because they underpin a learner's capacity to learn autonomously.
(Osney Grange Group, 2009)

This discussion paper will particularly focus on the issues and challenges of helping students reframe their views and definitions of feedback in sympathy with AfL approaches. This is deemed especially important because, whilst it is widely accepted that effective feedback has huge potential to enhance and accelerate learning, we have evidence that some students' conceptions of feedback might be limiting their capability to benefit from the range of feedback available to them during their time at university. Helping them develop their ideas about feedback, rather than reinforcing mistaken assumptions and limited views of feedback, is arguably an important enterprise, and one to which it is worth devoting time and energy.

From this viewpoint feedback is seen as a process which is fully integrated into the learning and teaching

process, building gradually over time, with active student involvement. In practice, this means that many of the feedback developments covered in the discussion do not necessarily focus on ways of improving feedback by creating better, faster or more diverse feedback messages. Instead, the discussion will concentrate on exploring some of the practical strategies staff have used to develop the student experience of feedback by embedding it in formative, learning-oriented environments. These will be presented together with some snapshots of staff and students' experiences of the redesigned feedback practices. The overall aim is to broadly illustrate some of the possibilities and challenges that emerged when different feedback strategies were put into practice. In this way the paper hopes to stimulate discussion and provide food for thought for busy practitioners, rather than offer a comprehensive and detailed summary of the vast body of work in this complex area.

This paper will be structured in four main sections.

Section 1 discusses some new perspectives on feedback to emerge from recent agendas for change in relation to assessment and feedback in HE.

Section 2 considers ways of putting formal feedback into practice.

Section 3 considers ways of putting informal feedback into practice.

Section 4 looks at ways of moving 'beyond feedback' (Sadler, 2010). This section focuses on educational practices designed to help learners comprehend and develop important assessment-related concepts.

Section I - An agenda for change

'Assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum. It powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. It is one of the most significant influences on students' experience of higher education and all that they gain from it. The reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning.'

(Boud and Associates, 2010:1)

Rethinking assessment to promote learning

This discussion of feedback is firmly rooted in the context of growing arguments to reframe assessment in HE so as to focus on learning and the support of student achievement rather than simply measurement.

Since the 1990s research has drawn attention to the different purposes that assessment can serve. Broadly speaking, it can:

■ *Certify and measure student learning*

From this perspective assessment's main purpose is to provide information for others about the extent to which students have learned something, or how their work compares with that of other students. Information often takes the shape of a score or data which converts to some sort of qualification. Seeing assessment through this lens is epitomised by the phrase 'assessment of learning'.

■ *Help students improve their learning*

From this perspective assessment's main purpose is to provide information to students themselves. This information – feedback – can help keep

them on the right track, helping them progress and succeed by helping them identify any gaps between current performance and required achievement. Viewing assessment through this lens might be captured by the term 'assessment for learning'. The work of Black and Wiliam (1998) has been influential in this respect.

■ *Equip students to be able to undertake learning and assessment independently of their teachers after they have left a formal educational setting*

From this viewpoint the purpose of assessment is to foster the kinds of attitudes and dispositions, as well as the skills and knowledge that learners will need to tackle the kinds of tasks and challenges they are likely to face throughout their lives. This future-focused view of assessment is conveyed by the term 'sustainable assessment' (Boud, 2000).

Researchers have argued, though, that assessment in HE has typically been so distorted by an over-emphasis on the purposes of certification and the justification of grades and awards that the core purposes of supporting learning – the formative purposes of assessment – have become obscured



(see, for instance, Birenbaum, 2003; Segers, Dochy and Cascaller, 2003; Boud and Associates, 2010; Carless et al, 2006).

Towards Assessment for Learning in HE

In overall terms, then, AfL is about trying to achieve a reappraisal of the role of assessment. It involves trying to ensure that our conception of assessment moves beyond that of testing what has been taught, or measuring learning outcomes, to encompass views which allow students to benefit from assessment and which develop their capacities to become effective assessors of their own and others' work. This means thinking about assessment activities in a new frame, or seeing assessment through new lenses.

The idea that learning is something done *by* students, rather than *to* or *for* them, has undoubtedly been a main driver of AfL reform in HE. Once it is accepted that learning is an active, dynamic process, in which students learn by actively making connections and organising learning into meaningful concepts and understandings (Barkley, 2009) then it follows that approaches to assessment and feedback need to change in line with this. For many researchers in HE, a more active, informed and participative role for students in the assessment process has usually been deemed to be key (Price et al, 2008). For example, a large body of research work and innovation has focused on involving students in the assessment process itself, often through the resources of self and

peer assessment, as a vital means of empowering them to take control of their own learning, rather than remaining dependent on others to evaluate their learning for them (Boud, 1995; Nicol, 2009).

The definition of formative assessment proposed by Sadler (1989) has been very widely used and accepted as a basis for AfL practice in universities. Sadler states that formative assessment must enable students to understand the goals or standards to be achieved and their own current level of performance, and then guide them in taking action to close the gap. This requires students to develop 'expertise' in order to make effective judgements about their own performance. Consequently significant emphasis has been placed on the ways in which self and peer assessment can act as a learning tool, supporting students to make effective and informed judgements (Bloxham and West, 2007; Rust et al, 2005). From this perspective, involving students explicitly in the assessment process entails helping students to develop their pedagogic and assessment literacy, as well as supporting them to develop appropriate ways of thinking and practising (Meyer and Land, 2005) within the specific subject domain. Bloxham (2008) suggests that the phrase 'assessment *as* learning' might best represent the idea that students should be supported to *do* assessment, not just be assessed. This conveys the central role that learners, not just their teachers, should play in effective assessment environments.



Models of feedback in HE

HE has some well-developed conceptual models that have been specifically designed to help us improve our formative assessment environments and feedback practices (see, for example, Gibbs and Simpson, 2005; Hounsell, 2007). In 2006, Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick re-interpreted and synthesised the research on formative assessment and feedback to offer a set of guiding principles for assessment and feedback that have learner self-regulation at the core. Self-regulation is interpreted as the extent to which students can monitor and evaluate aspects of their own learning behaviours, and then act on this information to improve their learning. Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick's model describes the process of student self-regulation from the initial assessment task and review of current knowledge, to individual interpretation and formulation of learning tasks, to the generation of both internal and external goals. The authors contend that the outcomes which are then produced generate *internal feedback* which enables the student to re-evaluate goals, criteria and standards, and then compare the current stage of their own learning/understanding to the external standards/goals/outcomes which they wish to achieve.

Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick's feedback principles have been widely disseminated across the sector. They include:

1. *clarifying what good performance is*
2. *facilitating reflection and self assessment in learning*
3. *delivering high-quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct*
4. *encouraging teacher-learner and peer dialogue*
5. *encouraging positive motivational beliefs and self esteem*
6. *providing opportunities to act on feedback*
7. *using feedback from learners to improve teaching*

(Nicol and MacFarlane Dick, 2006).

In later work, Nicol's REAP project (2009) extended these principles, establishing clear links to summative as well as formative assessment design. The new principles also brought into focus the importance of learning communities in enhancing engagement and achievement, and of choice and diversity in assessment methods. The significance of closing the feedback loop, ensuring that feedback information is attended to and acted upon, was also reinforced.



After all, feedback can only serve a formative function and serve learning fully 'if it involves the evoking of evidence and a response to that evidence by using it in some way to improve the learning' (Black et al, 2003, 122).

Finally, it is interesting to observe that in universities a major focus has been on developing ways of giving feedback on student work and encouraging constructive use of feedback by students (see, for example, Gibbs and Simpson, 2005). This contrasts with the priorities of AfL in compulsory schooling, where emphasis has been laid instead on teacher development focused on classroom practices, building in opportunities for dialogue, enquiry and appropriate questioning (Black et al, 2003). A key aim in the school sector has been to integrate a holistic view of formative assessment with classroom pedagogy that develops students' cognitive abilities and deep forms of learning within clearly defined subject domains (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Black et al, 2003). Within this framework formative assessment is a pedagogic approach encompassing a range of activities which are undertaken by teachers and/or students which provide information that can be used as feedback. This feedback is used to modify the learning or teaching activities in which stakeholders are engaged (Black and Wiliam, 1998).

The view of formative assessment as part of good classroom practice, 'involving interactive dialogue where the teacher can explore and steer by sensitive challenge' (Black and McCormick, 2010: 497) is a much less prominent view in HE. Angelo and Cross (1993) have, however, explicitly promoted this approach in universities, using the term 'classroom assessment'. They see classroom assessment, which they envisage taking place in large lecture formats, as learner-centred, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative, context-specific, ongoing and firmly rooted in good pedagogic practice.

The Northumbria CETL's model of Assessment for Learning

For us, AfL is about trying to establish a new balance in assessment which helps address the current over-emphasis on summative testing. Of course we require summative assessment which is rigorous and maintains standards. But we also urgently require manageable, cost-effective strategies for developing learning-oriented or formative assessment which promotes student engagement, is embedded in teaching and learning, provides feedforward rather than retrospective feedback, and is a positive force in helping students to achieve their potential.

Our experience and research has led us to synthesise six key conditions for the support of AfL, through a learning environment that:

1. **Is rich in formal feedback:** *via, for example, tutor comment; self assessment systems*
2. **Is rich in informal feedback:** *through, for instance, dialogic teaching, peer interaction and carefully designed classroom assessment which provides students with a continuous flow of feedback on 'how they are doing'*
3. **Emphasises authentic assessment:** *tasks are relevant and meaningful in some way, beyond 'just acquiring marks'*
4. **Offers opportunities for low-stakes assessment practice:** *students try out and practise knowledge, skills and understanding before they are summatively assessed*

5. **Develops students' independence and autonomy:** *students learn to evaluate their own progress and direct their own learning*
6. **Balances formative and summative assessment:** *high stakes summative assessment is used rigorously but sparingly*
(see Figure 1)

The six conditions act as interlinking pedagogic principles which can be used to inform the development of effective AfL practice and harness the power of assessment to support learning. A key purpose of our approach is to foster student development in taking responsibility for evaluating, judging and improving their own performance by actively using a range of feedback. These capabilities are at the heart of autonomous learning and of the graduate qualities valued by employers and in professional practice.

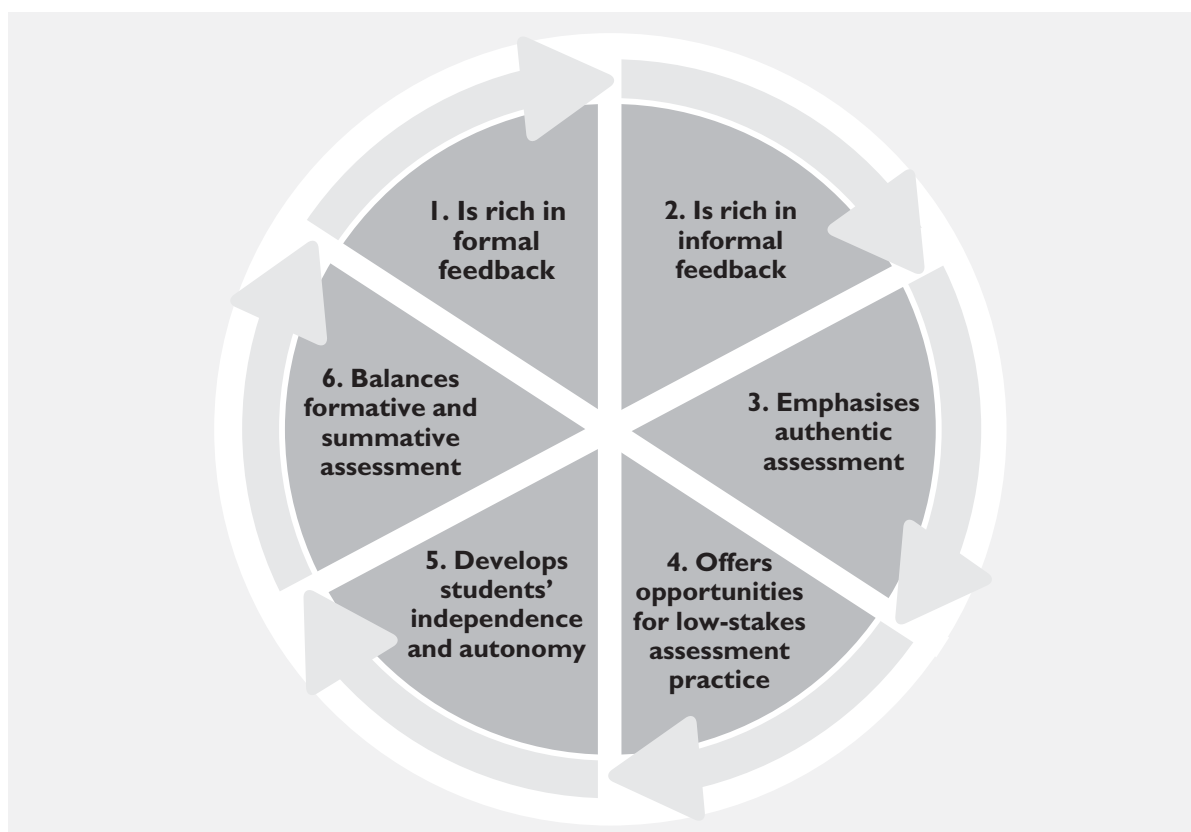


Figure 1: Characteristics of a learning environment that supports Assessment for Learning

So for us AfL is not only about the quality and timeliness of feedback tutors give as mandated by university systems – although this is important. Students benefit from assessment which enables them to judge for themselves how they are doing and offers them opportunities to improve. In addition to teacher-written feedback ‘at the end’, students require different forms of feedback from tutors and others during a module; they also need interaction with fellow students which provides informal feedback and a broadening of ideas and possible strategies to move learning forward.

