Dialogic feedback in online group tutorials

Mary Jacob, LTEU, 1/7/2021 09:45-10:15

This case study presents an approach to tutoring that provides rich dialogic feedback to students through online group tutorials. We used the affordances of MS Teams to promote inclusion and build a learning community in which students feel comfortable sharing with and supporting their peers. This model is adaptable to small group tutorials at any level of study, from first-year undergraduate modules through postgraduate taught and research programmes.

In this session, we explore how the process worked for our groups and how it could be adapted for other teaching contexts.

Chi, Roy, and Hausmann (2008) found powerful evidence showing that students can learn vicariously when they observe other students being tutored. We used this principle in our assessment tutorials for the PGCTHE module, **PDM0530 Action Research and Reflective Practice in Higher Education**.

From past experience, I knew that many of my students would need extra support in designing the evaluation questions for their action research projects, and that the most effective way to provide such support is through consultations where we discuss the specifics of their projects. Previously, this took place through individual consultations in my office, after which I would send a follow-up email to reinforce key points.

Since the lockdown in response to Covid, I have been running these as small group tutorials online. We use the affordance of Teams to provide rich feedback and capture the dialogue as it develops. Students can refer to the text chat later for details, and thus don't have to rely on their own notes. Students have said that they not only learn from the portion of the session in which we discuss their own projects, but also from the discussion around their peers’ projects as well.

Several factors are key to implementing such a session effectively. Active listening (Rogers, 1987) and strength-based feedback (Louis, 2015) are essential for building trust and inclusion. In our conference session, we will explore ways that these principles can be applied in your own teaching contexts.

## What is dialogic feedback?

David Carless (2013) defines it as:

**interactive exchanges** in which interpretations are shared, **meanings negotiated** and expectations clarified. Impacting on the extent to which such processes may be embedded in courses are relationships of **trust** between teachers and students, and between students themselves.

## Pedagogical framework

This was my first time to use vicarious learning. I’d been using the other methods already and seen some powerful case studies of vicarious learning in practice, but not tried it myself.

## My implementation

PGCTHE module 2: PDM0530 Action Research and Reflective Practice in Higher Education

* Students are academic staff
* Action Research Projects in their teaching
* Evaluate effectiveness of intervention
* Answer their research question

## What we did before

* Individual consultations (coaching sessions) in my office
* Based on the tutor asking and responding, not telling (I already used chain of whys, dialogic feedback, and strength-based feedback)
* Must be attuned to specific projects, not generic
* Not all students request consultations
* Poor evaluation questions 🡪 lack of useful data for project report

## What we changed

* Vicarious learning – students observe coaching conversations with other students
* Online, all invited (rather than meeting in my office upon request)
* Small groups (rather than individual)
* Students share screens (rather than working with paper)
* Rich feedback in chat, which they can download later (rather than my manual notes written up and emailed afterwards)

## What makes it work

* Build trust and inclusion
* Encourage clear thinking
* Students observe peers (vicarious learning was the linchpin)

## Feedback from participants on the group nature of the activity

* **Hearing the tutor's feedback on my peers' questions** clarified the principles of writing good evaluation questions.
* **Hearing the tutor's advice to others** helped me to avoid common pitfalls.
* **Seeing my peers' evaluation questions** gave me new ideas for writing my own questions.
* **Discussion of my peers’ questions** addressed some of the issues I wanted to ask about, myself.
* **Other**: In the session I attended we didn't discuss questions but it helped **hearing about the other participant's problems and ideas**.
* It helped clarify my ideas for the project. It was very useful having more than one participant for the broader perspective.​
* Again, there is a lot of value in the community of practice – because many students share the same questions and doubts, coming together and trying to find answers is a very productive and proactive way of tackling these common issues.​

## How can you apply these ideas?

Graphical user interface, text, application, chat or text message

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Another option would be to record a session where you give a dialogic tutorial with a single student or small group and make the recording available to a larger cohort. This could work well providing that the content of the tutorial session would be essentially the same for all students. The key element is to spend more time asking and responding than you do in telling.

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