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JOURNAL OF RESPONSE TO WRITING

Encouraging Active Participation in Dialogic Feedback through Assessment as Learning

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Sustainable feedback practices, that can encourage self-regulation of performance and improvement in future work beyond an immediate task, require our students to be active participants in, and users of, the feedback we provide. Critical to this participation are the internal feedback mechanisms of reflection and self-assessment. They require students to make evaluations about their own writing without the aid of external agents, which in turn can encourage better use of teacher feedback. Moreover, dialogic collaborative feedback that encourages this type of self-evaluation through interactive cover sheets has been featured in existing practitioner research studies. This teaching article presents an extension to the use of such cover sheets to include student self-evaluation and reflection in relation to specific marking criteria as part of an existing feedback cycle on a first-year undergraduate course. Observations from the practitioner research presented here highlight how the inclusion of such rubric criteria not only helped to develop students' confidence in independently monitoring and evaluating their writing but also heightened awareness of the rhetorical features of their texts.

Keywords: assessment as learning, internal feedback, self-reflection, self-evaluation, dialogic feedback

Introduction

A feedback process is an essential component of any writing pedagogy, but within this process, the teacher is not the only responder. As students write, they also internally monitor and evaluate their own work in relation to intended performance. The traditional conceptualization of feedback as an episodic event, wherein the student writes and the teacher responds, ignores this crucial role of student agency and the importance of these internal feedback processes (Nicol, 2013). If, instead, we conceptualize the function of feedback as serving to develop our learners' ability to make evaluative *internal* judgments of their own writing, then the teacher-centric concept of *external* feedback provision is no longer as generative (Boud, 2007; Cowan, 2010; Sadler, 2010). Effective feedback practices, therefore, should facilitate this self-evaluation and assessment of learning (Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006). When students are given opportunities to self-evaluate and reflect in response to feedback input (external or internal) and to utilize their evaluations to build knowledge—what Nicol (2013) calls “reflective knowledge building”—our feedback practices become more “sustainable,” or in other words, “support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks” (Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011, p. 397).

Within a critical and reflective writing pedagogy, a dialogic and collaborative feedback process can enable students to become reflective, independent learners. The purpose of such dialogic feedback is to inform, diagnose, promote, and extend student learning (Alexander, 2006). A dialogic feedback process, with the student positioned as initiator rather than simply recipient, requires feedback to be not only a measurement of performance but also a collaborative and communicative event realized as interaction between giver and receiver or teacher and student (Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker, 2016). Sustainable and dialogic feedback requires that students have opportunities to reflect on, review, and put into practice feedback input—both external and internal (Nicol, 2013). Students have generally been found to have a preference for external feedback that outlines for them *specifically* what to do to improve a particular piece of writing (Crisp, 2007), as in for example, indirect or direct coding of accuracy errors (or “red-inking”) in written corrective

feedback of L2 writing. Studies suggest, however, that for feedback to effectively enable students to make improvements to their writing, they need to be encouraged to not only be active users of external feedback but also to develop their ability to generate internal feedback. This requires that they can self-assess and evaluate independently of the teacher as responder. Students also need to understand *why* this type of learner agency is important (Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Winstone et al., 2016), and *how* development of these metacognitive skills of self-evaluation can help “in developing a mindset of proactive recipience” (Winstone et al., 2016, p. 14).

Previous studies have identified the usefulness of self-evaluative activities in developing writing skills using tools such as interactive cover sheets (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010) or adaptations of Nancy Sommers’ (2013) “Dear Reader” letters to encourage collaboration in a dialogic feedback cycle between student and teacher (Ferris, 2014; Goldstein, 2005; Hoon Lee, Ping Leong, & Song, 2017; Shvidko, 2015). By requiring students to take an active role as a first step in this feedback cycle, these cover sheets can help to facilitate the internal feedback process that is essential to successful writing. Feedback literacy, however, also requires the ability to read, interpret, and use external written feedback commentary (Sutton, 2012). Students need to be able to understand and use feedback as it relates to the criteria through which their writing is assessed if teachers’ external feedback is to develop learning and improve performance. If students do not understand the terminology of the marking criteria or are not able to relate rubric criteria to their own writing, then subsequent external feedback has little value (Jones, Allen, Dunn, & Brooker, 2017). As such, teachers need to extend self-review activities to encourage students to critically evaluate their writing in relation to assessment criteria as an additional resource to direct student learning and writing development.

