

How does the medium affect the message? Architecture students' perceptions of the relative utility of different feedback methods.

Pedagogic discourse on feedback has shifted away from teachers' actions towards how it is used by students to improve their work and learning strategies. In Architecture programmes feedback occurs through a combination of methods; this paper presents the outcomes of a questionnaire study researching undergraduate and postgraduate students' perceptions of which they considered most and least useful, and how they could be enhanced. With increased attention on dialogic approaches to feedback, the study provides insight into students' views of the relative utility of several dialogic feedback methods. Key themes that emerged which affect feedback utility are the environment in which feedback takes place, feedback discourse, and message content. Although the signature pedagogy is centred on verbal dialogue, the perceived value of that dialogue varied significantly; some methods were considered much more useful, others left students uncertain and seeking greater clarification within the feedback message. The study suggests contact time be considered qualitatively as well as quantitatively. Another significant finding is students' desire for more visual feedback, which may be salient to disciplines across the art and design subject area. Other implications for practice are discussed.

Keywords: feedback utility; student perceptions; dialogic feedback

Introduction

Pedagogic discourse and research on feedback has shifted from teachers' actions towards those of students and, more specifically, how they engage with and use messages about their work (for example, Carless et al. 2011; Winstone et al. 2017a; Esterhazy and Damşa 2019; Winstone and Carless 2020). It has been argued that comments only become feedback when students use them to improve their work or learning strategies (Sadler 1989; Carless and Boud 2018), and the extent to which students interact with their feedback impacts significantly on their subsequent

performance (Zimbardi et al. 2017). Being able to interpret and apply feedback are key aspects of how students learn (Sutton 2012); however, research suggests they may not understand such commentary or struggle utilising it (Hattie and Timperley 2007; Boud and Molloy 2013b).

Misalignment between views of feedback held by students and teachers is one of the fundamental barriers to student uptake (Winstone and Carless 2020), and comprehending students' views is crucial to reaching a shared understanding over feedback's purpose (Winstone et al. 2016). This paper presents outcomes of a study at a post-92 UK university that researched how undergraduate and postgraduate Architecture students perceive, understand and utilise formative and summative feedback about their coursework, and the extent to which the medium through which they receive feedback affects its perceived utility. Orsmond et al. (2005) recommend that teachers evaluate how their feedback to students is utilised, not least because – as Boud and Molloy (2013a) highlight – without such understanding teachers are blind to the consequences of their actions and cannot act to improve learning. Given the comparability with feedback methods in other creative subjects (Orr, Yorke and Blair 2014), this study will be relevant across the art and design subject area.

Context

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) describes levels of study within higher education across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The typical structure of architectural education is a three-year undergraduate degree (FHEQ Levels 4 to 6) followed by a two-year postgraduate degree (FHEQ Level 7; in this paper the nomenclature 7/1 and 7/2 is used to differentiate between the first and second year). In both programmes feedback is typically provided through a combination of methods, including one-to-one tutorials, small group tutorials, design reviews (also known as crits

or juries), informal peer discussion in studio and summative written feedback.

At this institution students receive formative feedback in design modules at weekly tutorials; most often these are conducted on a one-to-one basis, although some teachers hold these as small group sessions, particularly in the early stages. These tutorials are interspaced, typically at three- or four-week intervals, with design reviews – a more formal yet still formative feedback session. This approach of weekly tutorials interspaced with design reviews forms the signature pedagogy of the discipline (Salama, 2015).

Design projects in each semester are divided into two modules of equal duration, either Origination followed by Resolution, or a module with students working in small groups followed by one in which they work individually; there is also a Theory module in the first semester and a Technology module in the second. Most modules have two components, so summative written feedback is provided at two points, and in most design modules one of those components is an embedded Theory or Technology submission, which facilitates crossover of feedback use. In each Level students typically have nine tutorials, three or four design reviews and five items of summative written feedback per semester, meaning they experience most, if not all, of the five different feedback methods described above several times each term. With design projects divided into two modules, and written feedback provided for two components, students have repeated opportunities to apply summative as well as formative feedback.

