

FESTIVAL OF LEARNING AND TEACHING 2019

What is the point of feedback?

Session 1: 10:55 – 11:15

What feedback strategies should we consider to impact upon the learning environment?

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In order to evaluate the importance of feedback activities for both tutor and student we should assess the potential transformative opportunities available when encouraging dialogic interaction to take place throughout the entire delivery of a module [Wells, 1999]. Dialogic exchange facilitates a creative engagement in both learning and assessment and focuses on a ‘deep’ approach to learning as oppose to a ‘didactic’ approach [Carey, Bridgstock, Taylor, McWilliam & Grant, 2013]. To facilitate this creative dialogic engagement in the form of feedback, the process of learning will depend upon a variety of teaching strategies to improve the quality of the learning environment [Boud, 2000; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000; Hounsell, 2011]. Development of critical thinking is paramount, and the quality of feedback ensures that the learner progresses in a positive manner increasing their understanding rather than identifying whether the task has been completed successfully or not [Ellery, 2008; William, 2011]. If feedback enables the student the opportunity to progress and develop then the position and frequency of these assessment activities should be considered within the structure of the taught module. There is growing concern about over assessment but if feedback is to feature as a positive learning tool then we must find a way forward and realise how this might impact upon our teaching styles and strategies [Crisp, 2007; Ellery, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Sadler, 2010; Nelson and Schunn, 2009]. Feedback needs to be considered a relevant feature of our delivery of the curriculum whether written or verbal in order to make relevant the development of the learner. Currently dialogue and feedback might not appear to act as a developmental tool but a means by which the student can negotiate the mark awarded in an assessment [Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2002].

Keywords: dialogue; feedback; feed-forward; teaching strategies; creative engagement; critical thinking; deep approach; didactic approach.

This presentation will focus on ***the potential transformative opportunities of feedback as 'dialogic interaction' within the learning environment***. The NSS clearly evidences that feedback/dialogic interaction is instrumental to the quality of the student's learning [Evans, 2013; Price, Handley, Millar & Donovan, 2010; Weaver, 2006; McDowell *et al.* 2008].

2018 National Student Survey

Percentage of respondents who gave the two most positive answers ('definitely' or 'mostly' agree) on:



¹ The data for the 'student voice' scale does not include responses to Q26 on the students' union, which is reported separately in this chart.

The 4 questions in the survey appear to be associated with the final assessment and so feedback is potentially restricted in its power due to its late positioning within the learning process [Crisp, 2007; Ellery, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Sadler, 2010; Nelson and Schunn, 2009].

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.

9. Marking and assessment has been fair.

10. Feedback on my work has been timely.

11. I have received helpful comments on my work.

NSS Survey, 2017 and 2018

The 73% for '**Assessment and Feedback**' might be explained if the feedback in the learner's mind refers to:

- (i) a final written document monologic in impact [**Tutor 'Initiation'** with *little opportunity for a student response*];
- (ii) the final outcome of a module [**Student 'Response'** limited due to the positioning and timing of the received feedback];
- (iii) a document justifying the assessment criteria and the final award - merely replicating the 'Excellent' and 'Well Done!' scenario [**Tutor 'Feedback'** quantifying the tutor's authority and often preventing further discussion].

If as the conference suggests we are to give feedback ‘purpose’ it might be useful to identify strategies that might impact upon our learning environment and address this level of student dissatisfaction [Higgins, Hartley and Skelton, 2002].

Reflection of a monologic interaction by a student:

In every session I listen to such phrases as ‘That was great!’, Well done! ‘Good Work! And I know when I hear it as a record of my work I am not satisfied. I want to extend myself! I want to be better! Why am I allowing myself to be satisfied with some-one saying, ‘That was Great!’ ‘Good Job!’ Where is my motivation to be better than I am? How do I change this relationship between my tutor and myself? What do I do? I am standing still! Help me please!