As part of the “assessment for learning” (AfL) movement, “assessment as learning” (AaL) has been suggested as having a central role in promoting this type of learner independence and reflexivity. Although feedback is central to both practices, AfL involves formative support as part of the assessment process, whereas AaL promotes the development of students’ capacity to self-evaluate their own performance (Earl, 2013; Lam, 2016). By encouraging these self-regulatory behaviors, such as self-evaluation,

as part of a dialogic feedback cycle, studies have shown that students can improve learning (Dann, 2002, 2014; Earl, 2013; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Torrance, 2007) and develop self-regulation in writing (Andrade & Evans, 2013; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Whereas AfL can facilitate students' development of writing through alternative assessment, such as feedback on drafts or student-teacher writing consultations/conferences, AaL positions learners as active agents developing metacognitive capacities for self-evaluation through engagement with specific criteria or rubrics (Crisp, 2007; Lam, 2016; Small & Attree, 2015). The distinction between AfL and AaL here, then, is somewhat analogous with that of the concepts of "learning to write," where students are learning to express themselves in writing, and "writing to learn," where writing is used to develop writing skills in the context of a discipline-specific area (Manchón, 2011).

Context

This practitioner inquiry was undertaken in the tutorial classes of a first-year undergraduate language and communication program that I taught in two different thirteen-week semesters at one campus of an Australian university. This is a discipline-specific credited program for EAL (English as an additional language) students undertaken in the first semester of their first year of study (for more details see Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, Walkinshaw, Michael, & Lobo, 2015). In total, the cover sheet was used in three classes I was teaching from two of the university's academic groupings (Business, and Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences). In these classes, the assignment task comprised a 1,000-word thesis-driven analytical essay. In the Language and Communication for Business class, students wrote an analysis of a business leader using a leadership style framework taken from a prescribed reading. In the other classes in the Language and Communication for Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences course, students chose a key theory, approach, or genre from their discipline to write about. The primary purpose of the written assignment task on these discipline-specific programs is to enable students to apply information literacy, critical reading and writing skills, as well as demonstrate language proficiency in developing and communicating ideas effectively. The process for the provision of feedback was also the same across both courses. In

week 7 of the 13-week course, students submitted an assignment draft on which written commentary and corrective feedback was then provided in relation to four marking criteria—*task fulfilment, coherence and cohesion, grammar, and vocabulary*. All feedback was provided electronically using the Turnitin's GradeMark facility. The draft was a formative assignment and only the final submission was graded. The draft was returned with comments in week 9, and students submitted their final paper in week 12.

The feedback process for the written assignment currently takes place within a wider framework of existing activities, as part of a dialogic feedback cycle, that are designed to encourage metacognition and self-evaluation and thus develop learner agency. Students engage with marking standards and criteria through evaluation of exemplars as part of their preparation for submission of draft assignments for formative assessment. This type of “student training” is important for successful AaL (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). However, the starting point of this feedback cycle was the teacher as responder to students' draft assignments. Following the return of these formative comments, students reflect on the feedback they have received using a feedback reflection sheet by commenting on how they will use the external feedback to improve their paper in regards to the four marking criteria. Subsequently students revise and resubmit their paper, which is then graded and returned with summative feedback. Students then have another opportunity to consult with teachers about the final feedback they have received.

Data Collection

Practitioner inquiry or “insider research” is dependent on an in-depth knowledge of context and participants and is usually driven by an initial problem or issue in the teacher's practice so that “the research question addresses something that the practitioner wants to do better or understand more clearly” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 73). The size of classes and the limited face-to-face contact time available on these programs (two hours per week per tutorial class) means that writing consultations/conferences with each student, which I facilitated during week 9 in class time on return of drafts with feedback, were extremely limited. Realistically I could only ever achieve a maximum of three to five minutes per student, and even then,

I was unable to accommodate every student. The efficacy of the feedback process and the ability of the students to use my feedback independently is, therefore, especially important.

To encourage development of self-regulatory behaviors, I adapted the concept of an interactive cover sheet to include self-evaluation in relation to the specific criteria that I would be using to provide formative feedback, and later a summative grade, on my students' writing (see Appendix). I reasoned that this would enable them to take a more active role in a dialogic feedback process. By responding directly to my students' own reflections and evaluation of their writing, I also hoped that my external feedback could supplement and encourage learner-generated feedback. Additionally, by asking students to direct their evaluation to the explicit criteria, I felt this could potentially increase self-confidence in meeting the expectations of the task.