The balance between formative and summative assessment is important, so students are not mainly driven by an instrumental hunt for marks. AfL does not use summative assessment and the acquisition of marks as the main driving factor. Instead, the focus shifts towards learning where students have opportunities to test out ideas, practise relevant skills and rehearse subject knowledge before these are summatively assessed.

Importantly, we know that students discriminate between assessment tasks that are ‘just hurdles to jump’ and those which are ‘relevant’ or feel authentic in some way. Authenticity may be gauged against activities which are likely to be useful in the world outside HE, such as in employment. It may also be that an activity is viewed as relevant because it gives students a sense that they are personally developing, progressing and learning something worthwhile.

This all means that *both* summative and formative assessment must be well-constructed and designed, and there may in fact be considerable slippage between the two within the learning environment (Taras, 2008). In other words, AfL is not *just* about formative assessment, especially as many practitioners simply think of formative assessment as giving students better feedback, allowing them to practise or polish

their assignment, or doing work that ‘doesn’t count’. Instead, from our viewpoint, the overall assessment strategy must employ a diversity of methods to assess genuine and valued learning. AfL requires appropriate assessment tasks – methods which stimulate and evaluate worthwhile learning throughout the learning process, so that students are supported to devote time and energy on educationally purposeful activity as they build knowledge and understanding (Gibbs and Simpson, 2005; Nicol, 2009; Kuh et al, 2005). Authentic assessment tasks will replicate as far as possible the ‘real’ subject, so that students are encouraged to learn to think and practise (Meyer and Land, 2005) in ways which develop students’ cognitive abilities and critical independence within defined subject domains (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Appropriate assessment tasks must also foster the capabilities and dispositions for learning in professional and personal life beyond graduation, as learning for the longer term (Carless et al, 2006).

AfL encourages students to take responsibility for directing their own learning and therefore we need to include specific components that will help students to understand the standards and criteria that embody what it means to do well in the subject, so that they are in a position to make informed decisions and evaluate their own work during the act of producing it. Our formulation of AfL is congruent with Sadler’s (1998) view of a new ‘learning culture’ which encompasses: engaging students through appropriate tasks; providing plentiful feedback, including through the resources of self and peer assessment; and an underpinning commitment to improve learning for all.

Some common misconceptions and mistaken assumptions about feedback

I will now turn to consider some common misconceptions and limited ways of thinking about feedback. It is important to discuss these, partly to try and avoid them fuelling our own feedback practices,

and partly to help our students move away from the restrictive models of feedback they often hold when they come to university.

In everyday university discourse, the feedback form, as a post-facto written comment sheet, has largely become synonymous with feedback. This means that feedback is often seen as a product (Price et al, 2011), which teachers deliver, and/or an event, which typically comes at the end of learning, and is tied up with students receiving a grade.

While students often claim to appreciate and value this kind of feedback, there is surprisingly little evidence that this type of feedback has 'made a difference' to the quality of the work students produce (Hounsell et al, 2010; Price et al, 2010). Instead of uncovering significant benefits, research has tended to identify problems arising due to academics' feedback messages being lost in translation, with students misunderstanding them, not being able to access the language in which guidance is couched, or failing to heed or act upon important advice (Higgins et al, 2001; Glover and Brown, 2006; Chanock, 2000; Lillis and Turner, 2001; Price et al, 2010).

In addition, there are issues about the timeliness of this traditional type of feedback, which comes too late to enable students to improve their performance (Higgins et al, 2002). Laurillard (1993) makes a useful distinction between 'extrinsic' feedback that constitutes a commentary subsequent to the action, and 'intrinsic' feedback which takes place within the context of the action. Obviously the latter seems more useful in terms of enabling change and future action, but most feedback sheets are received by students at the end of a module.

Further, by offering a summary judgment (such as a mark or grade) traditional feedback forms tend to position this kind of 'official' feedback strongly within a

measurement rather than a learning paradigm. This might actually distract a student from engaging with any developmental function the feedback has been designed to offer (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Moreover, Bloxham (2009) has pointed out how the traditional feedback form is, from the lecturer's perspective, inevitably often linked to accountability and quality assurance, which might mean the feedback-giver actually has as much of an eye on the external examiner and a perceived need to defend and justify the grade awarded (Price et al, 2011), as on the student for whom the feedback is, ostensibly, crafted. After all, feedback forms are often the main source of tangible evidence that appropriate feedback mechanisms are in place on our courses.

But arguably the most important limitation is if this kind of feedback is regarded, on its own, as being the main means by which students can find out how they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work. In its extreme form, this view of feedback can become equated in people's minds with a linear model in which tutors are the sole providers of advice and guidance. Here the student's role is to simply wait to receive feedback, as it is only after this 'gift' has been given that they can move forward in their learning. This 'transmission' model, or feedback-as-telling, relies exclusively on the tutor dispensing advice, or, perhaps, instructing the student what to do.

Where this model of feedback is particularly dominant it may actually encourage students to view themselves as passive recipients of tutor-given knowledge. It may also lead learners to attach an over-riding significance to the judgements tutors make and the marks they award, rather than seeing feedback as having implications for their future learning and behaviour. Moreover, it may be the case that the more students are 'told' how to improve their work, the less likely some are to develop independent abilities to make judgements for themselves.



Orsmond and Merry's (2009) study supports this assertion and suggests that some students become extremely dependent on tutor-written feedback. However, providing more and more of this sort of feedback may simply increase student dependence on the tutor. In particular, Orsmond and Merry's research discovered that not all students thought about or responded to teacher feedback in the same way. Non-high achieving students appeared to focus on the detail and 'surface features' of feedback messages, stating that they had difficulty in relating comments to their work, acting on the feedback, and were confused by feedback that suggested a range of different approaches. They generally accepted everything the tutor suggested and believed that the provision of more tutor feedback was crucial to their success (Orsmond and Merry, 2009). On the other hand higher achieving students tried to understand the essence of the feedback being given, did not accept all feedback and thought critically about it. The researchers concluded that it is crucial that students, particularly non-high achievers, are encouraged to think differently about feedback.

There are further conceptual problems with feedback-as-telling or teacher exposition. According to Nicol (cited in JJSC, 2010), students do not learn by passively listening to and absorbing transmitted information. Learning from feedback actually involves students actively constructing their own understanding of the information and making their own sense of it. For them to be able to act upon feedback-as-telling, they must first decode it, then

internalise it, and then use the information to make a judgment about their own work. These are all acts of self-evaluation, so, Nicol contends, students require help to improve their ability to make their own evaluative judgements about the quality and impact of their work if they are to benefit from a range of external feedback. Further, Sadler (2010) argues that a straightforward form of teacher exposition cannot hope to communicate the complex assessment concepts that underpin the process of appraisal of complex, divergent works which characterise assignment tasks at university. Quite simply, there can be no recipe or set of rules which would adequately convey an effective approach to the kinds of complex works students are required to produce. Instead of being told what to do or not to do, or what is expected or not expected, learners need to come to feel the requirements via extensive social interactions with people who are immersed in the disciplinary ways of thinking and practising of the specific subject domain.

There are, quite evidently, significant challenges here, especially if, as one survey recently indicated (Glover, 2006), students' dominant view of 'feedback' is largely confined to written tutor comments on marked assignments.

These significant challenges are illustrated by the case of Natalie, one student in our own research, which indicated that students coming to university often hold a view of feedback that acts as an instrumental straitjacket, rather than a springboard for sustainable

learning (Davies and Ecclestone, 2008). This not only limits their capacity to use the range of feedback on offer, but also means they bring unrealistic demands and expectations which need to be carefully managed.

Davies and Ecclestone warn that formative assessment and feedback practices designed to help students can, ironically, become framed by teachers in ways which militate against the development of learner autonomy and deep, sustainable approaches to assessment, subject knowledge and learning. This is especially prevalent if the drive to get students to meet summative targets is to the fore of people's thinking. In such instances, instead of involving students actively as participants in the feedback process, teachers' feedback practices actually take the form of teacher-led techniques for feedback, diagnosis and review. Teachers are entirely in control, using feedback procedures and formal paperwork exclusively to track students towards their summative targets (Ecclestone, 2002; Torrance, 2007). This can even mean that 'learning' gets displaced and comes to represent achievement without understanding (Ecclestone, 1999), as feedback is used, for example, to coach students to meet criteria rather than engaging deeply with the subject.

Unfortunately, this is an experience of feedback which our research has shown that students all-too-often bring when they come to university. A large contributory factor may well be the dominance of the qualifications and testing culture in compulsory schooling. For instance, in this high-stakes assessment culture, students need particular grades in their public examinations in order to progress and compete for places at university, and become accustomed to defining themselves in terms of levels and standardised test scores (Stobart, 2010).

Natalie's prior experiences of feedback

Natalie, who has just started university having successfully completed her A-levels, is talking about her experiences of feedback at college.

Natalie talked of feeling quite 'lost' with her academic work during her first semester. Part of this was because she was not used to the 'new' academic conventions she was expected to follow when it came to her writing. Other factors included the types of 'teaching' she received, which made her feel estranged and disorientated, like an 'outsider in a foreign land' (Mann, 2001, 11). Reading round a topic, going into a subject in more depth, and looking for multiple perspectives were things with which she felt uncomfortably unfamiliar.

While Natalie was reassured to find that much of her work would be assessed by what she saw as 'coursework', she was extremely worried to discover that she could not expect to hand in her work for a teacher to look at and comment on several times before the submission date. She explained that during her A-levels:

"[In college] for coursework, it was very 'teacher-help', if you know what I mean. We would write the essays, hand them in, they would mark it and they would, not make you change it all, but... it was basically the teacher had written it, if you know what I mean. Like, you would say your view and the teacher would turn it around to try and make it more suitable."



In practice, this meant she was coming to university with a model of feedback which was strongly characterised by teacher direction and control over her learning. She felt terribly 'lost' and worried without it:

"Feedback at college was, well... if it was coursework you'd just get drafts and they'd write 'Change this', or 'Delete this', or 'Just sort it out...' And it would be helpful... Because sometimes [here] you just don't know what to do. So that's the thing about Uni. You don't get to do drafts, so you are a bit lost with that. Here you just feel, like, 'Oh! I'm on my own!' You've got no drafts or anything like that... no one telling you how to get those few extra marks. Or to tell you to take out something that was wrong."

The view of feedback that Natalie brought with her, then, was clearly focused on 'feedback-as-telling'. Her comments suggest that she appears to feel that the teacher, not the student, is responsible for regulating her learning. Her view, which sees teacher feedback as responsible for gradually shaping her work into the

'correct' answer, seems to have positioned her as a passive bystander in her own learning. Even worse, it seems to have implied that subject material is not something to be struggled with and mastered, but is inert content to gather and put in.