Paulo Freire [1970] would observe that little or no transformative learning would appear to be taking place. The feedback is congratulatory; comments remain static and focus on what ‘is’ rather than how to ‘be’ in the future! I would suggest that although complimentary and kind this is neither good feedback nor a good example of dialogic interaction [Buber, 1965; Kramer, 2013, p. 10]. In his inspirational text **Pedagogy of the Oppressed** Paulo Freire acknowledges the importance of education based on the needs of the individual but he does qualify this by stating that ‘...the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach’ [Freire, 1970: p. 61]. The above working journal entry does not appear to reflect this philosophy.

For feedback to have purpose in our communities of practice [CoP] all participants should understand the ‘everyday’ nature of the narrative journey they have embarked upon [Wenger, 1998: p. 4]. All participants should have a shared way of ‘doing and approaching things’ [Smith, 2003] and be able to answer at any stage of the ‘learning’ journey the ‘where’, ‘how’ and ‘what’ of their individual progress [Boud, 2000; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000; Hounsell, 2011] in other words ‘how we interpret what we do’ [Wenger, 1998]. More importantly the dialogic interaction and the positioning of feedback opportunities within the delivery of a module should engage with ‘shifts’ of understanding and personal development (action and practice) in both knowledge and language for learning to be effective. Kolb [1984] suggests that learning not only involves dialogue and reflection but is ‘...a culturally grounded experience where the **process** is more important than the **product**’ [Aubrey & Riley, 2016: p 175]

Feedback in the form of dialogic interaction is a ‘way forward’. It opens up opportunities for all participants to share what they know and value to enrich the future and to share common ‘values’ and wisdom. We need to make our learning environment ever ‘present’ and be ‘in the moment’ [Schön, 1987; Buber, 1965]. This act of being present requires all participants to engage with each other in terms of their thinking, feeling, empathy, emotional thoughts without ever denying personal beliefs [Kramer, 2013: pp. 14-15]. The philosopher Martin Buber in *Between Man and Man* [1965; p. 84] refers to this as ‘inclusion’ and requires of all participants to have empathy and through dialogic interaction to attempt understand each other whatever their point of view [Kramer, 2013; Howe, 1963].

Regarding dialogic interaction much of the research throughout the four decades from 1970 identifies a triadic dialogic pattern which has become a regular feature of our exchanges with students [Flanders, 1970; Wells, 1999; Mercer, 2008; Alexander, 2001; & Reznitskaya, 2013; Howe & Abedin, 2013]. In fact, 80% of all our seminars, debates, learning/teaching styles and feedback follows the two dialogic patterns that follow:

- (i) **I-R-F** (initiation- response-feedback); or
- (ii) **I-R-E** (initiation- response-evaluation).

Three part sequence – pattern of interaction within the learning environment e.g. Triadic pattern

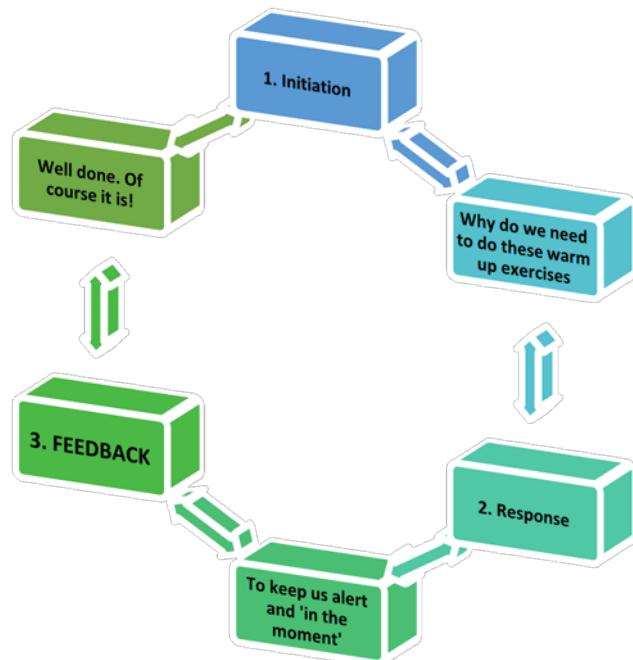


Figure 1. I-R-F [Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975]