The Assessment as Learning Tool

After submitting their drafts electronically, I asked students to complete the interactive self-reflection and assessment cover sheet during their tutorial, while referring to their own original copy of the draft. For the purposes of this tool, I conflated the criteria of *grammar* and *vocabulary* (see Appendix) to encourage students to think more about language function than form and to hopefully discourage the broad and vague comments that students often make in their self-evaluation of these areas. Barriers to the usefulness of such an intervention can be a lack of understanding of its purpose, benefits, and importantly, knowing how to complete the task effectively (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Dann, 2002, 2014; Nicol & McFarlane-Dick, 2006; Shvidko, 2015). I therefore spent time explaining to the students about the dialogic and collaborative nature of writing and reviewing and provided examples. I also explained that it was not necessary for them to make comments for every criterion but only where they felt they wanted to or where they felt it might best improve their writing. This also provided the opportunity to unpack, reflect, and share discussion of the assessment criteria itself; a process which has been identified as important in dialogic and collaborative feedback (Juway et al., 2004). When providing my feedback on students' drafts, I tried to respond

to each individual student's AaL reflection and evaluation sheet in my own margin and summative comments. Figure 1 illustrates a schematic of the process.

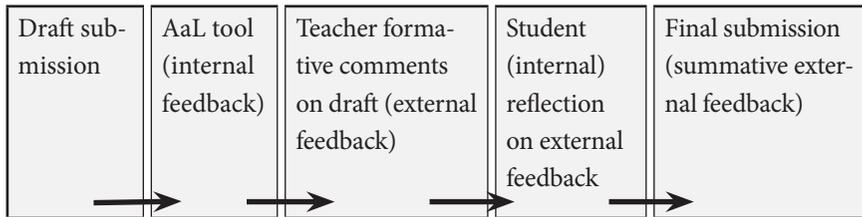


Figure 1. AaL tool as part of feedback process

Discussion

The following presents selected extracts from the dialogic feedback cycles of two students, one from each of the classes in the two academic groupings. These extracts focus on the marking criteria *task fulfillment* and *coherence and cohesion* in relation to the thesis-driven essays written by a Business student (Sylvia, see Figures 2–3) and an Arts, Humanities, and Social Science student (Leo, see Figures 4–5). Pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality. Student writing is presented verbatim with no corrections made.

In the first extract, from Sylvia's interactive self-evaluation cover sheet (see Figure 2), she attempts to articulate her concerns about connecting her research to her thesis. She recognizes that her paragraphs have a suitable structure but speculates that the lack of support is the reason for this disconnect in certain sections of her essay. Nevertheless, in evaluating her own strengths, Sylvia acknowledges her efforts in finding suitable supporting information.

Criterion:	I need feedback/help with the following areas:
<p>Coherence & cohesion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure of introduction and conclusion appropriate for an academic essay • clear topic sentence and one main idea in each body paragraph • ideas developed, supported, and logically grouped in paragraphs • appropriate mix of cohesive devices 	<p><i>I think I have good evidences/ideas but in discussion of first leadership style I don't think it connect it well to answer question. So paragraph is good structure but it doesn't seem so good support maybe??</i></p>
<p>My paper has the following strengths:</p>	<p><i>I'm pleased with the research I've made to discuss my point of view. I think I have made good references to the leadership style framework given.</i></p>

Figure 2. Extract from Sylvia's interactive self-assessment and reflection cover sheet—Business essay

Through the internal monitoring of her own writing, Sylvia is beginning to realize that there are potential problems for the reader in understanding the development of her controlling idea, even though her paragraph has good structure and she has some “good evidences/ideas,” and so asks for external feedback to help resolve this. She has also recognized that these are problems attributable to the criterion *coherence and cohesion* as described in the assessment criteria.

Out of the four main leadership styles outline by Darling & Leffel (2010), Wei Jianjun the CEO of Great Wall Motors, could be regarded as a Creator. These leaders tend to look for something new and fresh, in other word, they are risk takers (Darling & Leffel, 2010). Wei Jianjun was able to create different types of auto mobiles such as Sedans, SUVs and Pickup Trucks that he was inspired from the pickup trucks in Thailand during his business trip and decided to make his own (Gulliver, C. 2012). [This is a good example Sylvia but it needs to be developed so that it justifies your controlling idea. You need to explain to me how/why this was a risk. How were these different to the types of vehicles made before in China? What was it about the pickup trucks in Thailand that inspired him?]. Also, Great Wall had foreign standards when it comes to safety and emissions, they also build their own crash-test track whereas the other automakers had to send their vehicles overseas to a government organization for crash testing (Anderson G., 2012). [Again, a good example but your line of reasoning is not clear. How do the foreign standards and the crash-test track initiatives demonstrate that he has Creator-like characteristics Sylvia? Remember you need to justify the claim you make by clearly linking the evidence. In other words, you have made a claim—Weijun is a Creator who is a risk taker—and you have given an example of the foreign standards etc., but I can't see how the evidence justifies or supports the claim. If you can put this information in, it becomes your voice/analysis which is what I want to see in your essay as well as the good examples that you have.] Through these aspects, Wei was able to comprehend Great Wall into a more diverse automaker company by developing new and fresh ideas from travels and experiences knowing the possible risks it may have.

