Introduction

It is well known to primary teachers that effective assessment of children requires a multi-faceted approach (Linfield 1994). Equally, written feedback on a piece of work is often not understood by the pupils themselves (Linfield, 1995). Arguably, as one proceeds through secondary and tertiary education, this situation changes little, with the best attempts to set ‘perfect’ assessments and give effective qualitative feedback, still leading to misinterpretation by students. It is also true that students often do not always recognise what is meant by the term ‘feedback’ and have difficulty in interpreting and understanding the feedback that they receive, even with the most careful and targeted advice in advance. (Sutcliffe et al 2014)

In 2010 the National Union of Students released a ‘Charter for Assessment and Feedback’ which outlined ten principles for effective assessment and feedback. Despite this charter, the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2015 still showed twenty-eight percent of students were not satisfied. “Assessment and feedback was again rated the lowest by students, with just seventy-two percent saying they were satisfied with this, the same level as last year.” (Grove 2014)

To tutors, this may feel like Figure 1

So what can be done to enable effective assessment and feedback? Can we ‘tip the balance’?

Table 1: The students said

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of feedback received on the course as a whole that have been helpful in clarifying things I did not understand</th>
<th>Aspects of feedback that have been less helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written feedback  - learning specifically to my own work</td>
<td>Written feedback  - I just sketched through it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and thought out critique that preprints mistakes, Annotations for written work</td>
<td>I would like to know how I can improve more, rather than just where I went wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal sessions with tutors where written feedback can be verbally explained</td>
<td>When it’s not specific enough - says what to improve, not how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sessions where lectures have answered any questions or misunderstandings positively and taken the time to help me understand</td>
<td>Words such as ‘reflect’, ‘critically evaluate’, ‘wide reading’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer assessment - we can compare what we have done with others and collect ideas</td>
<td>Quality of feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● I would prefer a whole page dedicated on how to improve</td>
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The Research

A pilot study in September 2014 invited a Year 2 cohort of 96 students on a BA (Hons) Primary Education course to complete a questionnaire exploring views on feedback on assessment they found ‘helpful in clarifying things [they] did not understand,’ (HEFCE, 2014) Analysis of questionnaires revealed that, despite a diverse set of views, 75% students were satisfied with the feedback they had received in Year 1, (see Table 1).

Conclusions – Tipping the balance

The pilot study demonstrated that students did not necessarily have an understanding of key terminology linked to assignments and assessment criteria. Clearly, careful scaffolding of assessment procedures, including student and tutor responsibilities within the cycle, needs to be explored early in a degree, revisited and consolidated throughout the programme.

The research also reflected that where students considered feedback to be effective, face-to-face interaction with tutors was a key component. This enables questions to be raised and misunderstandings to be quickly addressed, before and during assignment completion, and after receiving summative feedback.

Universities have work to do to show students that feedback is not something that is simply received, but needs student interaction and engagement. For the higher education sector to move forwards, and for students to maximise their potential, we need to tip this balance of tutor and student support/engagement. It is clear that for many students there is a lack of understanding of both their role and that of the tutor within the assessment cycle.

In some ways these conclusions seem obvious. Yet pleasingly we are within our grasp. We can ‘tip the balance’ if students take an increased role and responsibility in the assessment and engagement cycle. However, the illustration for this is not polar ends of the assessment and engagement cycle. However, students must consider their potential, we need to tip this balance of tutor and student support/engagement. It is clear that for many students there is a lack of understanding of both their role and that of the tutor within the assessment cycle.

The References and Further Reading

Table 2: Responsibilities for Student and Tutor Engagement in the Feedback Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student engages, complete assignments and values</th>
<th>Tutor responds to related questions</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Tutor marks and provides feedback appropriately to the task and level of study | Can the student access and 'read' the feedback?
| Can the student understand feedback and engage? | Can the student engage, complete assignment and values?
| | Does the student respond to feedback?
| | Has the student engaged, completed assignment and valued feedback?
| | Is the student engaged and ready to 'learn' the next assignment?
| | Can the student access and 'read' the feedback?
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| | Is the student engaged and ready to 'learn' the next assignment?

Figure 3

Figure 2 Responsibilities for Student and Tutor Engagement in the Feedback Cycle

References and Further Reading

Sutcliffe, Ruth, Linfield, Rachel and Geldart, Ros (2014) Tipping the Balance: Overcoming Assessment Challenges. The Research

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References and Further Reading

Linfield, R. S. (1994), Straw assessment, Primary Science Review 35

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