Theoretical Frame of Feedback in Architecture

In socio-constructivist pedagogy Palincsar (1998) describes discourse as the primary tool for cognitive development, expertise as facility with such discourse, and learning occurring through interaction, negotiation and collaboration. Orr and Shreeve (2018) identify dialogue as the glue that holds the art and design learning environment together

and enables students to practise the critical language of their discipline; they describe dialogue in the curriculum, in the form of tutorials, design reviews and informal conversations, as where the construction of meaning and identity is acted out.

Learning centres around conversations between teachers, students and their peers within the same and different cohorts, through which participants are enculturated into studio practices (Mewburn 2012). The significance of these dialogic interchanges can be seen in their affective dimension. Austerlitz and Aravot (2006) propose that students' emotional responses to these conversations are some of the most important instruments through which they evaluate their studio encounters and interpret meaning from dialogue with their teachers, and therefore exert significant influence on students' learning.

Winestone and Carless (2020) argue that a new paradigm feedback model in which students and teachers actively engage in meaning-making through dialogue aligns with a socio-constructivist approach. This constitutes the theoretical lens for the study, in which feedback, as described by Price, Handley and Millar (2011), is an interactive, non-linear and contextually situated process through which students and teachers are active agents in co-constructing learning – a social practice centred around discourse.

Methodology

During the second semester of the 2018/19 academic year, students in all cohorts of the undergraduate and postgraduate Architecture programmes (n=266) were administered with a short-answer questionnaire. It asked which feedback method students considered to be the most useful and the least useful, and why; if they usually understand their feedback; what they would change to enhance their feedback's utility; what they perceive as the purpose of feedback; what they do with their feedback when they

receive it; in what ways they utilise their feedback, both in the short term (on that piece of coursework), and the longer term (in subsequent modules); and what makes them more likely to act on feedback. The latter questions relating to the perceived purpose and self-reported uptake of feedback are explored in a second paper (Smith, forthcoming). The participants' responses discussed here relate to:

- (1) Which type of feedback on their coursework do students find most useful and least useful, and why?
- (2) Do students usually understand the feedback that they have been given?
- (3) What change to the feedback students receive would make it more useful to them?

A member of the institution's Learning and Teaching Academy reviewed the questionnaire and suggested minor amendments to the wording of one question. The study was then approved by the institution's research ethics committee. Given the low response rates that can afflict online surveys (Bryman 2012), paper copies of the questionnaire were issued at the start of a teaching session for each cohort, and the students returned them anonymously at the end of the session. Participants were assured that the questionnaire was voluntary, they could stop at any time or leave out any question, and that responses would be reported anonymously. The overall response rate was 64 percent (n=169); in each cohort the response rate was: Level 4 – 52 percent (n=46), Level 5 – 69 percent (n=40), Level 6 – 60 percent (n=31), Level 7/1 – 74 percent (n=32) and Level 7/2 – 80 percent (n=20). The survey took place between weeks 22 and 27 of the academic year, depending on a suitable teaching session being arranged, timed so that Level 4 students would have repeated experience of each feedback method used in the programme.

The responses were transcribed verbatim. The data set (21,334 words) was analysed using inductive thematic analysis; a realist approach was adopted, iteratively searching the experiences described by the respondents (Braun and Clarke 2006). Following in-depth reading to provide familiarity with the data, the initial analysis produced a working list of codes. All responses were then individually marked with labels associating them to relevant codes, which were confirmed through re-reading the data to saturation. Once coded, the data was re-read to identify overarching themes, developing sub-themes where required, and the coded data was grouped by theme. The responses were also colour-coded by cohort, so that once collated into codes and then themes they could be referenced to each cohort to identify any emphasis within codes or themes for particular levels across the programmes.