None of this will stand her in good stead for producing the complex, divergent kinds of assignments that, at least in theory, typify the high-order thinking embodied by university assignment tasks (Sadler, 2009). It will not help her adopt the deep approaches to learning (Ramsden, 1992) or critical thinking (Moon, 2005) that her lecturers are likely to expect. In short, Natalie appears to have a long way to go if she is to align her expectations and thinking about studying, assessment and feedback with those of her university lecturers.

Natalie's worries and concerns about feedback at university, and her misconceptions, are by no means atypical. Helping students to rethink their models of feedback, then, is a really significant area for development. Many students may need active support and explicit encouragement to reframe their view of feedback in the early stages of their courses if they are to benefit from the many kinds of feedback available to them during their time at university.

Section 2 - Putting formal feedback into practice

I will now offer a few practical illustrations of formal and informal feedback designs which lecturers in the Northumbria Assessment CETL decided to employ to encourage their students to reframe their views of feedback, so that they developed both subject knowledge and insights into the learning process in the spirit of sustainable assessment. The examples illustrate range and diversity in relation to the ways in which staff sought to incorporate new feedback practices.

Across our CETL, lecturers often redesigned their assessment practice to provide structured opportunities for feedback. They sought to engineer specific feedback events as planned parts of their modules to try and improve and diversify their students' experiences of, and engagement with, a range of feedback.

As observed earlier, most people still think of feedback as comment which tutors give to students. They particularly think of it as written comments on work submitted by students for assessment. But formal feedback which is a planned part of any module or programme can be much more than that.

Tutors may, for instance, offer students feedback:

- on oral presentations or progress reports
- on draft work
- on some sort of preparation activity, such as an essay plan or element of a report
- on a group summary of key issues that need to be addressed within the module's subsequent summative assessment task.

Alternatively, they may break down a module assignment into smaller steps which link together and build on one another in order to provide feedback on

an early submission, so that the students can take forward any advice into the second element of their work.

Finally, they may give collective or whole-class feedback, offering students some general observations about the ways in which students responded effectively to an exam or an assignment, and ways in which common limitations might be improved.

Formal feedback and peer review

Tutors who are particularly concerned to help students move away from dependency on tutor comment often consciously redesign structured opportunities for feedback. This can draw students' attention to the *range of people*, not just tutors, who can offer useful feedback. In other words, they build in structured opportunities which try to switch attention away from lecturers as the customary providers of feedback, towards peers, more experienced students, employers and other stakeholders as the creators of useful feedback.

Across our CETL, peer review was a hugely popular format for redesigning feedback practices. Hounsell et al (2010) note that the introduction of peer feedback has spread rapidly, and many examples can be found across a range of subjects. The research literature in

HE offers ample evidence of the benefits of providing students with opportunities to give and receive feedback from their fellow students (see Boud et al, 1999; Falchicov, 2005; Orsmond et al, 1996, 2002; Liu and Carless, 2006; Nicol, 2009). In addition, peer feedback does not usually carry the levels of anxiety or concern – on the part of students as well as staff – that can be associated with the kinds of peer assessment that result in the award of a mark or grade (Liu and Carless, 2006).

The following range of examples, which are organised into broad types of pedagogic activity, offers a snapshot of some strategies used by CETL lecturers in a range of disciplinary contexts. It is important to note that many of the examples did not use peer review as a means of enabling students to get feedback on draft work which they would subsequently rework and improve for a final submission. Rather, tasks which were peer-reviewed often focused on allowing students to gain feedback on their developing knowledge, skills and understandings within the subject domain, so that students formed a sense of how they were doing as they built up their appreciation of a particular field of study.

Peer-review feedback strategies

Constructive commentary on formative writing tasks

In several subjects large classes of students were organised into groups to share short pieces of practice writing, either in face to face settings or via the e-learning environment. Peers were supported to give constructive comments to each other. Through these sorts of collaborative tasks each individual received a range of comments, entered into discussions with peers, and had the opportunity to see and learn from the different ways in which fellow students approached writing in the subject domain.

Poster review events

The peer review of student-produced posters was also an extremely popular strategy. During events attended by staff and students, peers were asked to offer feedback on other students' posters, which were typically produced in groups. Producing a poster involved students working collaboratively to consult relevant sources, draw on their developing understanding of the topic, and presenting it to a live audience, who gave oral feedback and asked questions for clarification, as well as supplying written comments. Sometimes peer review forms were used, or students stuck post-it notes, with suggestions for further reading or areas to consider, onto the poster. No marks or grades were awarded, but students were supplied with guidance on giving each other constructive feedback.

Progress reviews

Progress reports with peer review were often built into a module. These involved timetabled sessions which focused on giving students access to peer and teacher comments on oral presentations at important stages of a student-led project. This kind of feedback was planned and scheduled by the teachers to best support learning by giving students the opportunity for direct feedback on formative tasks focused, for example, on the development of a suitable research question, research design issues, or data analysis. Peers, guided by the tutor, offered oral feedback which helped each student hone the (often too broad) area they planned to cover, or offered practical suggestions which helped them locate suitable settings for their enquiry and so on.

Blogging in study syndicates

Online peer review was sometimes used. For example, in one subject area, students established themselves in study syndicates. At specific points during a module, one student became a blog writer who provided a commentary on selected set reading, while the rest of the students offered feedback on the blog writer's analysis – helping them perceive omissions, misunderstandings, or challenge their prejudices.

Reviewing draft essays

Some examples involved students in the peer review of draft essays pre-submission. In one example, this was done to flag up the importance of attending to broad theoretical issues. The lecturer was concerned that students often tend to focus on acquiring content knowledge but the learning outcomes also required them to use critical reflection to improve their learning. Well in advance of the hand-in date, students were asked to bring a 1,000 word draft of their module assignment to a session. They then reviewed the drafts in groups of three. It was stressed that participation would help students directly with their final assignment submission. For the peer review, students were supplied with guidance on giving constructive feedback and a peer review sheet which directed them to comment on the content and depth of the draft (for instance, how well points were supported by evidence), in addition to presentational matters, such as style and format.

Student conferences

Sometimes lecturers designed student conferences, in which learners had the opportunity to present work-in-progress to gain a range of feedback. Here the providers of feedback involved employers, third-year students on the same course, or students from other Schools and subject areas, as well as tutors and peers from the specific module in question. Sometimes the conferences were deliberately informal. One lecturer, for example, explicitly wanted to encourage her first-year students to draw on the theory which formed the backbone of the module and was the focus of the taught sessions. She was concerned, however, that *“At this point in the degree, students sometimes miss the point of the whole module, which is a real shame. They can be really hard-working – very conscientious – but hand in a piece of writing that’s too narrow as a response when they come to tackle the assignment.”* To help students perceive the stance that the module took, she arranged an informal conference, in which over 80 first-years were asked to individually bring along a relevant visual image of their own choice which they would analyse in relation to the module's theoretical frameworks. The conference was set up on round tables, seating about eight first-year ‘presenters’ facilitated by two third-year student volunteers. Each table had a key question that the lecturer had designed to alert students to important aspects she wanted them to consider. Students moved around the tables until they had considered their image in relation to all of the questions. As they talked about their image, everyone on the table scribbled feedback on paper tablecloths, so that comments were available to everyone as they moved from table to table.



Students' views of the feedback strategies

In these kinds of activities, students highly valued having the chance to practise their developing knowledge and skills. They were extremely reassured to gain feedback on their ideas and have others check their progress. As one said:

"You know that other people will pitch in if it's off beam. If not the teacher, someone else will add new things, or give you help if you get stuck."

Most felt that having access to this kind of feedback helped them to become aware of gaps in their own thinking. Peers could help them identify problems or issues they needed to think about and address. For example, one claimed she benefitted from:

"Getting ideas. Things you might've missed out on, or theories that you maybe hadn't thought about putting in and maybe you needed to."

Often, however, students drew attention to the way that seeing other people's approaches, rather than deriving feedback directly via people's comments on their own work, was the most helpful element. Hounsell (2007) suggests that offering students access to on-display work, as opposed to working in isolation on privately contracted work, can be a helpful source of feedback during the course of learning itself. For instance, hearing peers talk about

the work and how they had tackled it helped students develop different ideas for building and understanding subject knowledge:

"What I liked about it was it drew on a lot of people. Not just the lecturers, other people too. So you get their views, their ways of explaining it. That's great, so you get lots of views on a thing."

This helped students begin to review their own progress, as the following student explains:

"Once I had the chance to hear how other people were going about their project, and got feedback from my peers about my own project, I felt much more confident and could see the sorts of things I should and shouldn't be doing."

Nicol (2010) suggests that being involved in peer review stimulates reflection. Many found that being required to articulate their ideas and enter into 'live' dialogue, rather than simply receive written comments, was a particularly useful element of the peer review process. As one said:

"Having to put ideas into words for peers to understand and ask about was a great way of teaching myself about the subject."



Practising and trying out new subject-related terminology and using new concepts, and getting feedback on one's capacity to do that effectively, was particularly important here.

Others found that giving, rather than receiving, feedback took some getting used to, but began, eventually, to see it as a valuable activity. It also helped if the lecturer explained the rationale for the activities, so that students could appreciate the thinking behind their involvement. The following student discussed how far her ideas about feedback had begun to shift as a result of being involved in peer review. At first, she felt sceptical and uncomfortable about getting involved, but gradually began to see how much she had to gain from giving, rather than just receiving feedback (Nicol, 2009) and from hearing other people's approaches and the feedback they gained:

"It was weird at first, giving feedback. But I soon got used to it, because I found I was learning from the other students."

Because it was so unfamiliar an exercise, though, giving feedback was something which most students needed explicit encouragement and support to do. One, for example, said it was valuable to learn how to offer feedback that would help the recipient:

"I think you have to get into the swing of giving constructive criticism. Don't just say 'That was good' if it wasn't, because that's not helpful. Say 'have you thought of this, or have you tried it like that?'"

Students also spoke of gaining insights into their teachers' requirements. Partly this came about by hearing the teacher's comment on other students' work, as well as having teachers directly commenting on their own efforts:

"The teacher was kind of, making sure we were talking about the viewpoints we needed to, so that was helpful. I saw that they wanted us to draw on a lot of different viewpoints, and not just think 'Right, this is what I think.'"



Some saw this as a matter of getting to 'know the game' and 'realise what buttons to push'. This kind of indirect feedback focused students on gaining insight into the standards and requirements lecturers had in mind, and encouraged them to see how and why their lecturers wanted them to see and think in disciplinary ways. One, for instance, talked about realising that she needed to take a broader view of the subject matter:

"Hearing other people's work and getting feedback from my peers about my own thing, I could see the things I should be doing. I will look for more theory in future. Read a lot more to look for different views."

Another explained that being exposed to other students' ways of working and listening to tutors' comments on others' work was beginning to have an impact on the way he approached lectures. At first, he had been seeing lectures as a place to 'get the notes', but had begun instead to:

"...write notes and stuff in class, thinking: How could I link this with my essay? Because I think you've got to sort of take a look at different topics. They're not, like, leaving it totally open to your own interpretation – you've got to meet the guidelines."

In this sense he was beginning to realise that his tutors wanted him to integrate theory and move beyond a view of subject knowledge as inert information. He felt this was a very different way of approaching assessment and learning than the one which he had employed successfully in his A-levels:

"Before university, there wasn't really much chance to take choices when you were writing assignments. You just did the essays they way they expected you to and they all looked pretty much the same. But with this, I can see that now I'm at Uni I have to make a choice about what I focus on, and that no two pieces of work will look the same. Because here you're reading your own stuff and you decide yourself. I think you kind of have to take more initiative. I saw the teachers liked that in the presentations."

Being involved in peer feedback, then, didn't just keep students on track by telling them what they had done well or aspects they had missed. It also helped some reframe their views of feedback as a dialogic, participative process, and helped them begin to recognise the importance of taking deep approaches to learning and viewing the subject matter through a different lens.



Formal feedback and self-review

If students are to use feedback from other sources, they have to decode it, internalise it and then use the information to make a judgement about their own work. All these stages are acts of self-evaluation (Nicol, 2010). Further, Nicol (2007) argues that the main characteristic of autonomy in learning is that students gradually learn to take significant responsibility for setting their own learning goals and for evaluating their own progress. He suggests that student empowerment, in the sense of the development of learner self-regulation, can be enhanced in the first year through structured opportunities for self assessment and reflection. From this viewpoint, students will benefit from regular chances to critically evaluate the quality of their own work during, as well as after, its production.

