Technology-enabled Feedback in Large Business Classes

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Class Sizes
445 and 706

Discipline
Business

Feedback Approaches
Exemplars, Rubrics, Peer feedback,
Whole class feedback, Post-exam feedback

Technologies
Turnitin PeerMark (turnitin.com),
Camtasia (techsmith.com)

Challenge & Aim

Maynooth University School of Business delivers core module in business to a large number of students in cohorts exceeding 200. A single instructor may teach 2-3 such classes, in the form of large class lectures, with limited resources to support course delivery, assessment and feedback. In this case study, the 1st Year Organisational Behaviour (OB) class comprised 706 students (taught in 3 separate streams by the same instructor) and the 2nd Year Marketing Management (MM) class comprised 445 students (taught in 2 separate streams by the same instructor), making it challenging for us to provide students with timely and personalized feedback. The case study employed a range of technology-enabled feedback mechanisms aimed at addressing this issue: Exemplars, Rubrics, Peer feedback, Whole class feedback, Post-exam feedback.

Evidence from the Literature

Research to date indicates that:

- **Exemplars and rubrics** can help students understand the standards associated both with a particular assessment, and with the subject discipline. They can also promote transparency, consistency, and efficiency in feedback provision (Carless 2015).

- **Peer feedback** potentially offers many benefits for student learning and motivation, particularly in relation to the development of self-regulation (Nicol, Thomson and Breslin 2014). When assigned to review somebody else's work, students are invited to step from the position of the person being evaluated into a position of an evaluator. This position requires knowledge of all course materials, analytical capabilities and critical thinking. While all these are also required to write an "ideal" written submission, they are employed differently as a reviewer.

- Provision of **generic, whole-class feedback** on draft work can be an effective way to provide timely feedback, particularly in the context of large classes. This approach can be more effective than individualised feedback that comes too late for students to engage with or apply (O'Donovan, Rust and Price 2015).

- The final mark is often the only indication provided to students as to how they have performed in an exam. Provision of **generic whole-class exam feedback** is one way that feedback on exams can be provided.

- **Screencast feedback** has potential to generate number of practical and pedagogical benefits for students and teaching staff. These include: supporting feedback comprehension and student engagement with feedback; provision of richer feedback; improvements in relation to access and flexibility; and potential for time saving (Y1Feedback 2016).

Feedback Approach

Stage 1 - Exemplar and Rubric
Students were asked to critically analyse a business case/set of cases and write an analytical essay/business column. Students utilised a rubric as guidance in both in developing their draft and in providing peer feedback. They were also provided with a screencast with sample feedback on the exemplar using the grading rubric.

Stage 2 - Peer Feedback
Students completed an anonymous peer review of 3 classmates' submissions.

Stage 3 - Generic, whole-class feedback
Generic, whole-class feedback that included feedback on both the essay and the peer feedback comments was provided via a screencast.

Stage 4 - Generic whole- class exam feedback
Generic, whole-class feedback on exam performance was provided via a screencast.

Outcomes

The case study was evaluated by considering a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence on student and staff experience. We considered students' responses to our annual Student Evaluation of Learning Experience (SELE) survey and looked at the statistics of participation in peer feedback. We also have some anecdotal evidence from our personal communication with students. From a staff perspective, we estimated the time spent on preparing and conducting this component of CA and discussed our experience in relation to the case study.

Student Response

87% of students in the MM module engaged in peer feedback stage of the assignment. In the SELE evaluation, 57% of students on the module indicated that they agree or strongly agree that submitted work received useful feedback. This is in contrast with just 3% in the previous year, where the course was assessed by examination only. For the OB module, 91% of students have submitted their essays, and 82% submitted at least 1 peer review. These numbers indicate students' engagement in peer review was lower than into writing their own essays. One of the potential reasons for such decrease might be the technological challenges in accessing essays for reviews and submitting reviews.

Student engagement was approximated using Moodle access statistics. The level of engagement with peer-review related materials was lower compared to the materials that were related to the drafting stage of the assignment. For example, only 52% students on the OB module watched the exemplar peer review screencast, meaning that at least 30% of students submitted their peer reviews without accessing this material. 61.5% of students indicated in the SELE survey that they agree or strongly agree that submitted work received useful feedback. The previous year's course was taught by a different lecturer and assessed by examination only, so it cannot provide a point of comparison to this figure. A small number of students commented on this assignment in their SELE survey*:

Student 1: *"Really enjoyed the peer feedback and the case study as it allowed us to apply our knowledge to real world examples"*

Student 2: *"Peer assessment was a helpful aspect of the module"*

Student 3: *"The assignment done on the case was good. It helped apply the methods we learn and make us clear on them. However the grading of the other students assignments was a waste of time in my opinion and time could have been spent on something more helpful towards final exam."*

In addition, some of the students in both modules expressed concern with the complexity of PeerMark software, and became discouraged after experiencing technical difficulties in submitting the first part of the assignment.

* These comments should be considered anecdotal.

Staff Reflections

Benefits were that students:

- Were exposed to giving and receiving peer feedback
- Were exposed to rubrics
- Were exposed to new technology
- To some extent engaged with the material

Drawbacks were that:

- Due to either low level of initial skills in academic writing and critical analysis or low motivation, students could hardly reach the threshold needed to deliver satisfactory result.

- Overall peer reviews were of low quality and peer grades were unreliable.

- Due to class size and limited resources, adequate grading of assignments was not possible. We had to resort to partial reliance on peer grades, which, in our opinion, resulted in positive skew of the resulting grades.

- We encountered numerous technical and usability issues with Turnitin PeerMark, which incurred a significant increase in lecturer workload.

- Overall we underestimated the lecturer's workload associated with planning and implementation of this case study.

- The multi-stage approach may pose logistical problems, in that as the failure to submit the first part of the assignment brings implications for the second stage (both for non-submitters and their peers)

Recommendations

We believe that PeerMark software at this stage is premature for use in large classes. We also recommend using peer feedback as a separate assignment, not as a means for peer grading of students' own written assignments. The timely input of materials into the system for students to review has to be controlled by an instructor. This does not solve the issue of grading high number of reviews on their quality, but at least prevents the system from stalling over late submissions or non-submissions.

In the large classes, we do not recommend to use peer feedback as basis for further grading by a lecturer, as the quality of peer reviews (in particular, among the 1st year students) was low.

References

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Contact ✉

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