FIVE ELEMENTS THAT IMPACT QUALITY FEEDBACK IN THE ONLINE ASYNCHRONOUS CLASSROOM

John Steele, Grand Canyon University
Rick Holbeck, Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

Online learning is growing rapidly and shows no signs of slowing down. This growth requires strategies to make online teaching as efficient and effective as possible in order to provide students with a quality education. One of the important factors that help support student learning is timely, quality feedback on assignments and in discussion forums. This paper offers some ideas for online instructors to give feedback more effectively and efficiently and discusses elements of feedback that can help make this an effective and efficient area of the online classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Effective feedback is a necessary and important part of the learning experience regardless of the learning modality. Additionally, the value of effective feedback may be even more understated in the online environment where students are more self-reliant. A majority of the learning in the online environment can be self-guided but without effective feedback, learning becomes more difficult. However, there are five elements that should be considered when giving feedback in the online environment and there are several ways that instructors can integrate these into their teaching practices without a lot of extra work that makes feedback more effective. The five elements are (1) personalization, (2) immediacy, (3) formative assessment, (4) type of feedback, and (5) time on task.

BACKGROUND

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000) Community of Inquiry (CoI) model is the foundation of quality online instruction. The CoI model includes three elements: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The instructor has the ability to impact all three of these elements in the online modality through quality feedback. The first presence, teaching presence, "is defined in the CoI model as the act of the instructor designing, facilitating, and orienting cognitive and social processes to obtain the results foreseen according to the students' needs and capabilities"

(Gutiérrez-Santiuste, Rodríguez-Sabiote, & Gallego-Arrufat, 2015, p. 351). Thus, the instructor needs to spur interest, motivate, and guide students in the learning process. All of these qualities can be enhanced with quality feedback, whether it be assignment or discussion feedback.

Quality feedback is one critical piece of quality instruction in either the online or traditional classroom. In the online domain quality feedback may have a greater impact because there is transactional distance between the learner and teacher. Since the online environment primarily consists of self-guided reading for the learner, quality feedback is most import for improving student performance and success.Quality feedback depends on the following five elements that go into developing it.

PERSONALIZATION

Personalization is a critical component and vehicle for delivering effective feedback in the online environment and can be traced back to the personalization principle, which developed strong support for the need to provide instructors with the ability to personalize their feedback (Clark & Mayer, 2011). Personalization is the key driver for giving students feedback in a more conversational and personable tone that makes the content more accepting and constructive. One study found that personalization gave a higher level of connectedness to one's instructor (Drouin & Vartanian, 2010). Lister (2014) found that every

Table 1. Ways an Instructor Can Embrace Personalization

Way to Personalize	Method for Instructor	Mode
Using student names	Can be included in any element of the classroom from discussion forum posts, messages, comments on assignments, and embedded feedback	Discussion Forum posts
Using the instructor name	Can be included in any element of the classroom from discussion forum posts, messages, comments on assignments, and embedded feedback	Discussion Forum posts
Changing post subject heading titles and/or post content	Changing content to be specific to the student (such as content within the post or subject heading)	Discussion Forum/Emails
Using a friendly tone	Using personable first- and/or second-person language	Discussion Forum
Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)	Personalized for the class or student	Discussion Forum
Using technologies for formative assessment	Personalized for the class or student	Discussion Forum
Using video or audio conferencing	Personalized feedback using video or audio with tailored feedback to the student	Assignments Class Performance Discussion Forum

opportunity an instructor has to personalize the online classroom can impact one's students. Thus, personalization becomes the vehicle allowing the critical component of making feedback through a personable and conversational tone that allows the instructor to display personality and bond with students.

WAYS TO PERSONALIZE FEEDBACK

Personalized feedback can create valuable connections between the instructor and students (Drouin & Vartanian, 2010). There are many ways that online instructors can quickly and efficiently give personalized feedback to students on assignments and in the discussion forum. Presenting content in a personalized manner, by using a video for feedback for example, may allow online instructors to increase instructional presence and foster learners' psychosocial needs (Brown et

al., 2009).There are many ways an instructor can embrace personalization in conjunction with the student feedback to make it more effective (see Table. 1).

Instructors have many effective and efficient options to personalize their feedback to students. The bottom line is that any level of personalization that an instructor can add to their feedback helps. Consequently, how fast the student receives this feedback may be more important.

IMMEDIACY

Immediacy is referred to as "directness and the intensity of the interaction" (Kožuh et al., 2015, p. 224) and impacts several aspects of feedback, such as answering questions, feedback discussion, and assignment feedback. Furlich (2016) found that instructor immediacy behaviors can promote the student's motivation to learn and engage with

the instructor on a personal level. Several studies have found positive classroom outcomes that occur simply from instructors using immediacy behaviors (Furlich, 2016; Sidlinger, 2010; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011). Furthermore, an abundance of literature determined that even nonverbal immediacy behaviors are positively related to a student's motivation to learn (Furlich, 2016; Sidlinger, 2010; Witt & Kerssen-Griep, 2011).