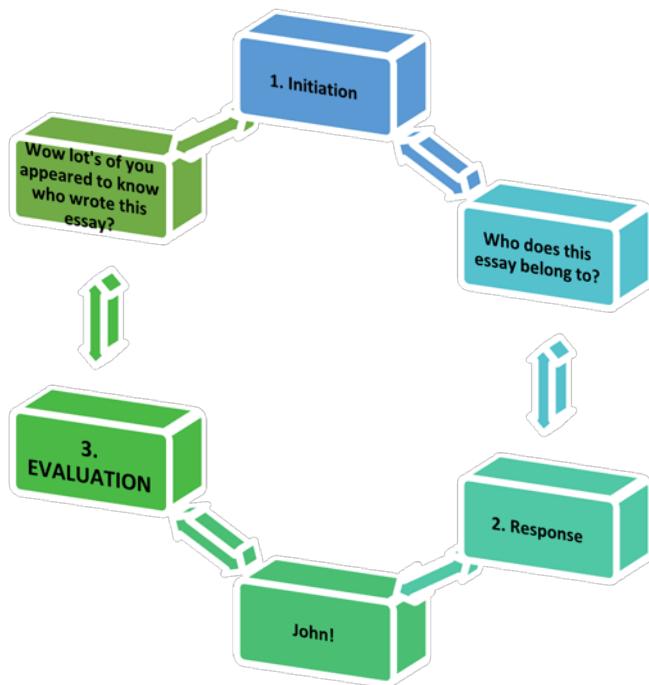


Figure 2. I-R-E [Mehan 1979]

Non-triadic dialogic interactive patterns (open and closed interaction chains)

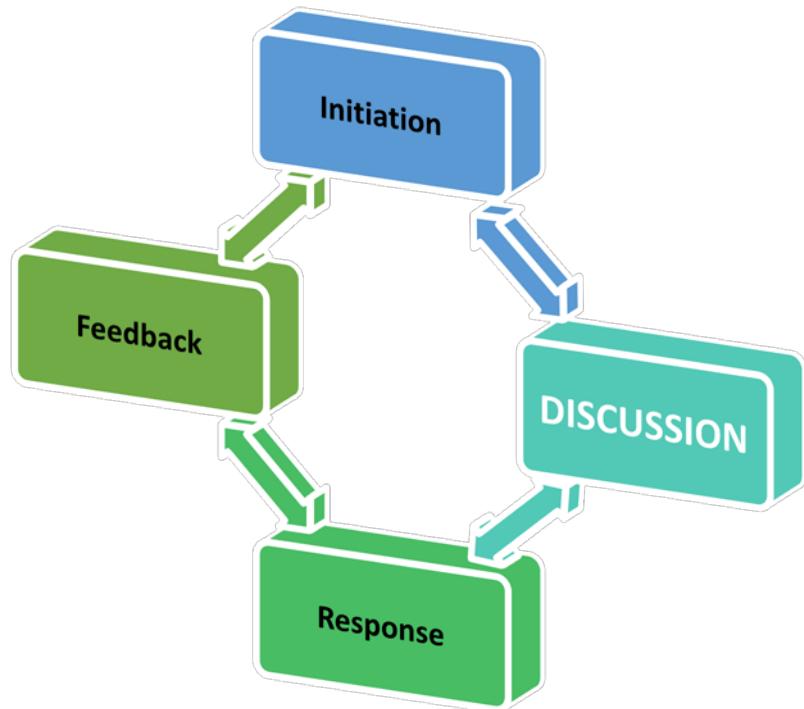


Figure 3. I-D-R-F [Wegerif, 1996; Mortimer & Scott, 2003]