Some CETL tutors consciously redesigned formal feedback explicitly to draw student attention to *self-review* and the need to participate pro-actively in the feedback process. For instance, to help students benefit from and learn to use feedback, one teaching team felt it might be useful to spend time designing explicit features of the course that might help students develop the ability to make their own evaluative judgements about the quality and impact of their work.

The teachers in this example were particularly keen to help their first-year students learn to actively engage with feedback, so that they could perceive its meaning and value and use it to improve their work. Tutors were eager, then, that students not only gained access to ample peer and teacher feedback during the production of formative tasks, but discussed it and took notice of it. As one explained:

“We wanted them to realise the important role they have to play in using feedback to make informed decisions about their own learning. It’s vital they get into the habit of self-review: taking stock and planning their next steps.”

Self-review feedback strategy: developing students’ awareness of self-review

The module was a study skills module delivered to over 140 undergraduates in the first semester of study. At particular stages in the module students worked with their guidance tutor in seminar groups of about twelve students. To facilitate the seminars and link them to the rest of the module, the teaching team designed a log book which formally required students to undertake self-review using a range of feedback.

The log book incorporated four small-scale thinking-writing (Mitchell, 2011) tasks. Students were asked to complete each task 'in rough', and to take it to their small-group seminar. The tasks were not marked, but each student was asked to share his or her response with the group, in order to get feedback from peers and the tutor and discuss how it might be further improved.

The log book was designed so that at the end of each seminar, students were formally required to draw together a summary of the feedback comments they had received on each task. This could be feedback they had received directly from others, or feedback information they had gleaned from discussing other students' work. Students were then supported to use this feedback to form a self-review and develop an action-plan, which they documented in relevant sections of the log book. The action plans were then used as the basis for discussions at the beginning of the following seminar, with students commenting orally on how they had put their action plans into use, and any issues or challenges they had encountered in doing so.

Students' views of the feedback strategies

Students generally felt that the small tasks were useful practice in trying out new skills and gaining formative feedback which would help them improve before they were required to submit pieces of work to be marked. Most felt they benefited, for instance, from the chance to practise and receive formative feedback on using academic writing conventions. Again, as in the previous examples on peer review, the opportunity to learn from other students' approaches also helped the process of self-review and decision-making, so that students saw ways of improving work *for themselves*, rather than relying on others to tell them what to do.

"I used rather informal language... And I saw I have to change that."

It is interesting to note the extent to which, from this perspective, getting something 'wrong' was particularly helpful, as the following student explained:

"One thing we learned from doing that was that a lot of us were changing the authors into alphabetical order when they'd written an article. But it was only when we discussed that with each other, and got it wrong, that we really learned it."

From this perspective, the process of making mistakes was useful, but for some students to feel this it was important that the formative tasks were not graded or marked in any way. One claimed, for instance, that because she knew the tasks were not marked, she approached them with a view to generating useful feedback, rather than show what she knew:

"Because I know it's not marked properly, I use it differently. I jot down notes or questions, and that's useful. Like, I would write when I didn't understand something. I wouldn't do that in an essay! No way! In an essay you're trying to look like you do understand, not that you don't!"

This suggests that the student is beginning to use her log book to identify aspects she discovers she does not yet understand and, therefore, needs to work further upon. In this sense she is using the reflections to think ahead, identifying for herself what she needs to do next. While some students already 'naturally'

realise the importance of becoming alert to aspects they do not yet understand, with a view to working further to develop insight, others seemed to value having this phenomenon explicitly brought to their attention:

"I've been writing down points. Like, writing to myself to remind me about things I think I need to understand more, or want to ask about."

If students are to be active in their own learning they need to be able to make decisions for themselves, work out what approaches to take and evaluate their own progress. Building in formal opportunities for students to generate feedback on their own work may well help some students to reframe their views of feedback, so that they begin to take over responsibility for the assessment process for themselves.

In summary, Section 2 has tried to flag up the importance of building in different ways of creating feedback-rich learning environments for students. It has focused on strategies which augment the 'traditional' types of tutor-written comment on individual students' marked work which universities tend to mandate. In part, these strategies often seek to address the limitations of traditional approaches, such as feedback coming too late, or not making sense to students. But the new approaches briefly outlined here also signal a strong move away from a conceptual model of feedback as a 'gift' that the lecturer provides. The section has placed emphasis on the ways in which students can become involved in creating, as well as receiving and engaging with, feedback, via the processes of peer- and self-review. In other words, we can build in different kinds of formal feedback not only from tutors, but also from others, including fellow students, in order to create effective AfL and support students' ongoing development.

Section 3 - Putting informal feedback into practice

'Everyday learning activities as well as special tasks and tests provide opportunities for the provision of feedback' (Boud and Associates, 2010: 2)

This section focuses on a range of examples of practice in which feedback occurred much more informally, as part of the normal flow of teaching and learning, almost as a by-product. From this viewpoint, classroom activities, assessment tasks and associated directed study were designed to maximise the formative potential of the university classroom. Here the teacher's role was to create effective conditions for learning by placing student involvement, effort and activity at the heart of the learning and teaching environment. Staff sought to ensure that students were provided with a continual flow of feedback which enabled them to see how they were doing.

This kind of feedback could not usually be planned in detail, but relied on designing a climate that encouraged dialogue, collaboration amongst students and interaction about subject-related tasks between teachers and students. To this end tutors across the CETL worked hard to structure the formative tasks and activities they asked their students to become involved in, moving strongly away from didactic, transmission models of teaching towards interactive, participative classroom experiences which were designed to foster student activity, application, discussion and social interaction.

This section strongly indicates the importance, from students' perspectives, of the social dimension, where shared experiences strengthen and enhance students' academic experiences by making a range of informal feedback available.

Improving informal feedback by redesigning classroom activities

Across the CETL most examples of informal feedback resulted from the redesign of classroom-based pedagogic strategies. Here staff were extremely conscious of trying to provide a different classroom experience than the one described by the following student:

"In most modules, you've just got to go along and get the notes, basically, and then hope you've got the right idea, to the level they're expecting, when it comes to the assignment. The problem is, you can hand in an assignment thinking that you've got it... but sometimes you really haven't! But by then it's too late! You do wonder if you're getting the right idea, so it's much better to have a go before it counts."



The tutors hoped to get their students to become genuinely involved in progressively more challenging tasks, giving them experiences which would help them to generate their own internal feedback. The idea was that students would become better equipped to gauge, monitor and evaluate their own progress, so they had the chance to adjust learning appropriately as they went along (Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006).

When they come to tackle a new subject area students often need time, space and explicit encouragement not just to practise, but also to express their sense-making in order to get feedback on their developing ideas. So engineering fruitful situations for focused peer discussion and shared meaning-making is an essential part of designing interactive experiences for our students. Informal interactions with peers are massively important ways of learning in universities (Boud and Middleton, 2003), because this places emphasis on a process of reflection, peer review and evaluation (Black and McCormick, 2010).

In practice, this meant tutors carefully structuring the academic-social experience in the classroom (Nicol, 2007) to encourage learners to become actively engaged in studying relevant disciplinary material together and spend ample time and effort on meaningful subject-related activity (Gibbs and Simpson, 2005). Black and McCormick (2010: 493)

note that in HE there is a 'preponderance of concern about formative feedback on written work: the potential contexts for development of formative approaches could well be expanded to consider also oral dialogue', in lecture theatres and large-group teaching, as well as in seminars and tutorials. The following three examples have been chosen because they focus on situations in which one lecturer, or two lecturers team-teaching, were working with a classroom group of between seventy to one hundred students.

***Redesigning classroom activities (Example 1):
Students working collaboratively to build
graffiti posters in class time to enhance
informal feedback***

The teachers organised structured activities where, in the two-hour 'lecture' sessions, the seventy students worked in groups to build posters over a period of three consecutive weeks. The posters were informal, graffiti-like displays, rather than polished performances. The tutors emphasised that they were intended to act as tools for learning, so presentation issues didn't matter, other than the material should be accessible to other students and teachers in the class when groups circulated to explore and discuss the findings of other groups' posters.

The lecturers set a series of academic tasks for their students each week. To prepare for each session, individuals were asked to research material, which

they brought to each session to help inform the development of their group's poster. Over a three week period, students worked on their posters to develop different sightings of an important threshold concept that the tutors believed underpinned high-order thinking and mastery in their particular domain. Threshold concepts are those held to be central by disciplinary specialists, and embody changes in the way in which students view the discipline, opening up a conceptual gateway to a new way of thinking about something (Meyer and Land, 2005). In the first week learners were required to discuss their personal interpretations of primary source material, then in subsequent weeks they researched different perspectives from a range of specified sources, which they added to their developing posters. This helped them link new ideas to their existing concepts, so that new ways of thinking were generated.

The students were supported to work collaboratively as groups. Ground-rules were negotiated, with students agreeing amongst themselves that everyone must participate, that consensus should be achieved before anything went on the poster, and that assertions anyone wanted to put forward should be supported by evidence and a convincing rationale. This was important, because discussion was the main means by which learners were to engage with the new material each week. As learners endeavoured to understand the ideas within their own personal frames of reference they interacted with peers and their teachers, who circulated around the groups, listening in to informally appraise students' understandings of the material, interjecting to ask questions to clarify how far students understood key concepts, or push the thinking further.

Later, in interviews with the research team, students talked about the value of negotiating common meaning with their fellow students. They felt this gave

them feedback on the extent to which they were grasping the relevant ideas:

"You make sure that it makes sense and then, to see if you can actually have an, a debate about it and have, have enough knowledge to back your arguments through when they go 'Well, hang on a minute, what about this, what about that?'"

In one sense, students sometimes felt the value of the peer discussions was to help tell them if anything was 'wrong' with their thinking, so they could learn by their mistakes:

"It's not a presentation where you've had a week to put it together, so you haven't got that anxiety about what you've put down as being wrong, because it's just something that you've done instantly... you then talk about it, you then get the feedback so you know as soon as you've put that up if there's something terribly out of place it's going to be picked up on by somebody."

Here the student's sense of the provisional and informal nature of the classroom discourse helps her see it as a genuinely formative exercise with a view to generating feedback, rather than a formal 'presentation' with an emphasis on being judged:

"With this, they want to get at what you think. So it's that sounding board, because it's something that you've done instantly... and you then can talk about it instantly, and then you get feedback instantly."



Within this perspective, students seemed to feel that the lecturers' role was to keep students on track in relation to the subject, but this was more in terms of helping to manage or steer classroom talk, rather than tell them what was 'right' or 'wrong':

"You need your lecturer to know that, yeah, that's what you're supposed to be talking about, yeah, you've got the right idea. Maybe explore this a bit more."

Black (2007, 19) argues that for genuinely formative interaction, 'wrong or partly right answers are what teachers need to know. The task is to respond to what has been elicited in order to develop discussion among learners, collecting various ideas, summarising and then challenging them with further questions that indicate a positive direction for the thinking.'

Interestingly in response to the poster-work students framed teacher feedback as questioning rather than telling. As one said:

"The thing that I did like was that they didn't give us straight answers. It wasn't 'What you're saying is right/wrong.' It was that they were questioning us, so that we had to do a lot more thinking."

Black and McCormick (2010) observe that oral discussion, involving interactive dialogue where the teacher can explore and steer by sensitive challenge, should be one of the main ways through which the learner is apprenticed into the world of academic discourse by being inducted into its practice. In the poster work students framed the lecturers as authorities who could help students 'see' the nature of the subject specialism, and its particular ways of seeing material, by means of asking specific questions:

"It's knowing what questions to ask, which somebody who knows their subject knows. I didn't know the questions [how to approach the material]. That's something that clicks through time rather than clicking because you're told it."

Here the student notes how it takes time, lots of active engagement with the subject and ongoing participation with knowledgeable others to develop a feel for what a subject is *really* all about. Without this insight, however, it is difficult for students to form a genuine sense of academic standards and requirements.

**Redesigning classroom activities (Example 2):
Building group summaries of required reading
to enhance informal feedback**

Here, in a lecture theatre, over ninety students worked together in self-selecting groups to build a 500 word group summary of an academic article in relation to a question the lecturer posed. Student groups fed the main points back to the whole group in plenary, and the tutor created a collective document which pulled together their ideas and addressed the question appropriately. She typed this up on the screen at the front of the lecture theatre and placed it on the e-learning portal at the end of the two-hour session, so that students could access it later.