Extract from summative comments: You indicated that you thought your Creator paragraph had some problems Sylvia. To improve this, you need to develop some of the ideas and create a more logical line of reasoning as I've indicated in my comments. Remember as your reader I need to be able to reach the same conclusions based on the argument you have developed in the paragraph; if I can't then I'm not able to interpret your intended meaning correctly. Have a look back at your class notes where we discussed developing ideas clearly in paragraphs for the reader.

Figure 3. Extract from feedback on Sylvia's draft essay—Business essay. Written commentary feedback shown here in bold would have appeared as electronic margin comments on original.

As evidenced in my later feedback comments (see Figure 3), I am able to confirm Sylvia's own evaluation of the problems she had evidenced in her writing in relation to this specific criterion, and then to draw on previous classroom instruction (viz., justification of evidence in relation to claims to enable reader coherence) to provide a way for her to use my responses to improve her writing. Of course, I might well have given the same comments on this paragraph without reading Sylvia's own evaluations; however, in enabling Sylvia to come to these conclusions independently and then by validating this self-evaluation with my feedback comments, her confidence in her own self-assessment competency would have been enhanced. Sylvia's initial internal feedback about elements of the cohesion and coherence of her essay were confirmed by my external feedback response as "reader" and her intended revisions guided by my feedback comments as "teacher." This is evidenced in her feedback reflection, where she articulates how she will improve in this area for her final submission, identifying that she needs to "properly discuss/explain my examples put in more of my voice and make my thinking clear to reader."

In thinking about the particular areas of her writing that she needs help with, and correctly aligning those with the criterion *coherence and cohesion*, Sylvia is beginning to develop the metacognitive and rhetorical skills that are important for successful academic writing. This positions her as an active participant in this dialogic feedback cycle, initiating a feedback "conversation" and stimulating my external feedback.

In the next set of examples, Leo has identified problems with the overall position of his analytical essay in terms of task fulfillment on his interactive cover sheet (see Figure 4). He has chosen to write about the topic of 3D technology and recognizes that he has a good example in the movie *Avatar*. However, he expresses his confusion about how to combine his analysis of the impact of 3D technology and a review of the movie.

Criterion:	I need feedback/help with the following areas:
<p>Task fulfillment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all aspects of task addressed • ideas indicate depth of knowledge • a clear and consistent position maintained throughout • academic conventions followed, including formatting and referencing 	<p><i>I want to analysis and evaluate this film as critical review of movie and talk about 3D technology impact. I am confused that how to explain my film and demonstrate key point.</i></p>
<p>My paper has the following strengths:</p>	<p><i>This is a good film to choose for the technology because it has interesting technology aspects to analyze.</i></p>

Figure 4. Extract from Leo's interactive self-assessment and reflection cover sheet—Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences essay

In my subsequent feedback comments on Leo's draft (see Figure 5), I highlight how his confusion is realized in his introduction, resulting in a lack of focus for his essay and subsequent body paragraphs. In this way, I can validate his internal monitoring, both of the problems he needs help with and also of the strengths he has correctly identified. As with my comments to Sylvia, I draw on this internal feedback as a starting point for the comments I make about the conflicting topics of Leo's proposed response and the suggestions I make for applying my external feedback.

In turn, my external comments serve to trigger more learner-generated feedback as Leo processes how he will apply my suggested revisions in terms of the criterion *task fulfillment*—“*My thesis statement needs to be clearer. Actually I couldn't make sense of what my topic was before I started draft so this was a problem, but now I have a good idea to make my topic 3D technology and use Avatar film as examples.*” His comments suggest a growing awareness about the cause of the problem he has asked for help with and confidence in his ability to apply the external feedback he has received.