'DIALOGIC DANCE' STRUCTURE

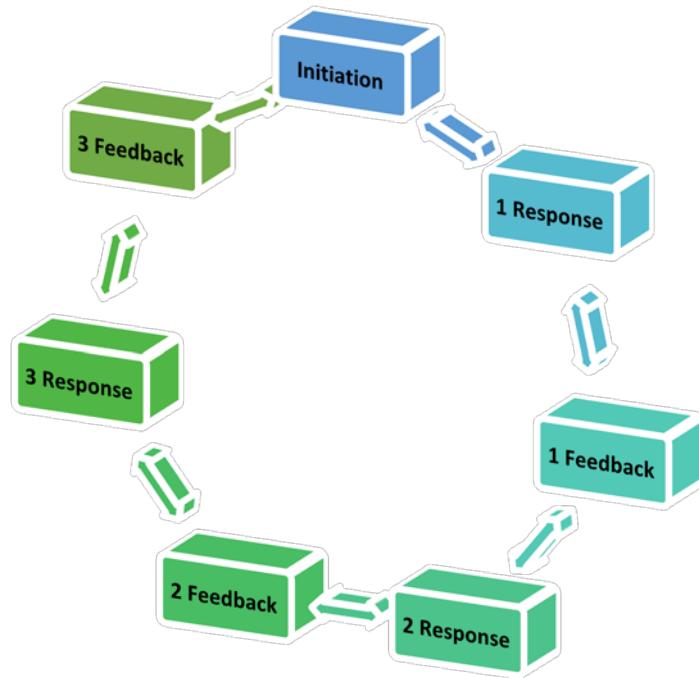


Figure 4. I-R-F-R-F-R-F [Wegerif, 2006; Mortimer & Scott, 2003]

This '*dialogic dance*' identifies through an '*every day*' event the moment when both parties, from potentially opposite views have the opportunity to experience similar events that bring them together [Yaron, 1993] regardless of the outcome of this exchange [Mercer, A. et.al., 1999; Mercer, 2007; Alexander, R., 2001; 2004; Wells, 1999].

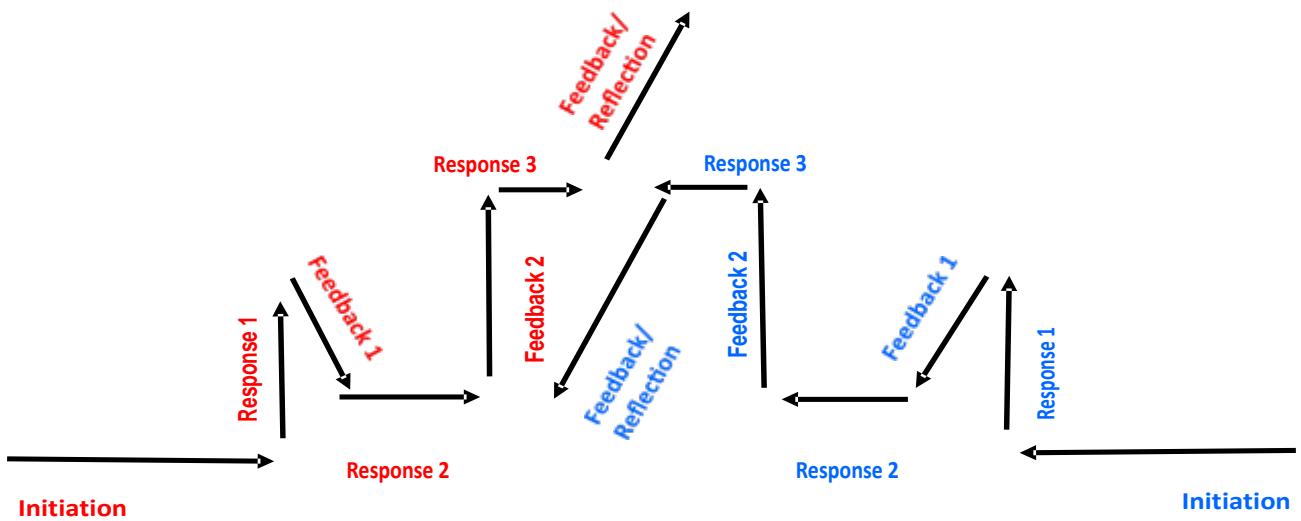


Figure 5. Notation for a 'dialogic dance' [Henson, 2019]