Nicol (2007) argues that good assessment and feedback practice should activate students' motivation to learn. He also suggests that the development of social interaction around academic tasks encourages networking and peer feedback in a way that creates a positive backwash effect on academic learning by providing positive social support. The following student is talking about how she had found the required reading to be quite challenging, so was reassured to learn that others struggled, too:

"I read it once, and then I went back to read it. It was quite hard to read, but it was useful to try and discuss it with others and see what they thought about it. I was quite relieved that others found it hard, too – you begin to wonder if it's just you who finds it difficult. It was useful to hear other people's questions, too. We could ask each other questions about what we didn't understand, that you'd feel stupid asking in front of the whole class, or asking the tutors."

It also helped her 'see' strategies for moving her learning forward:

"Writing the summary together was good, because when the lecturer started saying what she expected to be included, or what she would have done, we could see what we had done was right, but that it could be a bit better by giving an overview. So now when I'm taking notes, I'm trying to get the information so that I can use it, or structure it, once I see the connection. It's hard to explain, but I'm doing things differently."

Furthermore, listening to how others – staff and students alike – express the sense they make of a topic, helps novices realise when they do not understand the ideas that emerge from a discussion or shared activity, as the following student illustrates:

"Doing that exercise was good, because I thought to myself: 'No. I haven't quite got it yet.' So I need to go away and look at it a bit more, do more to try and get my head round it properly."

**Redesigning classroom activities (Example 3):
Structuring project-work to enhance informal
feedback**

Some CETL tutors set up project work, developed along the lines of research-based enquiry (Brew, 2006) or enquiry-based learning (Kahn and O'Rourke, 2005) as a way of redesigning teaching as a series of structured activities where students were required to work, often in groups, on an open-ended task to an agreed output.



For instance, an introductory theory module was entirely established around small-scale student activities and dialogic teaching, rather than the delivery of information. Students were required to collect, discuss and gradually learn to analyse data from the 'real world' in an effort to offer them an authentic academic experience which would help them perceive the relevance of the theories being studied by applying them to material they had gathered from their own local environments. Traditional lectures with over 100 students were replaced by interactive discussions about the activities students had undertaken. A series of related activities required students to gather material for analysis and discussion as part of a semester-long project which they would write up for their assignment. For example, at one point in the semester, individual students were asked to gather data, in the form of literal signs and leaflets they could find in public spaces, about a relevant topic. They were asked to post examples of the data they had gathered to the e-learning portal. They were also asked to write a paragraph analysing their data using particular theoretical lenses.

Before the lecture, the two tutors skimmed the posts that students had made. They selected one or two effective responses and one or two less effective responses and planned the session around feedback on these. They facilitated a class discussion of these examples, highlighting how each could be further developed. Students found this useful, even when their own data was not focused upon:

"We got feedback in class on our [data]. The lecturers picked out some and talked about what was good and stuff. They mentioned people's writing about the [data] – that was really useful. Someone had said children were oppressed, which I'd said in my writing... And they said 'Yes, fine, that's one way of looking at it. But how else could you look at it?' So they weren't saying it was wrong, but that if you add to it, or do it this way, you know, look at it from another point of view, then that would be even better. So that gave me the next sort of step on the road."

Within this framework students saw the lecturer as someone who helped steer discussion and peer interaction by setting clear, carefully structured academic tasks, eliciting students' views which the teachers then discussed and encouraged them to develop. This structure gave students valuable feedback in each lecture:

"I like the way the module is set out. It's broken down into tasks and they give you feedback. So what you can do is alter or change. Because you get feedback off each session. So if there are areas you need to develop, you can do it."

Again, students saw this kind of teacher feedback as useful questioning which offered them insights and guidance about possible future strategies they could take, rather than telling them what to do next. One student, for instance, explained the feedback process as follows:

"You do something, then they keep getting you to go further into it."

In summary, this sub-section has suggested that designing active, collaborative and dialogic approaches to classroom activities brings with it an intrinsic supply of informal feedback to improve student learning. For example, as students work together, discussing ideas and approaches, and

interact with their teachers on carefully chosen classroom tasks, they can test out their own ideas and skills, see how other students go about things and begin to appreciate the standards and requirements of their subjects.

Informal feedback beyond the classroom

One strong finding to emerge from the CETL research programme was the value many students placed on the importance of feedback embedded within informal learning communities to enhance their academic experience. Many of the classroom-based AfL activities, for example, spurred students to form their own informal feedback-rich or feedback-seeking communities beyond the classroom. Sometimes this focused on engineering extra opportunities to discuss one's approaches with peers, as the following student explained:

"I found I can learn a lot from explaining it to other people – that helps me learn, you know? So I desperately try and get peer groups going. Otherwise, there's no feedback, and I think, especially on your first assignments, you need reassurance. That's something I really need, because you haven't got it at home, so that's what I want from coming to campus. I miss out academically if I can't get support from other students."

However, many students also consciously set out to explain their courses, and their growing perceptions of topic areas, with partners, friends or family members who were not directly involved in the university experience. Often students did this to gauge for themselves how far they were grasping a topic, by seeing if they could explain it to an outsider. For instance, the following student explained why she talked to her partner about her learning. She wanted to see for herself whether she had developed the more complex ways of thinking about and seeing the subject matter that she realised were important:

"I'm just checking... I'm kind of... confirming that some people don't actually get it. Because... when you get somebody who's completely... detached from it they are a better sounding post. And that, kind of, reaffirmed that maybe I was seeing what I was supposed to be seeing."

Our research repeatedly found that talking to people beyond the course or subject-area was a common strategy many students used to gain self-generated informal feedback by reflecting on, interrogating and negotiating their understandings and experiences of a topic.

Using authentic assessment to enhance informal feedback

Boud (2009: 42) suggests that assessment tasks which feel meaningful or authentic beyond the internally-referenced assessment context of the university, can help focus learners' attention on learning for the

longer term, by engaging students more thoroughly in situations that anticipate engagement as a full professional. He argues that assessment tasks which share some general features of professional practice can help 'build the capacity of students to learn and assess for themselves when they are out of our hands'. These might include, for instance, the taking of judgements which have consequences for other people, or the requirement to co-produce outcomes with colleagues. Within our CETL, authentic assessment task designs appeared particularly potent tools for 'seeding' informal feedback opportunities embedded in peer discussion which extended well beyond the classroom environment. Appropriately designed summative tasks exerted a powerful positive backwash effect (Watkins, Dahlin and Eckholm, 2005) on learning and fostered informal feedback, as the following example illustrates.

In a second-year option on assessment, instead of writing an essay, Joint Honours² students were required to produce guides to assessment which would be suitable for first-year undergraduates. Learners could decide to work alone, or with others, to produce these materials. The guides took shape gradually, and as the module progressed 'teaching' sessions were given over to their design and development, with ample opportunity for student-student and staff-student dialogue.

This approach helped students to see how the knowledge they were developing, and the way they were building towards the assignment, had direct relevance and importance in the 'real world', even though the students did not necessarily envisage

² These students were studying on a Joint Honours programme in the School of Health, Community and Education Studies. Students choose two part-routes, which have an applied social focus (such as Early Years, Childhood Studies, Disability Studies, Guidance and Counselling). The programme does not offer license to practice: each part-route is studied as an academic area of enquiry. Students on any combination of part-routes can choose to take the option on assessment.



going on to undertake a professional teaching qualification. Learners were highly motivated and creative in their approaches. They chose a variety of formats, including booklets, catalogues, DVDs, games and leaflets, which aimed to give first-years lots of useful feedback on their approaches to learning and assessment. One guide was subsequently edited and published online – ‘The F Word’ (Barry-Cutter and Price, 2009) not least because it focuses on the theme of feedback in its own right and has been very well-received by first-year students on an introductory study skills module³. It is interesting to acknowledge the heavy emphasis it places on peer interaction as a source of valuable feedback.

Many students taking this option module chose to develop their materials in small self-selecting groups or pairs. Most said this offered them a more ‘natural’ way of working, in which ideas were shared and co-produced in a constructive process of dialogue, negotiation and peer review:

“Working on the same thing together is kind of helpful with this. Because we both have a working knowledge of the topic, we could actually say, No, I don’t think that’s right. Does this mean this? Should we put it this way?”

Hounsell (2007) argues that collaborative assignments like this can help foster connoisseurship and a fuller appreciation of academic standards amongst students, as students can learn from co-generation and co-writing as they work together on subject material.

Using student mentoring to enhance informal feedback

In another example, second- and third-year students studying Guidance and Counselling as a topic for academic enquiry were invited to become involved in designing authentic mentoring experiences for first-year students. The ‘live’ and unpredictable meetings with the first-year mentees meant that the mentors carefully thought through the implications of different stances they could adopt. They discussed these at length in their groups:

“Each member of the group had an entirely different and very strong opinion on the mentoring role and how the candidates should be approached. And we spent an awful lot of time debating, a long, long time, prior to the actual day of the mentoring, debating how you should do it, what we should do.”

³ **The F word.** A guide to feedback, produced by students for students, created by Elizabeth Barry Cutter and Nick Price. Available online at: <http://escalate.ac.uk/8410>



In this way, working together to design their mentoring session engaged students in deep discussion of the subject and its standards, affording students with a great deal of informal feedback on their views of subject terminology and debate about appropriate theoretical approaches.

However, another strong theme to emerge was the extent to which the mentors felt their involvement in the scheme helped them to generate feedback for themselves about the quality and relevance of their academic studies. This was often couched in terms of being able to see what they knew and could do, instead of focusing exclusively on areas of deficit, which more traditional assessment environments often tended to prompt them to do. Interestingly, in this way mentoring offered students self-generated feedback on their broader experiences of being at university, rather than simply their academic performance as measured by grades and marks:

"It was not until this point that I realised how far I had come, not just academically, but personally. Prior to attending the first meeting I was nervous about not having anything worthwhile to pass on; taking part in this mentorship has really highlighted how experienced I am as a student and as a potential employee. Through passing on my experience to year one I really learned about myself."

In both of the examples of authentic assessment mentioned above, students were particularly motivated by feeling that their academic work might have a positive impact on the learning experiences of the first-year community. Being asked, as part of a summative assignment task, to offer first-years valuable feedback on the experience of learning felt a realistic goal and a sense of agency emerged as a key theme.

In fact, many other students across the CETL community became enthusiastically involved in voluntary feedback-generating activities which often took place beyond the formal curriculum, where no marks or extrinsic rewards were attached. For example, Learning Leadership was a voluntary extra-curricular scheme developed within the CETL (Sambell and Graham, 2010). It was based on a blend of the principles and values underpinning Supplemental Instruction (PASS, 2010) and our own model of AfL. Learning Leadership became a 'summative free zone,' to create a clear demarcation between formative assessment and measurement culture. Student second- or third-year volunteers were trained by the CETL Student Development Officer to become Learning Leaders, who supported first-year students within their discipline. The scheme was designed to adapt to local contexts in a bespoke manner, so that each new version or uptake had a focus which emerged from a consultation process with staff and students in the particular area. In this sense it focused upon areas of academic experience which students themselves felt to be challenging in specific disciplinary contexts.

The idea was that assigning students a degree of power to effect pedagogic change, to give feedback and to facilitate others' learning might help position the student leaders with a sense of agency within the university milieu, as well as help first-years make a smoother transition to academic study. Contrary to the enduring myth that students will not do anything unless it is marked, our new scheme proved extremely popular with students from a range of disciplines. It was also well received by first-year students, who reported finding the feedback helpful and convincing, because it emanated from students rather than tutors. First-years claimed, for instance, to find it very helpful to receive feedback from more experienced students on the course. Some felt reassured to learn that the second- and third-years remembered struggling with course content in the early days, but had learnt to regard teaching sessions as valuable places to ask questions, discuss issues and see if they were on the right track:

"They explained that all experiences, good and bad, help you learn."

Others were keen to discover how far and in what ways first-year study might be useful in later years, as the following student reveals:

"I remember saying to some of the second- and third-years, 'Do you actually use [this theory] in any more years?' And they were 'Yeah, yeah you come back to it time and again. It's always there, it's kind of, how you think about the topics you do – so you need to get in that frame of mind, thinking about it. It does all link in: everything's all pieced together.' So that made me more determined to get my head around it all!"

