SYDNEY TEACHING COLLOQUIUM 2014

Research and evaluation

A holistic approach to assessment and feedback: the case of feedback on written assessment tasks in the sciences

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Abstract
This workshop will address the challenge of creating a holistic approach to assessment and feedback where feedback is integrated closely with the progression of assessment tasks within unit of study curricula in the sciences. In this way, students can build on their learning in discipline knowledge, understandings and written communication through an assessment feedback cycle. A large body of research in the area of formative and summative feedback on university writing assignments has convincingly shown that feedback is highly valued by students and essential for student learning (Hattie & Timperley 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick 2006; Vardi 2012). However this research also highlights how students struggle to use feedback for their future learning (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton 2001; Sadler 2010; Orsmond & Merry 2011).

Our research, based on student questionnaires and focus groups across intermediate units of study in the science faculty, confirms these findings. This research also involved marker interviews and workshops where discipline staff could explore strategies for improving the assessment feedback cycle. Staff attending the workshop committed to changing practice in giving feedback leading to new understandings of feedback as part of an on-going dialogue with students. In presenting a summary of the outcomes of our research, namely, students’ comments on their use of feedback and changes in staff practices, participants will be encouraged to reflect on their own feedback practices, highlighting challenges and best practice strategies in their own contexts. We will then introduce participants to key strategies from the literature and invite them to comment on whether they would be able to use these. The presentation will conclude with the launch of a practical Handbook which summarises both our research findings and the relevant literature in the area. Individual staff can refer to this handbook for their own purposes and co-ordinators can use this in sessional staff training.

References


Theme
Approaches to assessment that demonstrate how students can use feedback for future learning (theme 4)