Peer assessment/feedback

Overview:

Peer assessment/feedback is a form of assessment that considers students as active participants in the learning process, helps instructors monitor students' progress, and boosts improvement in students' work. This consists in students giving feedback to peers' work using relevant and common criteria or rubrics, and producing a reviewed and enhanced final product in which the comments received are addressed. Peer assessment/feedback is different in nature than evaluating peer contributions to group work.

It involves a rich communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performance and standards, and is supported by the notion that student-student interaction can lead to enhanced understandings and improved learning experiences(Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Liu & Carless, 2006). Thus, the foundation for peer assessment/feedback is that it enables students to take an active role in the management of their own learning as they monitor their work using internal and external feedback (Butler & Winne, 1995). Also, by commenting or ranking the work of peers, students not only identify the standards which can then be transferred to their own work, but also construct an evolving understanding of discipline-specific content matter.

Peer assessment/feedback has been traditionally used in language learning, (e.g., Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006), but has been also broadly employed in higher education contexts around the globe and across disciplines (e.g., Hamer, Purchase, Lixton-Reilly & Denny, 2015; Liang & Tsai, 2010). The existing literature on peer assessment/feedback indicates that: a) students are generally able to make reasonably reliable judgments when compared to those of instructors (e.g., Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000; Hamer, Purchase, Lixton-Reilly & Denny, 2015; Pare & Joordens, 2008); and b) students generally find the peer assessment/feedback processes fair and honest (e.g., Dochy, Segers & Sluijsmans, 1999).

The following sections offer a summary of what researchers and instructors across disciplines have reported around the use of peer assessment/feedback in different university-level teaching and learning contexts.

Courses & student enrolment:

Although peer assessment/feedback is often associated with composition courses, instructors have utilized peer assessment/feedback in varied disciplines that include, but are not restricted to, STEM (e.g., Biology, Environmental Sciences, Chemistry, Engineering, Computer Sciences), Law, Health Disciplines (e.g., Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacology, Physiotherapy), Management and Human Relations, Business (e.g., Marketing, Administration, Accounting, Finance), Social Sciences (e.g., Geography, Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, History, English), and Fine Arts (e.g., Music).

Reported peer assessment/feedback approaches have been implemented in introductory, intermediate and advanced level courses, as well as in theory, laboratories and clinical classes. Enrolments fluctuate between low (30 students) and high (+1000).

Evidence of impact:

The following are some of the benefits and limitations reported in the peer assessment/feedback literature.

Benefits of peer assessment/feedback*:*

- Boosts the role of students from passive to active leaners
- Develops students' evaluative skills
- Enhances student learning/understanding of subject matter & improves performance in exams and tests
- Exposure to peer's work allows students to better realize the nuances between good and poor written products
- Feedback can be provided to numerous students rapidly
- Formative assessment/feedback helps monitor student learning/progress
- Fosters collaboration among students
- Improves student writing skills & final products
- Models academic writing process
- Promotes the development of critical thinking/reflection skills
- Reduces marking load for instructors

Limitations of peer assessment/feedback*:*

- Additional pre/briefing time can increase instructors' workload
- Can elicit unfair/biased results due to friendship/collusion/peer pressure
- Consistency in quality of student feedback
- Dysfunctional group behavior
- Fairness in the assessment process
- Student may not understand that process is similar to formal academic writing
- Students may be reluctant to make judgments regarding their peers
- Time commitment is needed on the part of students
- Useful and constructive peer feedback requires training and experience

Vignettes:

A further practical reason for peer feedback is that students would receive more feedback from peers and more quickly than when academics are providing comments (Liu & Carless, 2006).

Even though students felt that peer feedback did not lead to change, though their work indicates otherwise. (Rodgers, Horvath, Jung, Fry, Diefes-Dux, & Cardella, 2015).

Writing gradually developed with significantly better coverage, richness and organization resulting from the online peer assessment activity (Liang & Tsai, 2010).

There is evidence that peer feedback enhances student learning as students are actively engaged in articulating evolving understandings of the subject matter (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000).

Expert markers and peer markers have a tendency to agree on the quality of written pieces being marked (Pare & Joordens, 2008).

Selected References and Resources:

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