Bosley (2004) similarly found that, in a range of work-related contexts, learners show a particular interest in the feedback they get from experienced colleagues they actually meet, affording credibility to the person's 'insider knowledge' and valuing the way the contact resonates with their own experience.

This all means that informal feedback can profitably stem from a range of diverse sources. As Boud and Falchicov (2006, 404) suggest: 'we must not make the mistake of attributing all the benefits of education to those aspects under the direct control of teachers or the curriculum.'

Section 4 - Beyond feedback

This final section considers the ways in which lecturers might design educational activities explicitly to engage students in discussions about assessment standards, criteria and quality. AfL encourages students to take responsibility for directing their own learning and therefore we need to include specific components that will help students to understand the standards and criteria that embody what it means to do well in the subject, so that they are in a position to make informed decisions and evaluate their own work during the act of producing it.

In 1998 Sadler stressed that the standards against which work is being judged should be clearly outlined to students and explicitly understood by staff. Staff attempts to achieve transparency about assessment task specifications and the criteria used to judge work is sometimes referred to as 'feedforward' (Sadler, 2010). Used in this context, the term feedforward contrasts with feedback, which is typically regarded as information about the quality of an appraised work and/or advice about how future responses to similar assessment tasks should be tackled.

In an article entitled 'Beyond Feedback', Sadler (2010) argues that simply 'telling' students about criteria, standards and what is expected in terms of assessment performance is as problematic as 'telling' them about the quality of their work in the hope they will improve it. Feedforward must represent more than a set of published guidelines, or a teacher's extensive verbal communications about assessment task specifications and/or criteria. In practical terms, lecturers learn to make complex appraisals of students' work by having access to a range of student productions and by learning to explain their judgements via criteria. Students should, therefore,

have the opportunity to learn the skills of appraisal in similar ways. These skills underpin the ability to benefit from external feedback and regulate one's own work.

But, as Sadler (2010, 458) explains, the process of making judgments about the relative worth of work is a complex one:

"Students need a sound working knowledge of three concepts in particular – task compliance, quality and criteria – if interactions between teachers and learners are to be formatively effective, and capability in complex appraisal is to be developed. These assessment concepts must be understood not as abstractions but as core concepts that are internalised, operationalised and applied to concrete productions. Without these, key assessment concepts are likely to remain submerged and invisible."



Sadler proposes that feedforward and feedback are likely to be improved by the intensive use of purposeful peer assessment as a pedagogic strategy, not just for assessment but also for the teaching of a substantive content of the course. If this process were put into action, he argues, the need for substantial reliance on feedback from the teacher would become significantly reduced (Sadler, 2010). Taras (2006) notes, however, that undergraduates tend to lack opportunities to develop concepts of standards and criteria. If they are generally excluded from the assessment process and do not have chance to engage with self and peer assessment, she argues, the anomaly arises that students can only learn to develop these skills indirectly through tutors' written feedback and editing of their work.

To address these issues some HE researchers have focused on designing assessment workshop activities where students have an opportunity to engage with assessment criteria and to discuss with tutors why and how these are applied (see for example Rust et al, 2003; Harrington et al, 2006; Price and O'Donovan, 2006). These workshops are often combined with the use of exemplars. Exemplars are illustrations of students' assignments that represent achievement of a given standard. Sadler suggests that 'exemplars convey messages that nothing else can' (Sadler, 2002, 136). They can be used to show rather than tell students what might count as excellent and less effective work. They also allow learners to build

experience in making qualitative judgments and to practise generating feedback.

This final section of the paper will focus on one case study to explore the use of exemplars in some detail. It is based on work undertaken as part of an ES/Calate-funded Developing Pedagogy and Practice project: Exploring the Rules of Engagement via Exemplars: enhancing staff and student dialogue about assessment and learning practice (Sambell, 2011). The project focused on supporting tutors to develop their own bank of concrete exemplars of student writing, which they subsequently used with their own students to stimulate staff-student dialogue about 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' approaches to writing for the purposes of assessment. Staff and students' experiences of using exemplars, embedded in disciplinary teaching, were explored through collection of rich pluralistic data.

Exemplar-work was deemed particularly useful in large-group teaching contexts, with groups of between 80 and 120 students on first-year modules, typically supported by only one or two module tutors. This meant that it was rarely feasible to provide regular individualised teacher feedback, or feedback on student drafts. The premise was, then, that working collaboratively on concrete exemplars would enable large groups of students, working in classroom contexts, to see and begin to evaluate authentic examples of student writing within the specific context of the material being studied and assessed.



In practice, exemplars can, as Handley et al (2008) suggest, take a range of forms. According to these researchers, for instance, exemplars:

- may be complete assignments or excerpts
- may be authentic pieces of student work
- may be (re)constructed by staff (so as to illustrate specific pedagogic points in as transparent manner as possible)
- may be annotated with feedback to
 - help students understand what tutors look for
 - help students realise how to use teacher feedback
 - help students build their self assessment skills.

Using exemplars: a case study

In the case study reported below exemplars were used in the following ways. The exemplar work involved several key phases, each encompassing a range of activities.

Preparation

Before the two-hour session, which ran in a tiered lecture theatre with over 90 students and two module tutors, students were asked to prepare a short piece of writing explaining a key concept in the disciplinary area being studied. This was not to exceed one side of A4 paper, and students were

advised to try and practise using academic writing conventions. The students, who were studying an Education-related course, had been at university for about nine weeks when the activities were introduced.

Phase 1

Students were asked to bring their writing to the session, where they were given four exemplars. The exemplars were based on previous students' attempts to explain the concept.

- First, the session started by involving students in a criteria-setting activity in which, together with staff, they generated some criteria which could be used to judge the exemplars.
- Students were then asked to work in small groups, trying to use the criteria to place the four exemplars in rank order.
- They were also asked to draft some feedback which would improve each exemplar.

Phase 2

- Tutors revealed and discussed the rankings they would award, and talked about the thinking behind their decisions.
- Students had the opportunity to ask any questions.

Phase 3

- Finally, students were asked to revisit the draft feedback they had prepared, augmenting or amending it, if necessary, based on the discussions so far. Again, they were encouraged to ask any questions.
- Students were also advised to reflect on how they would improve their own piece of writing, in the light of the session. These reflections could be submitted as an aspect of an overall reflective commentary which they were required to submit as part of the module's assignment. Tutors explained that this might help the markers offer more effective written feedback comments at the end of the module, because it would allow students to indicate how and why they had tried to improve their work, thus enabling the tutor to offer feedback about whether their self-evaluations seemed to be on the right lines. It was made clear, though, that the choice to include this element in the reflective commentary lay with each student.

Teachers' views of the illustrative value of the exemplars

Sadler (1989, cited in Price et al, 2007, 44) suggests that exemplars are 'key examples chosen so as to be typical of designated levels of quality or competence. The exemplars are not standards themselves but are indicative of them... they specify standards implicitly.' The tutors in this case study wanted students to see clear variation of standard across the exemplars, because they were keen to enable students to recognise, discuss and justify their decisions for placing each exemplar 'above' or 'below' another. Consequently, they had carefully chosen the four exemplars to represent what they saw as 'clear' examples of work which occupied the middle band of work in upper-second, lower-second and third class categories, plus a borderline fail.

Moreover, the lecturers deliberately avoided using 'model answers'. Model answers can take the form of 'ideal responses' (Hounsell et al, 2010), in teachers' attempts to demonstrate appropriate ways of tackling a task and/or to offer students insight into how their own work might be improved (see, for instance, Huxham, 2007). In interview, both tutors explained that from their viewpoint, they wanted students to see 'realistic' pieces of student writing at an early stage of development, rather than ideal, highly polished pieces of writing. Partly this was because they did not want to 'scare' students, especially at this early point in the course, with unrealistic expectations. Predominantly, however, they had chosen the exemplars explicitly to represent different levels of understanding in relation to the 'question'.

Interestingly, the tutors used assessment-related discourse to describe their own appraisals of the exemplars. Exemplar A was chosen because it represented a 'sound response', with a 'clear thesis statement' based on 'an effective summary of challenging and appropriate literature'. Exemplar B represented 'reasonable, but more limited work', 'based largely on repeating chunks of a basic introductory text'. Exemplar C was 'a fair attempt, but tended to include detail, as illustrative material, which needed clearer introduction and explanation'. Exemplar D was chosen because it 'misunderstood the key concept entirely'. They acknowledged that *all* the exemplars displayed errors of convention, including problems with citation, spelling, style and so on. In practice, however, both tutors were much more concerned with the conceptual strengths and shortcomings of the exemplars.

Carless (2007) usefully draws attention to what he calls 'pre-emptive formative assessment'. This is an intervention during instruction which seeks to support ongoing student learning by attempting to



circumvent possible mis-steps before they occur. Interestingly, the lecturers in this case study had chosen the exemplars – especially the ‘fail’ – predominantly to ‘engineer in’ the essence of the subject domain. To do this they had relied on their experience and expertise to select common mistakes novices make within domain knowledge to make these visible for students, before any misconceptions resulted in ineffective learning or assessment performance within the module (Carless, 2007). They did this to try and raise learners’ awareness that the domain contains various challenging elements which they need to tackle in the summative assignment.

In interview, both lecturers referred to common ‘confusions’ or misconceptions that, in their experience, typically occur for students at this point in learning the subject. They deliberately sought to highlight these via the exemplars:

“We’d picked exemplar four because we thought it was blindingly obvious that the writer of that piece had grasped at a concept... which was patently wrong in this context! It’s a classic mistake, though, at this early stage, and costly for students if they don’t find out until they submit a marked assignment.”

Additionally, the lecturers’ choice of assessment task, which focused on the idea that knowledge about the topic is relative and contested, was also a key design feature. As one lecturer said:

“Our job on this introductory module is to introduce the idea that childhood, as a concept, is much, much more complicated than they probably ever imagined. But it’s vital they grasp this if they want to do well on the course.”

To help students ‘see’ this, previous teaching sessions had focused on activities which promoted the oral discussion of diverse experiences, perspectives and debates relating to childhood, with teachers drawing attention to the paradoxes that emerge. This meant that the exemplar activities were, from their viewpoint, ‘just another way of helping students appreciate the big ideas’.

Teachers’ views of the importance of students’ active engagement and participation

Rust et al (2005, 237) argue that ‘acquiring knowledge and understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards needs the same kind of active engagement and participation as learning about anything else’. Further, O’Donovan et al (2004) assert that active engagement of students in assessment processes, with students learning to

evaluate exemplars or other student work in formative ways, will help students actively develop a better understanding of what is or is not acceptable practice in the subject context. To this end, the tutors designed the classroom activities to encourage students' active involvement in the process of making, discussing and negotiating evaluative judgements about the relative worth of the exemplars.

As students worked on the exemplars in phase one, the teachers wanted to encourage learners to collaborate in small self-selecting groups. They did not ask students to attribute marks to each exemplar, but asked them to agree an appropriate rank order for the four exemplars with other students in their team. The idea behind this was that having access to a range of exemplars, not just 'good' ones, would help students actively compare and contrast the exemplars, encouraging them to justify work of different standards by using criteria. Furthermore, the teachers felt it was important that the students were encouraged not to work in isolation, but to discuss their thinking and reasoning. This was to try and ensure that students offered reasons and evidence for their choices, with students learning collectively, via discussion, about the subject and what its requirements and standards are (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Overall, then, from the lecturers' viewpoints, what mattered most was that their students learned to practise 'seeing' through the lenses of the subject-domain. Their focus, in practice, was on raising students' consciousness of writing for assessment as a means for thinking about and communicating ideas that matter, rather than explaining assessment criteria or essay-writing skills in any abstract way. In

this sense, the exemplars embodied their sense of the curriculum and served to emphasise for students the importance of shifting from absolutist to contextual knowing about the topic. When, during the second phase of the session, the lecturers explained their reasons for ranking the exemplars to the students, they referred repeatedly to how far, and in what ways, each exemplar 'communicates the understanding that views... aren't fixed' and the extent to which each 'realises that different views... exist'.

They explicitly drew students' attention to the literature each exemplar used on which to base the explanation of the key concept. From this viewpoint the reference list in each exemplar was discussed by the lecturers as much more than a simple acknowledgment of sources: instead it concerned the breadth of consideration and the quality and relevance of the evidence consulted (Moon, 2005).

