

## **Write Now Mini-Project**

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**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

**Feeding forwards as well as back: Developing a program to help students apply the feedback learnt in one year to the next year's assignments**

**INSTITUTION:**

Liverpool Hope University

**PROJECT LEADERS:**

Cathal O'Siochru

**DISCIPLINE/DEPARTMENT:**

Department of Psychology

**MODULE:**

Dissertation module

**YEAR/LEVEL OF STUDENTS:**

Third year/Level H students

**NUMBERS OF STUDENTS IN MODULE:**

114

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**CONTEXT**

When used effectively, feedback from previous assessments can make a critical contribution to the development of a student's writing style. And yet there is often a widespread failure among students to collect feedback for their assignments, especially those completed towards the end of the year. As well as failing to benefit the students this uncollected feedback is demoralising to staff, leading them to see the feedback process as unproductive and a waste of their time. Our plan was to "recycle" this uncollected feedback by passing second year feedback forward to the students and their supervisors at the start of their third year. Students would then collaborate with staff to use the feedback from their second year research project as a basis for developing their third year dissertation project.

**PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

Our feedback recycling program was designed to tackle the issue of uncollected feedback and provide a sense of continuity to both the development of a student's research skills and the feedback they receive. We aimed to help students gain the maximum benefit from the feedback while at the same time restoring staff confidence in the feedback process. In addition, we hoped to use this opportunity to study some of the factors that influence a student's reactions to feedback, thus improving our understanding of those factors and helping us develop our approach to providing feedback.

**METHODOLOGY**

The plan was to administer the program to all students and supervisors in the third-year dissertation project. Many supervisors and students did participate but some did not, allowing us to compare the

experiences of the participants to the non-participants. We analyzed the effectiveness of this programme on a number of different levels. We collected observations on the programme from the student participants using a questionnaire. One section of the questionnaire measured student perceptions on the effectiveness of the feedback recycling program. Another section included measures of student attitudes towards feedback in general, academic self-efficacy and approaches to learning. As well as directly analysing the questionnaire data we used it to identify a suitable range of students to be invited to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews. The interviews also explored the student's perceptions of the programme, the impact/benefit they saw the programme as having and some of the more general issues the students had with their feedback. It was hoped that the interviews would add some richness and depth to the data over and above that provided by the questionnaire data.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

Each third-year dissertation supervisor received the second semester project and feedback for those students whose final year dissertation they were supervising. The dissertation supervisors that participated then conducted their own review of the project reports and the feedback those reports had received. Following this, the students were asked to conduct their own review of the project and the feedback associated with it. The students were asked to summarize the main points made in the feedback and identify any guidance and direction offered. When both reviews had been completed the students and supervisors met to discuss their respective interpretations of the reports and the feedback. The product of this meeting was an action plan outlining the steps the student would take to apply the lessons learnt from the feedback to their dissertation project.

### **ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT OF PROJECT**

Our assessment of the impact of the programme showed that it was successful. Analysis of student perceptions showed that students who participated in the program showed a significant increase in their perception that feedback had a major impact on their studies. Furthermore, those students who participated in the programme showed a small but significant increase in their dissertation project grade compared to those students who did not participate. These findings fit in very well with our aims to get the students to re-engage with the feedback process and to increase the impact that feedback was having. With regard to the staff, the responses were also positive. The staff who produced the feedback in the second year showed appreciation of the fact that their feedback was being used and having a positive effect. The supervisors that participated in the feedback reviews reported that the chance to review their students' past performance helped them in assessing their strengths and weaknesses. They also commented on seeing the benefits that the action plans had produced on the quality of the dissertations their students were producing. These responses fit with our aim to restore staff confidence in the feedback process.

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### **DISSEMINATION**

We presented these findings to our own department at our annual development session in the summer of 2009. We also presented the programme and the findings of our analysis as part of the university's Learning and Teaching Week in 2009. Furthermore, we presented the programme in various stages of development as part of the Pedagogical Action Research annual symposium in 2008, 2009 and 2010. Related to this we have published an article relating to our program in PRIME, the in-house journal of the PAR research group here at Hope University.

As well as disseminating the research findings to our colleagues here at Hope we have endeavoured to publish this research. We are currently in the process of completing a number of articles which we hope to publish in one of several peer-reviewed journals such as *Studies in Higher Education*, the *Journal of Educational Psychology* or the *Journal of Further and Higher Education*.

Another avenue of dissemination was to present our programme at national and international level conferences. We have presented this programme and its findings at the annual Psychology Learning

and Teaching Conference (PLAT) in 2010. As an upshot of this presentation we have submitted an article to be considered for publication in the conference edition of the PLAT journal.

#### **AVAILABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES**

We hope that the publication of some or all of our proposed articles will make the outcomes of our project available to a wide audience. Some of the project leaders were approached at the PLAT conference by colleagues in other institutions who expressed an interest in hearing more about our project. This should lead to some invitations to make presentations at their institutions in the near future.

We also intend to make our project outcomes available on the Hope University website. At the moment we are in discussions with IT services about the location of this proposed sub-section of the site but we should be online and available to others before too long.

#### **FUTURE PLANS FOR PROMOTING PROJECT WORK/OUTCOMES**

It is our intention to continue to promote the practice of carrying over feedback from one year to the next. Within the department we aim to explore potential expansions of the projects, such as using first-year feedback to inform the second-year research tutors or the feedback from all projects in a given year being combined into a portfolio that the students carry with them into the following year. It is hoped that the success of the programme and the lessons learnt from it will lead the way for other subject areas in our University to explore similar programmes. We intend to continue to run this programme in our department and disseminate its findings during future Research Weeks and PAR annual seminars in the university. We also hope that the publication of articles about our programme and its findings in various journals will allow us to reach colleagues in other institutions across the UK and beyond.

#### **REFERENCES:**

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