Another study by Fahara and Castro (2015) explored the pedagogy that teachers used to promote immediacy in the discussion forums of online courses. Fahara and Castro's findings were broken down into three categories: instructional design, different forms of communication, and teaching strategies that promote immediacy. They noted many forms of communication and teaching practices that promote and establish immediacy (Fahara & Castro, 2015). Examples include:

> *establish closeness and empathy, use of language and protocol; polite greetings and goodbyes, use the familiar "you" to address each other, send emails and instant messages, reply to emails on the same day, communication as if it happened in an actual classroom, and establishing a dialog (Fahara & Castro, 2015, p. 370).*

Technology tools, more specifically Web 2.0 tools, can also be used to promote immediacy. Instructors are now able to use technology tools to offer formative assessments where students can receive real-time elaborative feedback that they can use moving forward. Many of these Web 2.0 tools are easy to use and set up as well. Thus, there are many technology tools available to online instructors that allow for easy insertion into the online classroom and instantaneous feedback for students. Formative assessments are one way for instructors to help students master concepts in a timely manner.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Formative assessments are crucial to student success because they allow the student to receive current feedback on their learning throughout the course (Steele & Dyer, 2014). Formative assessments have long been an important piece of the teaching and learning process, regardless of modality (Spector & Yuen, 2016), and they are a

way for instructors to check for understanding and redirect instruction if necessary.

Bergquist and Holbeck (2014) created a conceptual model for using formative assessment techniques in the online classroom based on the work of Angelo and Cross (1993). Five steps were recommended by the authors for implementing formative assessment techniques in the online classroom: (1) identify learning objectives and summative assessments for a learning module, (2) select an appropriate formative assessment technique for that module, (3) implement the formative assessment technique into the discussion forum, (4) analyze student responses to check for understanding, and (5) reteach or provide affirmation for student work (Bergquist & Holbeck, 2014, p. 5). Repeat these steps as necessary until learning objectives are met. For specific examples of classroom assessment techniques, see Angelo and Cross (1993). Multiple studies have shown that the addition of formative assessment techniques in the classroom may promote higher student learning outcomes (Cross & Palese, 2015; Holbeck, Bergquist, & Lees, 2014; Steele & Dyer, 2014).

TYPES OF FEEDBACK

Verification Feedback

Verification feedback is an important part of the formative assessment process. Verification feedback is exactly how it sounds and is nothing more than the instructor verifying that an answer is correct or incorrect. Traditionally, in the synchronous classroom, students receive verification feedback on an instantaneous basis. However, in the asynchronous classroom, students may have an additional wait time to receive verification feedback. A study by Marsh, Lozito, Umanath, Bjork, and Bjork (2012) determined that verification feedback delivered directly after each question improved assessment scores in comparison to no feedback or feedback used when an answer key is posted for students to self-verify afterward. Verification feedback is a necessary component for effectively and formatively assessing students. Finally, even though verification feedback is important, just informing student that the question is wrong is not enough.

Elaborative Feedback

Verification feedback is great as it allows students to know if they got a question right

or wrong, but elaborative feedback allows the instructor to take the feedback and expound upon it further. Elaborative feedback tells students not only what answers were wrong, but how they can avoid the same mistake next time. It allows students to master the content in the formative assessment before the summative assessment, so they perform better on the summative assessment. However, providing elaborative feedback can be time consuming, but there are ways to give this valuable feedback quickly.

TIME ON TASK

The element of time can be the biggest nemesis to providing quality feedback because of the ubiquity of online teaching. Most universities employ part-time adjunct instructors who are short on time. However, there are many simple ways that instructors can enhance their feedback that are not time consuming, such as with KWLs (Steele & Dyer, 2014). One way is through utilizing formative assessments such as Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs), which are methods of formative evaluation designed to improve student learning. The main benefit of using CATs as a mode of effective feedback is that it can help prepare students for the summative assessment and provides instructors with an opportunity to check for understanding before the summative assessment.

Mandernach and Holbeck (2016) found that a majority of online teaching time is spent on grading and participating in the discussion forums. Knowing this, it is important for instructors to find ways to be efficient in these areas. Some of the ways that this can be accomplished are through Web 2.0 tools (Steele, Nordin, Larson, & McIntosh, 2017). For instance, screencasts, video feedback tools, and reminder apps can be used to make sure students are prepared in advance (Steele et al., 2017). This proactive approach can save a lot of time for instructors during grading.

DISCUSSION

Effective feedback is a crucial element for student growth and learning regardless of the learning environment. Going beyond student learning, the use of, or lack of, quality feedback also impacts student's satisfaction and future performance. Students are now able to leave a university and select a new place to attend school with the click of button. Previously, students in the traditional environment may have been trapped due to geography. However, online education allows students to easily pick up and move on if they are not happy, thus, making student satisfaction important. The more ways instructors can engage students in the online atmosphere and offer new ways to help them, the better.