- Move 1** **INITIATION** - Confrontational asserting individual status of participant 'A' and 'B'. Also addresses the initiation of the dialogue
- Move 2** **RESPONSE 1** - Hesitation and then both move in same direction to respond and listen as appropriate.
- Move 3** **FEEDBACK 1** - Wishing to avoid confrontation immediately move opposite direction in an attempt to avoid each other thus the dialogic dance develops
- Move 4** **RESPONSE 2** - Similar position as the beginning of the meeting. However, the world looks different due to the experiences of participants.
- Move 5** **FEEDBACK 2** - Resolution of conflict and agree to have 'a shared' experience.
- Move 6** **RESPONSE 3** – Further challenge before resolution
- Move 7** **FEEDBACK/EVALUATION 3** - Enriched by the '*dialogic dance*'. Something has happened since the start of the dance and participants move on.

This dance identifies what Buber would refer to as '**active learning**' where participants enter the learning environment as 'inclusive' partners and through the '*dialogic dance*' share their knowledge by blurring the lines between each other in order to '*pass on by*' [Buber, 1965; Kramer, 2013]. As in the dance in the act of exchanging dialogic ideas both partners appreciate shifts in perception, reciprocity, trust and belief and are enriched by the opportunities offered by engaging with the dialogic framework established within the learning environment [Tweed, 2008: p. 180].

THE DIALOGIC FRAMEWORK

The **Dialogic Framework** will be based upon a set of agreed ground rules devised for the specific needs of each module. This framework suggests that a module should have **three iterative cycles**. Each iterative cycle facilitating a creative engagement between participants and encouraging a ‘deeper’ approach to learning as opposed to a ‘didactic’ approach [Carey, Bridgstock, Taylor, McWilliam & Grant, 2013]. The reason for establishing this framework is that the

learning environment **SHOULD** be:

- a place for excitement and passion where dialogic interaction is able to flourish and develop through the various cycles of reflection within the curriculum planning. Participants should feel they have an equal share in the learning.

learning environment **SHOULD NOT** be:

- a series of sessions that have to be attended in order to gain the factual information that eventually leads to the ‘test’!

DIALOGIC DANCING

In the act of ‘doing’ (*dialogic dance*) all participants are enriched by the opportunities offered within the learning environment...

[Yaron, 1993, Tweed, 2008: p. 180].

‘...the collaborative behaviour of participants as they use the meaning potential of a shared language (*dialogic dance*) to mediate the establishment and achievement of their goals in social action’

[Wells, 1999: p. 174].

**MAJOR PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL INFLUENCES
CONTRIBUTING TO THE STRUCTURE OF THIS
'DIALOGIC FRAMEWORK'**

Dewey's *learner centred philosophy* together with his ideas regarding reflection for all participants is at the heart of this dialogic framework [Carr, 2003: p. 223]. Dewey saw the learner in much the same way as Copernicus saw the sun - the centre of attention [Dewey, 1899: 151].

Bloom's cognitive domain taxonomy is referenced as part of the framework increasing in complexity within each cycle of the dialogic framework [1956; Eisner, 2001: p. 51].

Bakhtin makes the distinction between dialogue and conversation of student and tutor by stating dialogic interaction is purposeful in its questioning and line of enquiry [Bakhtin, 1993; 1994: pp 108-109].

Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* acknowledges the importance of a *learner centred education* based on the needs of the individual [Freire, 1970: p. 71]. Freire writes that 'students – no longer docile listeners - are now critical co-investigators in dialogue...' [Freire, 1970: p. 62].

Martin Buber in *Between Man and Man* [1965; p. 84] requires of all participants to have empathy and through dialogic interaction to attempt understand each other whatever their point of view [Kramer, 2013; Howe, 1963].

Donald Schön identifies two types of reflection e.g. *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. The first indicating the potential for 'thinking on one's feet' and the second for reflecting on the event once it has happened [Schön, 1983: p. 68].

Lave and Wenger with their shared vocabulary in the *process of learning* [Lave & Wenger, 1991].