Students' views of the value of working on exemplars

On one level all the students who were interviewed claimed to find the activities extremely useful. They felt the session offered them feedforward in a concrete, rather than abstract way. For instance, one student explained:

"I think seeing it just makes you understand it more. Like, someone can stand there and say, 'You shouldn't do this and that' but until you've actually seen it then you don't know what that looks like. I think it's harder if you just get a list of rules and have to figure out for yourself how to apply it."

Some claimed to perceive useful strategies for closing the gap they had noticed between their own work and that of the 'better' exemplars. It was extremely common for students to realise they were required to undertake considerably more reading, as in the following instance:

"I suddenly learned that reading is so vital, as it builds up your knowledge and helps you gain a better understanding. That was the light bulb moment of the whole semester!"

Some also began to pay more close attention to the nuances of definition and terminology within the subject area:

"When we discussed the task in class I realised that what I had written didn't focus on the question! It was this that made me read around the subject more."

Many said, too, that they felt clearer about their teachers' expectations when it came to writing assignments. For instance, the following student realised the tutors did not want to see students reproducing their secondary reading verbatim but preferred them to summarise it, putting it into their own words to develop an argument:

"I was surprised with what they expected. They didn't want so many long quotes and all the information and detailed knowledge from my reading."

This insight helped the student resolve to alter her approaches to note-taking and assignment-writing.

The value of peer feedback and discussion

As they worked on the activities in class some groups were observed by an independent researcher. It is especially noteworthy that in their initial group-discussions of the merits of each exemplar, all the students who were observed only noticed and discussed what Rust et al (2005) call the 'visible' features of the work (such as spelling or referencing) rather than the arguably more important 'invisible' features (such as analysis, argument). Even more importantly, before any form of dialogue was opened up with tutors and despite access to the assessment criteria, students almost exclusively ignored issues pertaining to the nature of knowledge in the subject domain, even though this was the implied focus of the 'question'. They focused, instead, on 'good' and 'bad' features of the exemplars at a strategic-related level (Harrington et al, 2006). In other words, they talked about how far each exemplar conformed to academic writing conventions by looking for features of a 'good essay,' with absolutely no reference to broader issues of learning and understanding in the domain. The following comment was typical:

"I thought some of them immediately looked a bit like they weren't going to be quite right. The one that had bullet points in it. I was a bit, 'Well that's a bit strange for an essay... we were always told not to put bullet points in.'"

Discussion of the use of the first person also preoccupied much student discussion time:

"There were a couple where a lot of it started with 'I' and 'My' and that's just immediately, when you look at, well, ... those two, they kind of jumped out as, 'Oh-oh, this might not be great.'"

In follow-up interviews, it became clear that the essay-writing 'advice' that students had been given in school or college appeared to exert a strong influence on students' understandings of teachers' requirements. This prompted them to look for surface textual features in the exemplars, rather than seeing assessment as the vehicle via which to perform the high-order skills of the discipline (Sadler, 2009). Another dominant topic for student dialogue at this stage was referencing:

"References was something that we noticed really quickly. One just had it in the text not at the bottom and some didn't put them, like, the people in brackets in the text either. I don't think any of them got them all correct."

Debates about getting the references 'right', about whether the student authors had attended skills sessions, and even a discussion about whether poor citation techniques constituted plagiarism, dominated the students' conversations when they initially judged the exemplars. This implies that, at this early stage in their university experience, most students typically framed essay-writing as a normative practice operating on a fairly superficial range of features, rather than embodying 'deep-related features' focused on developing subject-related understanding and appreciating engagement with different viewpoints (Harrington et al, 2006).

Classroom observation further revealed that very few groups of students actually placed the exemplars in accordance with the rank order the tutors allocated. Many students found, often to their surprise or consternation:

"What we thought was best or worst was different to what they thought!"

While some groups simply muddled the two 'best' exemplars, several believed the exemplar which had misunderstood the key concept was actually the best piece of work and the most effective response was often considered 'worst'. In short, many students were unable to discern the exemplars at the extremes. For example, one student said, with a measure of disbelief:

"I had the best as worst! To me, it looked really bare!"

Once they heard the teachers talk about the rankings they would award, all the observed students were anxious to look again at the exemplars. Although they had been asked to amend their draft feedback for each exemplar, in practice, nearly all the discussion focused on the exemplar which the tutors felt to be a fail:

"When I first read number four, I thought it was really good! I liked that she said what she thought. But then like, I myself, I went back and read it again and it totally doesn't follow the question or anything."

In this sense, as a result of their 'mistake' in ranking the work, students started to consciously look for different features in the exemplars, trying to reformulate their views of quality by deliberately looking for aspects the tutors valued. In one sense this could be viewed as an attempt to 'see' afresh from the lecturers' point of view:

"We all thought number four was pretty good and then we realised that it was rambling on about something else."



Individual students who could ‘see’ the problems with exemplar four began to help their peers begin to understand what tutors were looking for, by discussing the concepts and meaning embodied by the exemplar, rather than limiting their appraisals to its surface features. As one said later in interviews:

“The first time I read it I thought it was pretty good but then... with number four, once I had read it again, I said something to my friend and she was still, like, ‘No, it’s really good’. And I went, ‘Yeah, but if you read it again it’s got nothing to do with the thing. Like, the nature / nurture: that’s got nothing to do with social construction...’ So she did read it again and she was like, ‘Oh yeah!... I get it.’”

Observation illuminated, though, just how much of a struggle it was for some students to adjust their views and see what the academics really valued. The following extract from recorded dialogue amongst a student group illustrates this, with some individuals repeatedly looping back to continue to apply strategic-related approaches relating to form, rather

than deep-related approaches relating to the development of subject knowledge:

- A *I want to know why they think this one’s the best one.*
- B *It’s good, but in my eyes it’s a bit like, it doesn’t flow.*
- A *Yes.*
- B *It’s a bit ‘bitty’...*
- C *Should have a full stop after ‘culture’...*

Eventually, though, the group began to engage with deeper-level approaches as the students compared and contrasted the exemplars. In the following data extract the discussion has moved on to debate *how* reading has been drawn upon in a weaker exemplar, rather than whether the citation techniques are technically correct.

- B *They’ve never actually brought theorists in.*
- C *That’s it! They haven’t!*
- A *They have, they’ve brought X in.*
- B *Where?*
- A *There, ‘social historian, X argued that...’*
- B *Yes, but not a lot, not like...*



Eventually, after lengthy debate, their dialogue started to focus more explicitly on the construction of meaning underpinning each exemplar, with student A explaining:

- A *See, all of these examples in here talk about different things. Like, she's talking about nature / nurture and how children are influenced by the birth order. And she's talking about race, gender, culture, class and time. And she's just got a general sort of...*
- B *...how do you know what's supposed to be right?*
- A *[Pause] Four talks about development. It's not wrong. It's just not right.*

Here student A seems to be shifting towards a more transitional form of knowing which enables her to distinguish the differences between the exemplars and allows her to see that the representation of knowledge in the fourth exemplar, whilst appropriate

in other domains, is, here, out of context and hence inappropriate. In other words, talking about the exemplars has encouraged her to express the idea that knowledge can be viewed as constructed and understood in relation to the effective deployment of evidence that best fits a given context.

Whilst unsurprisingly not all students in the group appeared to understand student A's insights at this early stage, it is important to note that at least questions were raised in individuals' minds about the nature of an 'appropriate' response. Wingate (2006) suggests that many academics may not be aware that students' difficulties with assessment and feedback frequently stem from a lack of understanding of epistemological assumptions. For Wingate, raising teachers' awareness of this would enable tutors to recognise their essential role in developing students' deeper understanding of knowledge, importantly embedded in subject material. If carefully chosen to reveal disciplinary knowledge, exemplars might usefully accelerate some students' understandings of the complex and situated relationships between reading, thinking and writing and help them share those insights with others.

Conclusion



Helping students to appreciate concepts of quality roughly in line with their tutors is a challenging enterprise, because lecturers' notions of quality require disciplinary and contextual interpretation if they are to be adequately understood (Bloxham and West, 2007). Research has shown that assessment tasks in HE are implicitly framed by the specific expectations, cultural and disciplinary orientations of the lecturers who design them (Bloxham, 2009; Lillis, 2001; Lea and Street, 1998). Because academics have been immersed in the specific knowledge-constructing enterprise of their subject domain for so long, acceptable ways of securing meanings within the domain have become taken-for-granted and 'invisible', even to themselves. This helps explain why students, as newcomers to academic knowledge communities, often experience assignment-writing as an 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis, 2001) or a 'mysterious tacit code' that they must crack (Elton, 2009).

The problem is, though, that tacit knowledge is, by its very nature, difficult to pin down and explicate. It is deeply inscribed in the social practices of particular communities and carried by lecturers' intuitive sense of the knowledge, rules and procedures of their specific disciplines. Such knowledge is not simply acquired, which means it is not accessible by advice or instruction. Instead, it is gradually developed by participatory relationships and extended dialogue with knowledgeable others. This explains why lecturers outside a specific subject domain are usually unable to recognise the subtleties and nuances that a subject expert sees in an effective assignment, and sometimes lecturers are not even conscious of their tacit assumptions themselves (Ecclestone, 2001).

Arguably these tacit conventions can only be learned by forging relationships of apprenticeship between newcomers and experts via ongoing engagement in social situations. In other words, learners need,



through ongoing dialogue, feedback and participatory relationships to gradually come to 'feel' the culturally specific ways of meaning making in particular cognitive domains. For most learners, the development of this kind of insight takes considerable time, energy and effort.

It is unlikely that this level of insight can be developed via teacher exposition, or by students trying to work out what is really required by reading written feedback or the editorial comments that teachers make on their work. Arguably, then, we should devote time and energy to creating situations in which feedback-like effects can be gained by interactivity, discussion and models of sustainable feedback (Hounsell, 2007) that are integral to learning and teaching.

Furthermore, the development of students' self assessment skills are of paramount importance. Perhaps this means, as Sadler (2010, 547) argues, in HE: *"Too much attention has been paid at the micro level within the traditional model: what the teacher can do to construct more effective feedback, and what the learner should do to make more use of the feedback provided."*

The intention is that some of the perspectives on feedback outlined in this discussion paper will stimulate alternative ways of putting feedback into practice, helping fuel a move towards a more holistic as well as dialogic approach (Price et al, 2011) to feedback in the context of an overall model of assessment for learning.

References

- Angelo, T.A. and Cross, P.K. (1993) *Classroom Assessment Techniques, A Handbook for College Teachers*. 2nd ed. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Barkely, E. (2009) *Student Engagement Techniques: a handbook for college faculty*. New York: Jossey Bass.
- Birenbaum, M. (2003) 'New insights into learning and teaching: their implications for assessment'. In Segers, M., Dochy, F and Cascaller, E. eds. *Optimising New Modes of Assessment: in search of qualities and standards*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, pp.13- 36.
- Black, P. (2007) Full marks for feedback. *Make the Grade: Journal of the Institute of Educational Assessors*. 2 (1), 18-21.
- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2003) *Assessment for Learning: putting it into practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998) Assessment and classroom learning. *Assessment in Education*. 5 (1), 7-74.
- Black, P. and McCormick, R. (2010) Reflections and new directions. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 35 (5), 493-499.
- Bloxham, S. (2009) Marking and moderation in the UK: false assumptions and wasted resources. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 34 (2), 209-220.
- Bloxham, S. (2008) Assessment in teacher education: stakeholder conflict and its resolution. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*. 2 (1), 13-21.
- Bloxham, S. and West, A. (2007) Learning to write in higher education: students' perceptions of an intervention in developing understanding of assessment criteria. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 12 (1), 77-89.
- Bosley, S. (2004) *Careers Helpers and Careers Hinderers: a qualitative study exploring the role of others in shaping individual careers*. Loughborough: University of Loughborough.
- Boud, D. (1995) *Enhancing Learning Through Self Assessment*. London: Kogan Page.
- Boud, D. (2000) Sustainable assessment: rethinking assessment for the learning society. *Studies in Continuing Education*. 22 (2), 151-167.
- Boud, D. (2009) *Assessment Futures*. Sydney: University of Technology. Available from: www.assessmentfutures.com [23 June 2011].
- Boud, D. and Associates (2010) *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Boud, D., Cohen, R. and Sampson, J. (1999) Peer learning and assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 24 (4), 413-426.
- Boud, D and Falchicov, N. (2006) Aligning assessment with long term learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 31 (4), 399-413.
- Boud, D. and Middleton, H. (2003) Learning from others at work: communities of practice and informal learning. *Journal of Workplace Learning*. 15 (5), 194-202.
- Brew, A. (2006) *Research and Teaching: beyond the divide*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carless, D. (2006) Differing perceptions in the feedback process. *Studies in Higher Education*. 31 (2), 219-233.
- Carless, D., Joughin, G., and Mok, M. (2006) Learning-oriented assessment: principles and practice. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 31 (4), 395-398.
- Carless, D. (2007) Conceptualizing pre-emptive formative assessment. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*. 14 (2), 171-184.
- Chanock, K. (2000) Comments on essays: do students understand what tutors write? *Teaching in Higher Education*. 5 (1), 95-105.
- Davies, J. and Ecclestone, K. (2008) 'Straitjacket' or 'springboard for sustainable learning'? The implications of formative assessment practices in vocational learning cultures. *Curriculum Journal*. 19 (2), 71-86.

