Chapter 12: Peer Feedback with Moodle Workshop

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Summary

As part of a programme to support their application for Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, postgraduate teaching assistants undertake a peer feedback activity in three large groups. Each submits a case study of their own teaching practice, and provides feedback on three others, with reference to the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF). The activity is feedback only, i.e. no numeric marks, and although non-compulsory, it is strongly encouraged.

Implementation

A Moodle Workshop was set up which gave a week to prepare the assessed work, and a week to give feedback on others' work. We used Moodle Workshop's Assessment Form to set three open questions which would scaffold the feedback by prompting reference to the UK PSF. Advance testing and evaluation of the first iteration gave us insights into what participants needed to know, to be reminded of, and how instructions would display to participants at each phase, and we prepared those accordingly. On the original submission we set attachments to zero (i.e. the submission would be typed/pasted into Moodle directly to streamline the review by allowing the feedback and original work to appear in the same window). We did not apply Moodle Groups to the Workshop activity since this would make the activity vulnerable to non-participation. We set the allocation to happen automatically, rather than to be done manually by a tutor. We ruled out non-submitting students from giving feedback on the basis that they were unlikely to participate. We were also very clear about who could see whose identity during the process (this is configurable using the Permissions for that instance of Moodle Workshop, and can be negotiated with students in advance).

A tutor for each group introduced the activity during an in-person session. Since the participants were new to the process, the lead tutor in each group took the important measure of writing themselves diary reminders to move the activity along. This helped with a number of actions: to remember to click Close to reveal feedback; to monitor the activity at key points; to provide signposting for participants (e.g. how to find their allocated case studies, or how to access the feedback they had been given by peers); to send out emails flagging the deadlines. It should be noted that the submission deadline is 'hard' for Moodle Workshop insofar as any lates need to be checked for and then manually allocated, which is time-consuming for the tutor, and potentially troublesome for any student who suddenly finds that they have an extra submission to assess which they had not planned for.

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Evaluation

Twenty-one participants completed a short questionnaire. The response rate was low, but there was clear approval for the activity. Eighteen reported their experience of *assessing* peers' work as Excellent or Good (with two further respondents reporting that it was Fine). Seventeen respondents reported their experience of *receiving* assessment as Excellent or Good (four as Fine).

Benefits and Challenges

Students said they appreciated:

> Feedback on their work.

> Insights about their own work from considering others' work.

> Being able to edit their submission in advance of the deadline.

> The improved instructions letting them know what to do, when and where.

Staff views haven't been formally evaluated, but from informal conversations we know that the group leaders appreciate Moodle taking on the grunt work of allocation. However, this depends on setting a hard deadline with no late submissions (otherwise staff have to keep checking for late submissions and allocating those manually), and one of the leaders was less comfortable with this than the other. They found it feasible to write diary notes to send reminders and alerts to students to move the activity along. The exercise has been repeated and now includes all tutors.

For each iteration we need to decide afresh about anonymity – should both submissions and reviews be anonymous, or one or the other, or neither? These can be configured via the Workshop's Permissions, and it's important to let students know who can see what. We also need to decide whether it is helpful for all participants to eventually be able to see all submissions and all feedback; we could achieve this by changing Permissions after the activity is complete (or even while it is running) to allow students to access the dashboard. We need to keep in mind that students who are reassured that their views are anonymous will often be franker than students who are not, and that their confidence to express views about peers' work constructively under their own names should improve with time and support.

Take-Aways

Peer feedback in Moodle Workshop works well if it is closely monitored and guided until students are used to it. The first few times students participate will depend on a tutor monitoring the activity and intervening with reminders and the occasional click to move the activity along. However, tutors have said that this is an acceptable trade-off given the immense amount of time saved with the automatic allocation of work and return of feedback. Anonymity and visibility of work and feedback is highly configurable, which is another benefit. Students need to know if the submission deadline is hard, although with some effort on the tutor's part it is possible to accommodate late submissions by making manual allocations of reviewers.