Kolb's *experiential learning cycle* that enables learning opportunities to be created along a continuum which are sequential, developmental, plus the potential to reflect upon the learning experience in a variety of ways [Kolb, 1984].

Robin Alexander states that dialogic interaction encourages a 'pedagogy of mutuality'. The dialogic framework responds to this by giving an opportunity for all participants to be competent thinkers in their own right and encourages such principles as being: collective; reciprocal; supportive; cumulative; and purposeful [Alexander, 2004: pp. 29 - 34].

Alina Reznitskaya has tackled 'the failure of dialogue' within the learning environment [Burboles, 1993, p. 144]. Reznitskaya has completed research in the value of dialogue in its various manifestation [Reznitskaya, 2012: pp. 446-456]. She has developed a six-point continuum identifying monologic and dialogic interactions within the learning environment. If we were to consider the value of this Dialogic Inquiry Tool [DIT] there might be a greater insight into the power and purpose of dialogic interaction and so improve the quality of our teaching [Reznitskaya, 2012].

DIALOGIC FRAMEWORK

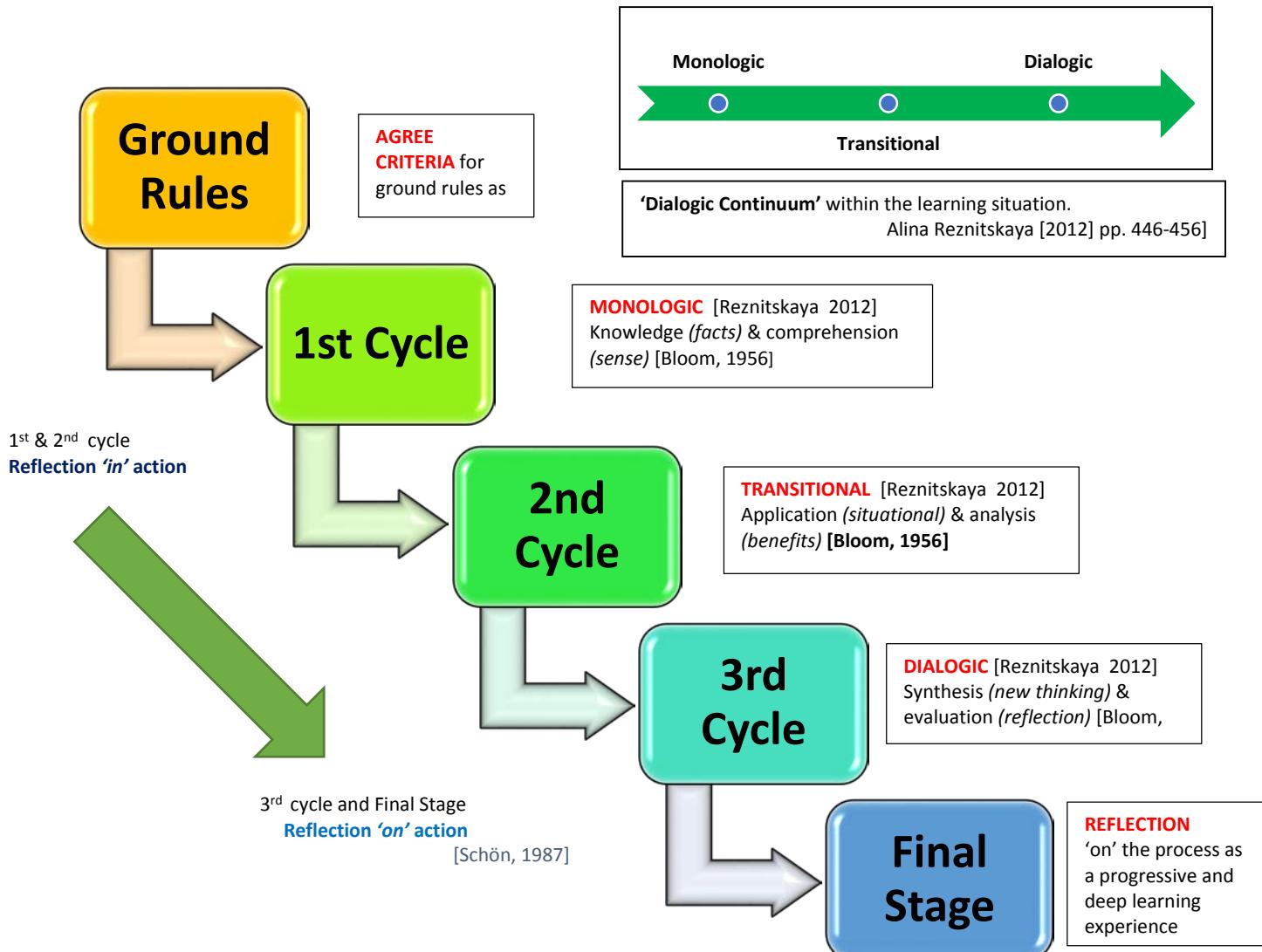
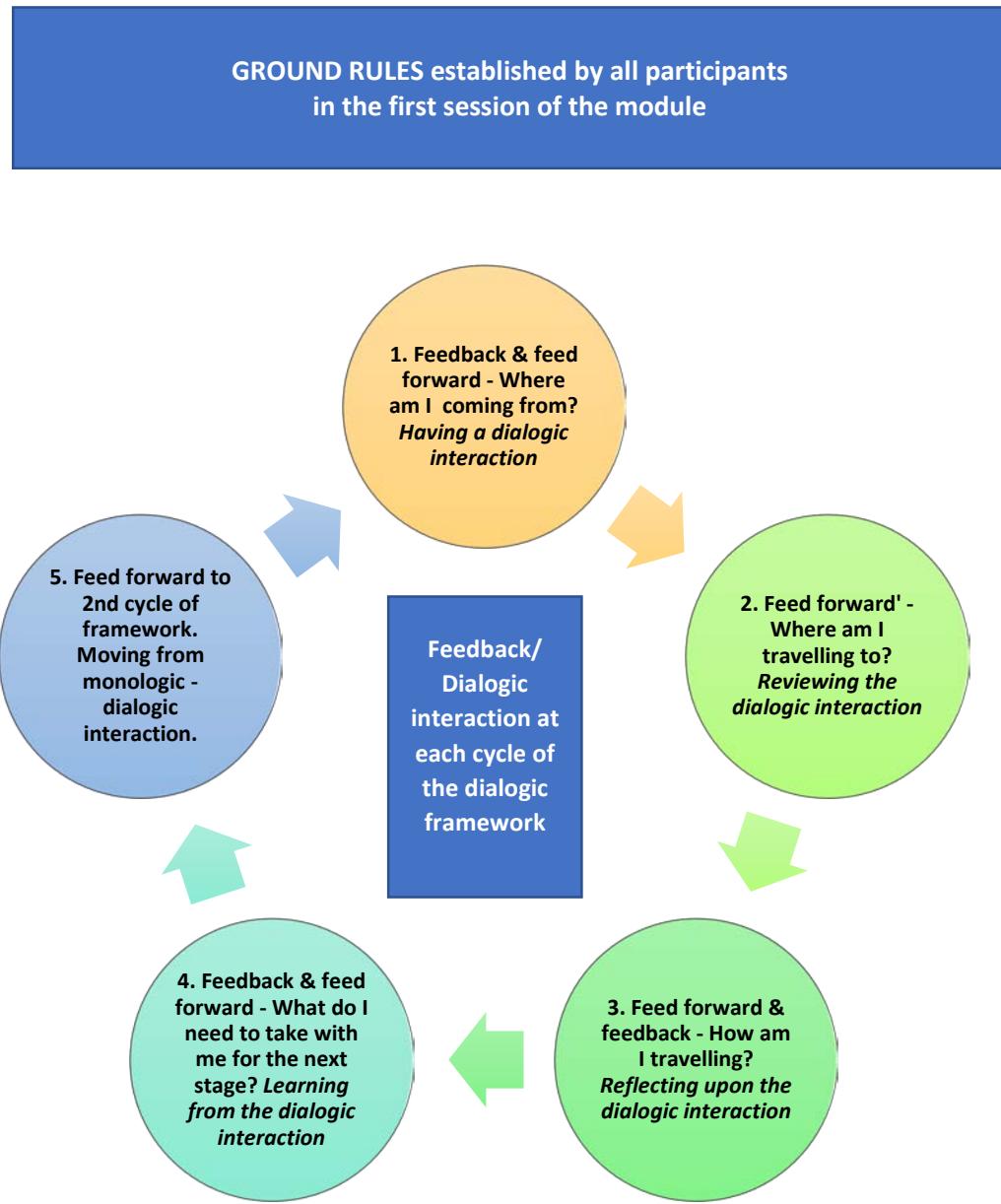