There is a very important fact, we can no longer ignore the importance of 3d technology since the 3D movies began to spread in our lives. The most typical representative works is the “Avatar”, this movie using rich 3D technology to meet the visual needs of the audience. Some people think that ‘dramatic power’ (Campbell, Jones & Datny, 2013, p.295) lets science and technology shocked the film industry. On the other hand, many people think 3d technology changes the way of the original design, which is destruction for design.

[You need to make the focus of your essay clearer Leo. I’m not sure what your thesis is at the moment. Do you mean you are going to use Avatar as a case study to analyse the impact (good or bad) of 3D technology on film ‘design’? If so, express this in a thesis statement along with your overall conclusion about this.]

Extract from summative comments: Leo—you have said in your self-assessment of your draft that you were confused about how to link the movie you have chosen with your key point. You have told me that you wanted this to be a critical analysis of the film Avatar, but also an analysis of the impact of 3D technology on films. But then in your thesis, you state that the purpose is to analyse the effects of 3D technology on ‘design.’ In the body of your essay, you have described the storyline of the film itself as you might do for a review, but you haven’t related this to 3D technology or film design. You’ve got 3 different topics and I think this is why you are getting confused about how to progress your response. You are right that Avatar is a good film choice for discussing 3D technology and maybe a good way to progress your response would be to discuss 3D technology and its impact on film production using Avatar for examples – like a case study. Once you have decided on one topic, you will be able to write a clearer introduction and thesis statement, and develop your body paragraph discussion more effectively.

Figure 5. Extract from feedback on Leo’s draft essay—arts, humanities, and social sciences essay. Written commentary feedback shown here in bold would have appeared as electronic margin comments on original.

Suggestions/Applications

The motivation for this practitioner enquiry was a need to improve the practical aspects of my students’ feedback literacy so that they would be able to read, think about, and use my responses to their writing more independently. My rationale for including the marking criteria and

descriptors in the pre-draft self-reflection and evaluation sheet was based on the concept of “assessment as learning.” As shown in the selected extracts, extending an interactive cover sheet in this way helped my students to align their own internally generated feedback with the rhetorical features of their texts that were being assessed. This exercise also contributed to developing students’ self-confidence in their own metacognitive skills and in their ability to improve their writing. I believe that a certain degree of self-respect was also generated through this type of self-assessment as the exercise encouraged students to acknowledge their own value as a “rhetor” and writer. Positioning my students as active agents in a dialogic feedback cycle also helped to improve my own confidence in teaching writing and providing feedback as I addressed their specific concerns, responding as both reader and teacher.

As a practitioner inquiry, my discussion of the use of this tool is, of course, specific only to the context of my own teaching and within my own classrooms. The extracts presented in this paper were purposively selected from students who engaged with the process effectively, and there were others who were not so successful in this. The written assignment process on this program only allowed for one opportunity to carry out this exercise, and for those students who had lower levels of language proficiency or who had previously experienced a more teacher-centric feedback process, this does not appear to be enough. For many first-year students, self-regulatory behaviors and self-evaluative practices are new concepts and as such mastery of AaL-related skills can only be achieved with systematic training or teacher support (Sadler, 1998), which given the limited contact time available, was going to be difficult, at least initially. Nevertheless, enough students engaged with the process to encourage me to continue my use of this tool as an additional resource for developing students’ metacognitive composition strategies and to recommend its trialing to other teachers. Such a pedagogical technique also has merit for inclusion in teacher development and training programs alongside discussion of how formative assessment can be used to not only provide feedback on past performance but also to inform future learning by developing students’ capacity for self-evaluation and reflection.

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Appendix

Interactive Cover Sheet

The aim of this sheet is to help you to read your writing critically and communicate areas on which you would like feedback from me. **Please try to point to specific areas and describe them explicitly. You only need to complete sections that you think you need help with—you do not necessarily have to comment on all criteria.** Complete this in the week 7 tutorial (i.e., after you have submitted your draft electronically).

Criteria	I would like feedback/help with the following areas:
<p>Task fulfillment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all aspects of the task addressed • ideas indicate depth of knowledge about the topic • a clear and consistent position maintained throughout • academic conventions followed, including formatting & referencing <p>Coherence & cohesion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure of introduction and conclusion appropriate for an academic report • clear topic sentence and one main idea in each body paragraph • ideas developed, supported and logically grouped in paragraphs • appropriate mix and use of cohesive devices 	

Grammar and Vocabulary

- accuracy of grammar
- range of sentence structures
- appropriate punctuation
- able to convey precise meaning and tone through choice of words
- range of appropriate vocabulary, including discipline-specific terms
- accuracy of spelling

My paper has the following strengths:

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