Effective assignment comments?

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The importance of feedback

- ‘Altering the gap’ (Sadler 1989)
- Emphasis on creating self-regulated learners
- Seven principles of effective feedback (Nicol 2006)
- Importance of the first year, Level 1
- Survey of tutor approach to providing feedback
  - Preparation
  - Methods
  - Conception
  - Use of Marking Guides
A possible taxonomy of feedback


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The survey

- T175 Networked Living
- 2400 students and 140 tutors annually
- 4 ‘high-stakes’ TMAs – summative and formative
- All tutors invited to respond on SurveyMonkey
- 41 questions, designed to elicit
  - Background and experience
  - How the Marking Guides were used
  - Tutors’ rating of Nicol’s principles
  - Marking Guide support for Nicol’s principles
  - Suggestions for additional help
- 50% response rate
Results 1

- Background and experience
  - 91% of tutors with 5 years + OU tutoring experience
  - 29% over 10 years experience
  - 85% worked on 4 + presentations of T175

- Rich reservoir of knowledge and ideas

- Possibly out of date conceptions of purpose of feedback

- Tutors not obliged to do additional training beyond induction
Results 2

- **Preparation**
  - 64% read the MG one week or less before cut-off date
  - Lost opportunity for future-altering feedback before submission?

- **Methods**
  - All tutors supply PT3 and on-script comments
  - 32% additionally include comments on a marking template
  - Tutors admit to duplication (triplication?) of feedback
  - Demotivating effect?
  - Templates tend to focus on retrospective-on-content feedback
Results 3

Principles of feedback

• 49% claimed “deliver high-quality information to students about their learning (e.g. strengths and weaknesses)” as primary or secondary aim

• 78% claimed “clarify to students what good performance is” best supported by Marking Guides

• Marking Guides appear to support retrospective feedback
Results 4

- Possible additional features
  - 57% wanted model answers
  - Students want personalised feedback as well as model answers (Huxham 2007)
  - Model answers will tend to be content focussed and useful for retrospective feedback only
  - Model answers ineffective for future-altering-on-skills feedback

- Language skills
  - 65% need more help with feedback on language skills
  - 45% need more help with feedback on numeracy skills
  - MGs inadequate in this crucial area
References