Figure 6. Cycles of the dialogic framework

FIRST CYCLE of DIALOGIC FRAMEWORK



Questions set for each cycle of the dialogic framework inspired by Kolb's learning cycle [1984].

1. Where have you been and how has this impacted upon your learning?
2. What are the goals for the next stage of the cycle?
3. What is the direction and approach to the next stage of the cycle?
4. Which ideas will you take with you and why?
5. Move on to the next cycle of the dialogic framework

Figure 7. First cycle of the dialogic framework

Within each cycle a variety of strategies should be considered to make relevant the specific nature of the curriculum and to enable all participants to interact effectively with their peers. For example, ‘peer reviews’ might integrate feedback into the actual module delivery and improve the quality of work [Nicol, 2010; Carless, et al., 2011]. The benefits of peer reviews being that in the shifting away from a ‘*telling*’ to a constructivist paradigm peers make comments upon the work of others and not only do we learn about the work of others but recognise the value that feedback has to both giver and receiver [Nicol, 2014: p. 105]. Skills and benefits considered in the framework for peer feedback might be as follows:

Feedback Skill:	Critical readership
Benefits:	Potential to analyse and evaluate the work of others and by doing so discover how to make their own work have focus and readability
Feedback Skill:	Problem solving, and ability to analyse and evaluate the current work
Benefits:	Express with clarity observations made and give/share useful guidance
Feedback Skills:	Writing short reports in accordance with terms of the assignment
Benefits:	Opportunity to support comments about strong/weak work in self and others

At the start of a students’ journey into higher education [Level 4] we should not be so concerned as to whether they know about ‘this’ or ‘that’, but whether they have been given an opportunity and a platform to argue their point clearly. We need to give our students a new way of looking at themselves, their learning and the world. If a curriculum is so dependent on the factual information being understood then alternative systems need to be put in place where dialogic interaction can have an equal position within the learning [Boud, 2000; Hattie and Timperley, 2007; De Nisi and Kluger, 2000; Hounsell, 2011].

Dare I suggest that one major risk is in ‘continuation’ between levels 3/4 and 5. I believe that the dialogic framework would enable students to engage effectively with learning - no matter what their educational background – and to return to their learning with a sense of excitement and focus. We need to take risks in education. This is one of those moments!

Might I also add that with technology becoming more and more addictive to each individual there is less space for dialogic interaction and reflection and the kinds of thinking and conversations that don’t comply with the demands of digital technology. We need to address dialogue and engage with conversations that are sometimes difficult to negotiate and require a sense of nuance in order for learning to have purpose. We need to understand the concept of ‘time’ and to give more ‘time’ to learning rather than always seeking the correct answers. We need the learning environment to be a place for meaningful encounters and realise the need for patience and a greater sense of ‘time’ in order to learn from each other. We must not walk into the future asleep. We must be in control of our decisions in terms of our existence within our community of learning!

I conclude that in order to prepare our students for the demands and uncertainties of the 21st century factual information is no longer enough. A framework for dialogic interaction / feedback should be considered as an essential part of the learning enabling all graduates to embrace the future with confidence.

David S K Henson
3rd July 2019

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