Creating a pro forma to improve the formative feedback of learning developers

Context to Pedagogic Intervention:

The Engagement Team at the University of West London offer formative feedback on students' work through one-to-one drop-in sessions, appointments and email. The service is used by on average 700 students a year with some students accessing support once but many access help multiple times during the year.

Some of the challenges faced by the team, not dissimilar from those faced by all academic staff members in the provision of this support include:

- Limited time available to offer support to all that request it
- Students returning for support without implementing the advised feedback
- Students not transferring feedback offered for one assignment to subsequent pieces of work.

This pedagogic intervention aimed to explore how Student Engagement Advisors (learning developers) could increase the effectiveness of the support they provide and increase the level of student engagement with feedback.

Literature Review of Feedback Provision:

In spite of the extensive literature on the provision of feedback in Higher Education (HE) there is an underrepresentation of the role that Learning Developers can play in the support of students. The majority of literature focusses on the lecturer to student dialogue (Gravett & Winstone, 2018). However, several themes pertinent to formative feedback emerged.

Emotions in feedback:

Motivation is essential to students acting upon feedback (Carless & Boud, 2018) In the context of feedback situations, emotions have a focal role, since they contribute to students' future motivation and self-esteem (Värlander, 2008). Methods to mitigate negative responses to feedback should be considered (Ryan & Henderson, 2018). However, emotional content should be omitted from comments to aid comprehension (Cabestrero et. al, 2018).

Multiple formats:

When dealing with a diverse student population and given the importance of feedback to learning, a variety of formats should be considered to meet the requirements of all university students (Johnson & Cooke, 2014) Using multiple formats, reduces the limitations of a single method, especially when complimenting verbal instruction (Ryan, Henderson & Phillips, 2019).

Transferability:

Students face difficulties when applying feedback, particularly in cases where transfer between different assignments is perceived to be difficult (Gravett & Winstone, 2018).

Corrections:

Court (**2014**) and Evans (**2013**) caution against providing significant amounts of corrective advice, as this may encourage learners to remain dependent upon their educators for explicit directions every time they take on a new task.

Personalisation:

Students prefer feedback that is personalised to the student's own work (Dawson et. al, 2019) studies have shown personalised feedback comments aid comprehension (Beaumont, O'Doherty, & Shannon, 2011).

Intervention design:

After engaging with the literature, two pro formas were designed to supplement the verbal feedback offered during the drop-in sessions/appointments and to standardise the feedback offered via email. One form for students to fill in before the feedback is provided and another pro-forma for them to take away, to support their future studies.

Other features of the pro formas that relate to research findings.

Emotions in feedback: Students are asked to indicate how they feel when working on an assignment

Transferability: Where applicable, it is made clear where feedback can be used on other future assignments to promote self regulation and academic independence. Resources are identified which could be useful for other work.

Corrections: The pro-forma aims to highlight overall areas for improvement, moving away from marking corrections directly onto assignment, to help reduce levels of dependency on the service and promote independence

Personalisation: The pro formas encourage highly personalised feedback with the aim students engage positively with the feedback.

Pro forma designs:

Academic support drop-in: Student fill in before drop-in

Date of drop-in:	Student number:
Student Name:	Module:

Assessment type: (Report/Essay/Reflective account etc.)

What? What feedback have you received on this work before, or similar types of work before?

What? Which aspects would you like to focus on.
1.
2.
3.

What? Which aspects do you find challenging? Which aspects are you most comfortable with?

When? When does this need to be done by? What other deadlines do you have coming up?

How? How does doing this work make you feel? Have you spoken to your course tutor about this?

Academic support drop-in: Feedback Form

Date of drop-in:	Support offered by:
Module:	Assessment type:

What? What is good about the work/ approach

What? Action points (areas to focus on)
1.
2.
3.

How? How can this be achieved?	How? How can this be applied to future work?
Why? Why does it need to be done?	When? When does this need to be achieved by?

Who? Who can support be provided by? How can they help.

Resources (What resources would be useful to use to help you achieve this?)

Intervention methodology:

The Engagement Team through a team meeting identified that repeat attendances of students, who don't engage with the feedback provided by their tutors and don't apply relevant feedback to subsequent assignments

The proformas were tested with 10 students during drop-in sessions over a 3-week period. 4 of these students had attended 10 drop-in sessions or more over the course of the 2018/19 academic year. Verbal feedback a week after the proforma was filled in was sought from these students.

Over the same 3-week period, a further 10 students were asked for verbal feedback on the pro formas about their perceived usefulness and suggestions for improvement were sought.

Results of intervention:

What stands out from the feedback received on the pro formas was that everyone from the two groups said that it made them engage with their feedback more.

A student who would normally come to a drop-in session at least 3 times during an average week, found the written recording of feedback useful. They returned only once within the 3-week period; this was for an advice on an un-related assignment.

4 students who used the feedback pro-forma, said that they previously would forget some of the action points after attending the drop-in session. They identified that the pro-forma had helped them remember and apply the feedback more confidently. This supports the idea that the provision of feedback in multiple formats with formative feedback (Johnson & Cooke, 2014) .

Students who came for quick questions / general academic advice not directly linked to a specific assignment, found the student proforma too detailed and intrusive. One student commented "I have often thought about what I want to focus on before attending the drop-in sessions… so I don't feel it should be a requirement to use it."

Evaluation of intervention:

The pro-forma appears, with this small sample group, to have succeeded in encouraging students to engage more actively with the feedback from their course tutors.

To ensure the pro forma design fitted the requirements for both staff and students, and given their fundamental part within the feedback process, students should have been involved in the pro forma design stage, critical feedback is useful in resource development.

Implications for future practice/ research:

For reasons of practicality the proforma cannot be used for every drop-in, however where it has been identified that students are returning multiple times (at least twice a week) they should have to engage with the pro-forma., as it has been shown to be effective.

Following on from this intervention, further proformas could be developed to support different students and their respective requirements. Service-using students will be involved in the dissemination stage. Other methods for the dissemination of this type of feedback could be explored; Ryan, Henderson & Phillips (2019) suggest the use of voice recordings of feedback can compliment both written and face-to-face feedback.

In line with Gravett & Winstone (2018) further research should be carried out within the institution to further understand students' perspectives on the role of learning developers (Student Engagement Advisors and Academic Support Librarians) in the feedback process. It could explore why students choose to enlist the support of learning developers as opposed to going directly to the subject-level academic for support with their feedback.

References:

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