CHERP SupporTaL Submission Form

SupporTaL case studies are intended to provide colleagues with a **concise overview** of learning and teaching related activities that have been undertaken. Associated documents, publications and/or resources can be included in the 'Images/Links' section.

*All sections must be completed; please email the completed submission form to supportal@ulster.ac.uk

Title
Student perspective on feedback practices
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Overview (summarize the activity in 2 or 3 sentences, max 50 words)
This evaluation investigated student perceptions of what it was like to receive feedback. A creative method facilitated discussion about feedback and identified good practice and practice that would benefit from modification.
Description (a brief description of the activity, max 200 words)
An interpretative and creative approach enabled participants to explore and express their experience of receiving feedback. A focus group structure facilitated a rich discussion and the use of Evoke cards enabled the use of creativity. Participants were student representatives (n = 3) and staff facilitators, (n = 2). The focus group used the NSS assessment question subset as a guide. The participants were invited to peruse Evoke cards and pick one, (or more), that created in them an idea of what they wanted to portray about their experience. Once each participant and facilitator reflected for a moment they engaged in a discussion about what the image showed in terms of the question set. Summary points were written on flip chart to capture the essence of the discussion.
After the focus group the facilitators met to discuss the output and identify themes in the discussion. These were recorded on a white board and following this a narrative account was written to account for the data. The narrative account was shared with the Learning and Teaching committee.
Context (the rationale including underpinning pedagogy and aims and objectives)
In AY13/14 it transpired that the National Student Survey, (NSS) score in relation to feedback achieved by the School was less than desired. This was despite work that had been done previously to change feedback mechanisms used. Feedback sheets used in the School had been modified over a period of four years and had been redesigned to focus on identifying for students the areas of good practice within their submitted work and pointing out the areas that could be developed in subsequent submissions.
Design (methodological approach)
An interpretative creative methodology was used to enable participants to make meaning out of an emotionally and cognitively complex scenario. Another element to consider in this field is the extent to which current work and thinking does not extend beyond articulation using language. From the outset this restricts what it is possible to investigate and ensures that only the consciously analysed elements of practice are considered. To get beyond this, to investigate the unconscious elements, Leitch, (2006) demonstrated the utility of using an arts based narrative approach to illuminate aspects that were previously in the dark for the participants and present the reader with a new perspective.
Impact (please provide an outline of the impact on learning and/or teaching; this could include details about internal/external dissemination and feedback from others)

1.   The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance

a.   When discussing this topic and using their Evoke cards as a springboard; participants agreed that they had experienced differences in terms of clarity. Whilst some difference is to be expected in terms of subject material and learning outcomes being assessed the participants highlighted that differences led to inconsistency and confusion. Despite the question being focused on criteria the participants focused on lecturers and differences between them.

2.   Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair

a.   This was considered under the collective term of fairness and it emerged that the participants felt that they had to ask for feedback as opposed to being given feedback. The participants further said that asking for feedback was based upon the quality of the relationship with the lecturer. The better the relationship the more likely participants felt it was ok to ask for feedback.

b.   Participants became animated when talking about a feedback clinic and they said that this was good practice. In particular they appreciated the opportunity this afforded them to have written feedback explained and personalised; moving feedback from information delivery to dialogue.

3.   Feedback on my work has been prompt was considered under the label of timeliness

a.   Participants highlighted that being on placement hampered feedback sessions and getting feedback on time or at all. The staff facilitators pointed out that the feedback sheets had been digitised to offset this known issue but the participants responded by highlighting that not all staff availed of the capacity to complete feedback sheets using a computer that could be sent out in an email or put on Blackboard.

b.   Participants expressed a view that there was inflexibility in feedback provision mechanisms insofar as feedback opportunities were offered as one off events.

c.   Participants said that providing feedback to whole groups that included those who had failed meant that individuals had to suffer the ignomiy of having to cope with this in what amounted to a public forum. This was cross referenced to the previously mentioned feedback clinic that made separate arrangements for those who were required to resubmit. The participants felt that this demonstrated sensitivity

d.   Consistency re-emerged at this point because participants highlighted that some lecturers adhered to time standards whilst others did not.

4.   Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand was addressed under the heading of detailed comments. This generated a robust and frank discussion that may be summed up by the following comments:

a.   Bullet points don't provide any information but are better than nothing. This point alluded to the discussion that highlighted that bulleted lists on feedback sheets provided rhetorical statements that did not have much meaning for the participants but they acknowledged that some information was present albeit in need of interpretation. This was described by the participants as vanilla feedback.

b.   Tick marks on pages aren't feedback; participants commented that they were unclear what tick marks meant.

c.   Poor handwriting means you can't read the feedback; Participants commented that they found this frustrating as they felt that important information was beyond their reach and they couldn't understand why an assessor would use poor handwriting when typing was available.

d.   Verbal feedback to accompany written helps make sense, (See Also: Feedback clinic cited as good practice); This comment highlighted that for this group, verbal delivery was the definitive way to enable students to make sense of written feedback.

e. Why give a provisional mark if it can change? The participants were unclear about why they would receive a mark that could change at a board of examiners. They expressed the idea that feedback without a mark would be sufficient and would prefer to receive a definitive mark after the board of examiners.

f. No comments on text; this comment was made with a sense of frustration. The participants highlighted that the feedback sheets make it clear that comments will be made throughout their text; so it was unsatisfying when no comments were made.

g. Participants said that feedback which was helpful and clarifying enhanced their experience of feedback and they pointed out that identifying how you have performed was helpful. The participants further expressed the feeling that good feedback removes barriers, (to learning), and allows them to build. This idea was also linked to the quality of the relationship with the lecturer described earlier.

Reflective Commentary (this should draw from your experience and identify what worked well and what challenges, if any, had to be overcome)

Overall the participants had both positive and negative experiences of receiving feedback. The biggest idea that emerged was that of the impact that the relationship the lecturer established with the students in a class. An open, positive relationship that valued dialogue was seen as the ideal. This was clearly demonstrated in participant's description of receiving feedback verbally as well as on paper. This idea is supported in the literature by Sadler, (2010) who argues that ideas about feedback need to move away from information delivery and move towards a dialogic basis to facilitate learning. The evaluation was limited by the small number of participants but this could be easily overcome by repeating the design with a larger sample. Sample size notwithstanding, transferability is still a realistic aspiration because the participants were reflecting upon their own interpretations and experiences and thus the veracity of their conclusions has resonance for other students.

Transferability (consider how this activity might be used by colleagues in other schools/faculties)

This evaluation could be used by colleagues to investigate their own practices around feedback using a creative method.

References (using Harvard style, list literature and other resources that influenced your work)

Casey B. 2009. Arts Based Enquiry in Nurse Education. Contemporary Nurse. 32. 1-2. 69-82

Leitch R. (2006). Limitations of language: Developing arts-based creative narrative in stories of teachers' identities. Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice. 12. 5. 549 – 569

Newell R. & Burnard P. (2011). A pragmatic approach to qualitative data analysis in Newell R. & Burnard P. (2011 2nd Edn). Research for Evidence Based Healthcare. London Sage.

Keywords (Max 4)

Feedback, Assessment, Creative method and student experience

Images/Links (2 images are recommended, 1 might be a photo of the author. You may also include any url, pdf, audio, video resources)

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