- Ecclestone, K. (1999) Empowering or ensnaring?: the implications of outcome-based assessment in higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*. 53 (1), 29-48.
- Ecclestone, K. (2001) I know a 2:1 when I see it: how lecturers and students learn degree standards. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*. 25 (3), 301-313.
- Ecclestone, K. (2002) *Learning autonomy in post-compulsory education: The politics and practice of formative assessment*. London: Routledge.
- Elton, L. (2009) Academic writing and tacit knowledge. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 15 (2), 151-160.
- Falchikov, N. (2005) *Improving Assessment through Student Involvement. Practical solutions for aiding learning in higher and further education*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2005) Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. 1, 3-31.
- Glover, C. (2006) Report of research carried out at Sheffield Hallam University for the Formative Assessment in Science Teaching Project (FAST). Available from: www.open.ac.uk/fast/FASTProject/Publications.htm [23 June 2011].
- Glover C. and Brown, E. (2006) Written feedback for students: too much, too detailed or too incomprehensible to be effective? *Bioscience Education E-journal*. 7-3.
- Handley, K., Price, M. and Millar, J. (2008) Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback: final report for FDTL5 project 144/03. Oxford: Oxford Brookes University.
- Harrington, K. et al. (2006) 'Using core assessment criteria to improve essay writing.' In Bryan, C. and Clegg, K., eds. *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.110-119.
- Higgins, R., Hartley, P. and Skelton, A. (2001) Getting the message across: the problem of communicating assessment feedback. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 6 (2), 269-274.
- Higgins, R., Hartley, P. and Skelton, A. (2002) The conscientious consumer: reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning. *Studies in Higher Education*. 27 (1), 53-64.
- Hounsell, D. (2007) 'Towards more sustainable feedback to students.' In Boud, D. and Falchikov, N., eds. *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education. Learning for the Longer Term*. London: Routledge, pp.101-113.
- Hounsell, D., Hounsell, J and Tai, C.M. (2010) *Enhancing feedback*. University of Edinburgh. Available from: www.tla.ed.ac.uk/feedback/index.html [23 June 2011]
- Huxham, M. (2007) Fast and effective feedback: are model answers the answer? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 32 (6), 601-611.
- JISC (2010) *Effective Assessment in a Digital Age: a guide to technology-enhanced assessment and feedback*. Bristol: HEFCE.
- Kahn, P and O'Rourke, K. (2005) 'Understanding Enquiry based learning.' In Barrett, T, Mac Labhrainn, I. and Fallon, H., eds. *Handbook of Enquiry and Problem-Based Learning: Irish Case Studies and International Perspectives*. AISHE. Available from: www.aishe.org/readings/2005-2/contents.html [23 June 2011]
- Krause, K., Hartley, R., James, R., and McInnis, C. (2005) *The First Year Experience in Australian Universities: findings from a decade of national studies*. Canberra: Australian Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Kuh, G.D., Kinzie, J., Schuh J.H. and Whitt, E.J. (2005) *Student Success in College: creating conditions that matter*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Laurillard, D M. (1993). *Rethinking University Teaching: A Framework for the Effective Use of Educational Technology*. London: Routledge.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lea, M.R. and Street, B.V. (1998) Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*. 23 (2), 157-172.
- Liu, N.F. and Carless, D. (2006). Peer feedback: the learning element of peer assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 11 (3), 279-290.
- Lillis, T. (2001) *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire*. London: Routledge.

- Lillis, T. and Turner, J. (2001) Student writing in higher education: contemporary confusion, traditional concerns. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 6 (1), 57-68.
- Mann, S.J. (2001) Alternative Perspectives on the Student Experience: alienation and engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*. 26 (1), 7-19.
- McDowell, L., Sambell, K., Bazin, V., Penlington, R., Wakelin, D. and Smailes, J. (2006) *Assessment for Learning Exemplars: the foundations of CETL AfL*. Newcastle: Northumbria University CETL AfL Occasional Paper 3.
- McDowell, L. and Sambell, K. (1998) 'The experience of innovative assessment: student perspectives.' In Brown, S. and Glasner, A., eds. *Assessment Matters in Higher Education*. SRHE/Open University Press.
- Meyer, J.H.F. and Land, R. (2005) Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: epistemological considerations and a conceptual framework for teaching and learning. *Higher Education*. 49 (3), 373-388.
- Mitchell, S (2011) Thinking Writing: a guide to writing-intensive teaching and learning. Available from: www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk [23 June 2011]
- Moon, J. (2005) *We Seek It Here... a new perspective on the elusive activity of critical thinking: a theoretical and practical approach*. Bristol: ESCalate.
- National Student Survey Results (2009) Available from: www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2009 [23 June 2011]
- Nicol, D. (2007) Principles of good assessment and feedback; theory and practice. From the REAP International Online conference on Assessment Design for Learner responsibility, 29th-31st May.
- Nicol, D. (2009) *Transforming Assessment and Feedback: enhancing integration and empowerment in the first year*. Mansfield: QAA.
- Nicol, D. (2010) *The foundation for graduate attributes: developing self-regulation through self and peer assessment*. Available from: http://www.reap.ac.uk/reap/public/Papers/DN_The%20foundation%20for%20Graduate%20Attributes.pdf [23 June 2011]
- Nicol, D. and MacFarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback. *Studies in Higher Education*. 31 (2), 199-218.
- O'Donovan, B., Price, M. and Rust, C. (2004) Know what I mean? Enhancing student understanding of assessment standards and criteria. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 9, 325-335.
- Orsmond, P., Merry, S. and Reiling, K. (1996) The importance of marking criteria in the use of peer assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 21 (3), 239-251.
- Orsmond, P., Merry, S. and Reiling, K. (2002) The use of exemplars and formative feedback when using student derived marking criteria in peer and self-assessment. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 27, 309-323.
- Orsmond, P. and Merry, S. (2009) Processing tutor feedback: a consideration of qualitative differences in learning outcomes for high and non-high achieving students. Paper presented at the Fostering Communities of Learners, 13th EARLI Conference, Amsterdam, 25th-29th August 2009.
- Osney Grange Group (2009) *Feedback: an agenda for change*. Available from: www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/documents/OGG%20agenda%20for%20change.pdf [23 June 2011]
- PASS (2010) University of Manchester. Available from www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/studentsaspartners/peer-support/pass/training [23 June 2011]
- Price, M., Handley, K., Miller, J. and O'Donovan, B. (2010) Feedback: all that effort, but what is the effect? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 35 (3), 277-289.
- Price, M., Handley, K. and Millar, J. (2011) Feedback: focusing attention on engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*. First published on 2 February 2011 (iFirst)
- Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2006) 'Improving performance through enhancing student understanding of criteria and feedback.' In Bryan, C. and Clegg, K., eds. *Innovative Assessment in Higher Education*. London and New York: Routledge, pp.100-109.

- Price, M., O'Donovan, B. and Rust, C. (2007) Putting a social-constructivist assessment process model into practice: building the feedback loop into the assessment process through peer review. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*. 44 (2), 143-152.
- Price, M., O'Donovan, B., Rust, C. and Carroll, J. (2008) Assessment standards: a manifesto for change. *Brookes eJournal of Learning and Teaching*. 2 (3). (Online December 2008) Available from: http://bejit.brookes.ac.uk/article/assessment_standards_a_manifesto_for_change [23 June 2011]
- Ramsden, P. (1992) *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.
- Rust, C., Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2003) Improving students' learning by developing their understanding of assessment criteria and processes. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 28, 147-165.
- Rust, C., Price, M. and O'Donovan, B. (2005) A social constructivist assessment process model: how the research literature shows us that this should be best practice. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 30 (3), 231-240.
- Sadler, D.R. (2002) 'Ah!... So that's "quality"' In Schwartz, P. and Webb, G., eds. *Assessment: Case Studies, Experience and Practice from Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page, pp.130-135.
- Sadler, D. (1989) Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems. *Instructional Science*. 18, 119-144.
- Sadler, D.R. (1998) Formative assessment: revisiting the territory. *Assessment in Education*. 5 (1), 77-84.
- Sadler, D.R. (2009) Indeterminacy in the use of preset criteria for assessment and grading. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 34 (2), 159-179.
- Sadler, D.R. (2010) Beyond feedback: developing student capability in complex appraisal. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 35 (5), 535-550.
- Sambell, K. (2011) Exploring the Rules of Engagement via Exemplars: enhancing staff and student dialogue about assessment and learning practice. ESCalate. Available from: <http://escalate.ac.uk/6488> [23 June 2011]
- Sambell, K. and Graham, L. (2010) Enhancing staff-student dialogue about assessment and learning practice. Presented at the European First Year Experience conference, Belgium, 26th-28th May 2010.
- Sambell, K. and McDowell, L. (1998) The construction of the hidden curriculum: messages and meanings in the assessment of student learning. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 23 (4), 391-402.
- Sambell, K., McDowell, L. and Brown, S. (1997) 'But is it fair?' an exploratory study of student perceptions of the consequential validity of assessment. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. 23 (4), 349-371.
- Segers, M., Dochy, F. and Cascaller, E. (eds.) (2003) *Optimising new modes of assessment: in search of qualities and standards*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic.
- Stobart, G. (2010) Assessment-fit-for-learning. Keynote speech to the Fifth Biennial EARLI/Northumbria Assessment conference, Assessment for Learners, Slaley, Northumberland, 1st-3rd September 2010.
- Taras, M. (2006) Do unto others or not: equity in feedback for undergraduates. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. 31 (5), 365-377.
- Taras, M. (2008) Summative and formative assessment: perceptions and realities. *Active Learning in Higher Education*. 9 (2), 172-192.
- Torrance, H. (2007) Assessment as learning? How the use of explicit learning objectives, assessment criteria and feedback in post-secondary education and training can come to dominate learning. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*. 14 (3), 281-294.
- Watkins, D., Dahlin, B. and Eckholm, M. (2005) Awareness of the backwash effect of assessment: a phenomenographic study of the views of Hong Kong and Swedish lecturers. *Instructional Science*. 33 (4), 283-309.
- Wingate, U. (2006) Doing away with study skills. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 11 (4), 457-469.

Appendix

A selection of useful websites on developing feedback strategies in higher education

Assessment Futures (University of Technology, Sydney)

www.assessmentfutures.com

Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange (ASKe)

www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/index.html

Engaging Students with Assessment Feedback (Oxford Brookes University)

<https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/eswaf/Home>

Enhancing Feedback (University of Edinburgh)

www.tla.ed.ac.uk/feedback/index.html

Feedback (Higher Education Academy)

www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/teachingandlearning/assessment/feedback

Feedback is a Dialogue (University of Strathclyde)

www.strath.ac.uk/learn/learn/feedback

Northumbria University's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Assessment for Learning (Afl)

www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/academy/cetl_afl/

Re-Engineering Assessment Practices in Scottish Higher Education (REAP)

www.reap.ac.uk

Thinking Writing and Making Feedback More Effective (Queen Mary, University of London)

www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/assessment.htm

Discussions in Education Series

Rethinking feedback in higher education: an assessment for learning perspective

ISBN 978-1-907207-36-5 July 2011

ESCalate

University of Bristol
Graduate School of Education
35 Berkeley Square
Bristol BS8 1JA UK

Tel: 0117 331 4291

Email: heacademy-escalate@bristol.ac.uk

This is one of a series of discussion papers commissioned for ESCalate, for more details see our website.

escalate.ac.uk