One of the ever-changing opportunities for instructors to offer more effective feedback is through technology. With advances in technology, instructors have many ways to reach students in today's online classrooms, such as video, Web 2.0 tool, or written feedback. It seems that the continued advance of technology will be important in providing new tools for quality feedback in the online classroom. This presents an opportunity for future research into using technology to deliver quality feedback in an efficient manner. Another interesting research aspect to consider is the importance of an online instructor's perception or view of technology and how this could impact their use of it for feedback. Regardless of how the feedback is delivered, it is a must for student learning and student satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

Effective and efficient feedback can take on many different forms and be completed in an range of ways. Some of this is dependent on the instructor, but there needs to be a balance between creating quality feedback and the time limitations that challenge most instructors. Some of these time constraints can be bridged using technology to deliver quality feedback to students in the online classroom. Furthermore, there are other considerations such as the learning management system, an instructor's technology self-efficacy, and time allowable. More research is needed in each of these areas to provide instructors with the tools they need to be effective and efficient at online instruction.

References

Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bergquist, E., & Holbeck, R. (2014). Classroom assessment techniques: A conceptual model of CATs in the online classroom. Journal of Instructional Research, 3, 3–7.

Brown, A., Brown, C., Fine, B., Luterbach, K., Sugar, W., & Vinciguerra, D. C. (2009). Instructional uses of podcasting in online learning environments: A cooperative inquiry study. Journal of Educational Technology Systems, 37(4), 351–371. doi:10.2190/ET.37.4.b

Clark, R. C., & Mayer, R. E. (2011). E-Learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning (3rd ed.) San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons. doi:10.1002/9781118255971

Cross, T., & Palese, K. (2015). Increasing learning: Classroom assessment techniques in the online classroom. American Journal of Distance Education, 29(2), 98–108. doi:10.1080/08923647.2015.1023594

Drouin, M., & Vartanian, L. R. (2010). Students feelings of and desire for sense of community in face-to-face and online courses. Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 11(3), 147–159.

Fahara, M. F., & Castro, A. L. (2015). Teaching strategies to promote immediacy in online graduate courses. Open Praxis, 7(4), 363–376. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083260.pdf

Furlich, S. A. (2016). Understanding instructor nonverbal immediacy, verbal immediacy, and student motivation at a small liberal arts university. Journal of the Scholarship Of Teaching & Learning, 16(3), 11–22. doi:10.14434/josotl.v16i3.19284

Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher educationmodel. The Internet and Higher Education, 2(2–3), 87–105.

Gutiérrez-Santiuste, E., Rodríguez-Sabiote, C., & Gallego-Arrufat, M-J. (2015). Cognitive presence through social and teaching presence in communities of inquiry: A correlational-predictive study. Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 31(3), 349–362.

Holbeck, R., Bergquist, E., & Lees, S. (2014). Classroom assessment techniques: Checking for student understanding in an introductory university success course. Journal of Instructional Research, 3, 38–42.

Kožuh, I., Jeremić, Z., Sarjaš, A., Bele, J. L., Devedžić, V., &

Debevc, M. (2015). Social presence and interaction in learning environments: The effect on student success. Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 18(1), 223–236.

Lister, M. (2014). Trends in the design of e-learning and online learning. MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 10(4), 671–680.

Mandernach, B. J., & Holbeck, R. (2016). Teaching online: Where do faculty spend their time? Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 19(4).

Marsh, E. J., Lozito, J. P., Umanath, S., Bjork, E. L., & Bjork, R. A. (2012). Using verification feedback to correct errors made on a multiple-choice test. Memory, 20(6), 645–653. doi:10.1080/09658211.2012.684882

Sidelinger, R. (2010). College student involvement: An examination of student characteristics and perceived instructor communication behaviors in the classroom. Communication Education, 61(1), 87–103. doi:10.1080/10510970903400311

Spector, J. M., & Yuen, H. K. (2016). Educational technology program and project evaluation. New York, NY: Routledge.

Steele, J., & Dyer, T. (2014). Use of KWLs in the online classroom as it correlates to increased participation. Journal of Instructional Research, 3, 8–14. Retrieved from https://cirt.gcu.edu/jir/documents/2014_v3/article2from14cds062jirjournalv62pdf

Steele, J., Nordin, E., Larson, E., & McIntosh, D. (2017). Student preference for information access in the online classroom. The Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education 18(1), 182–195. doi:10.17718/tojde.285815

Witt, P., & Kerssen-Griep, J. (2011). Instructional feedback I: The interaction of facework andimmediacy on students' perceptions of instructor credibility. Communication Education, 60, 75–94. doi:10.1080/03634523.2010.507820