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Responsibility sharing in the feedback process: Perspectives of educators

Theme - Addressing challenges of assessment in mass higher education

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The impact of feedback on learning is driven by what students, not only educators, do (Carless, 2015). Proposing a culture of shared responsibility in the giving and receiving of feedback, Nash and Winstone (2017) argued that students need to be empowered to take more proactive roles in feedback processes. However, educator-centred models of feedback continue to dominate practice (Winstone & Boud, 2018). Shifting practice towards student-centred models of feedback demands a better understanding of how educators view their own and their students' responsibilities. In total, 216 lecturers from UK universities answered two open-ended questions concerning their beliefs about (1) the responsibility of the educator and (2) the responsibility of the student in the feedback process. Content analysis of their responses revealed five themes representing the perceptions of educators' responsibilities: grade justification; provision of comments; facilitation of students' development; affective awareness; and following policy and procedures. Furthermore, there were six themes representing educators' perceptions of students' responsibility: process comments; follow guidelines; engage in reflection; enact comments; seek clarification; and engage in dialogue.

By comparing the prevalence of these codes, we found a predominance of educator-centred over student-centred models of feedback. In particular, responses that conveyed transmission-focused perceptions of educators' responsibility—focused on the mere provision of comments—were significantly more common than were responses that conveyed the student-focused model of facilitating students' development. Similarly, when considering students' responsibility, educators significantly more often made reference to the basic processing of comments than they did to the enactment of comments. We supplemented this by conducting a linguistic analysis of the words these educators used when describing their own and their students' responsibilities in the feedback process. This analysis, conducted using LIWC (Linguistic Enquiry and Word Count; Pennebaker et al., 2015) software revealed that when describing their own responsibilities in the feedback process, educators' language was characterised by more certain, emotionally positive, power-related, and causal language, than was the case when they described students' responsibilities.

Taken together, these findings indicate a predominance of transmission-focused models of feedback processes among university educators. When describing students' responsibilities, educators used tentative language, and they were more likely to identify the importance of students' basic processing of comments than to mention their proactive enactment of comments. Facilitating student-centred approaches to feedback may benefit from educators and their students engaging in a dialogue relating to student enactment of comments in order to develop a sense of shared responsibility in the feedback process.

References

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