Findings

70 percent of respondents considered one-to-one tutorials to be the most useful method of feedback. The design review, in comparison, was perceived as most useful by the second largest proportion of participants, at 19 percent. Only a small proportion considered group tutorials to be the most useful, which had the third largest proportion of responses at 7 percent, followed by informal discussion with other students (2 percent), written feedback after work has been marked (1 percent), and other feedback methods (1 percent).

Similarity in the proportion of students from each cohort that considered each method the most useful was striking; favouring one-to-one tutorials: Level 4 – 72 percent, Level 5 – 73 percent, Level 6 – 71 percent, Level 7/1 – 72 percent and Level 7/2 – 60 percent. The drop at Level 7/2 was mirrored by an increase in respondents from that cohort who considered the design review to be most useful: Level 4 – 15 percent,

Level 5 – 18 percent, Level 6 – 19 percent, Level 7/1 – 16 percent and Level 7/2 – 35 percent; reasons for this are discussed below.

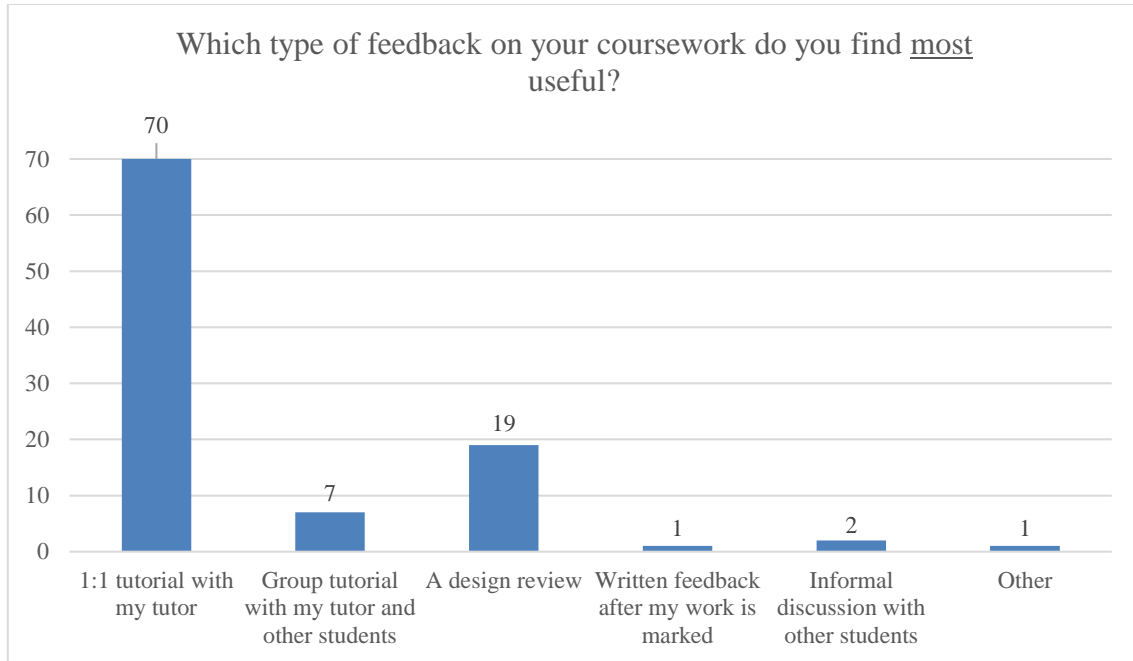


Figure 1: Percent responses of which type of feedback on their coursework respondents considered most useful.

Responses were more varied in answer to which feedback method participants considered to be least useful. The largest proportion, 37 percent, identified this as written feedback after work has been marked, followed jointly by group tutorials and informal discussion with other students (both 24 percent), and then design reviews (11 percent), other feedback methods (3 percent), and one-to-one tutorials (1 percent). Again, there was notable consistency in the responses between the different levels across the two programmes.

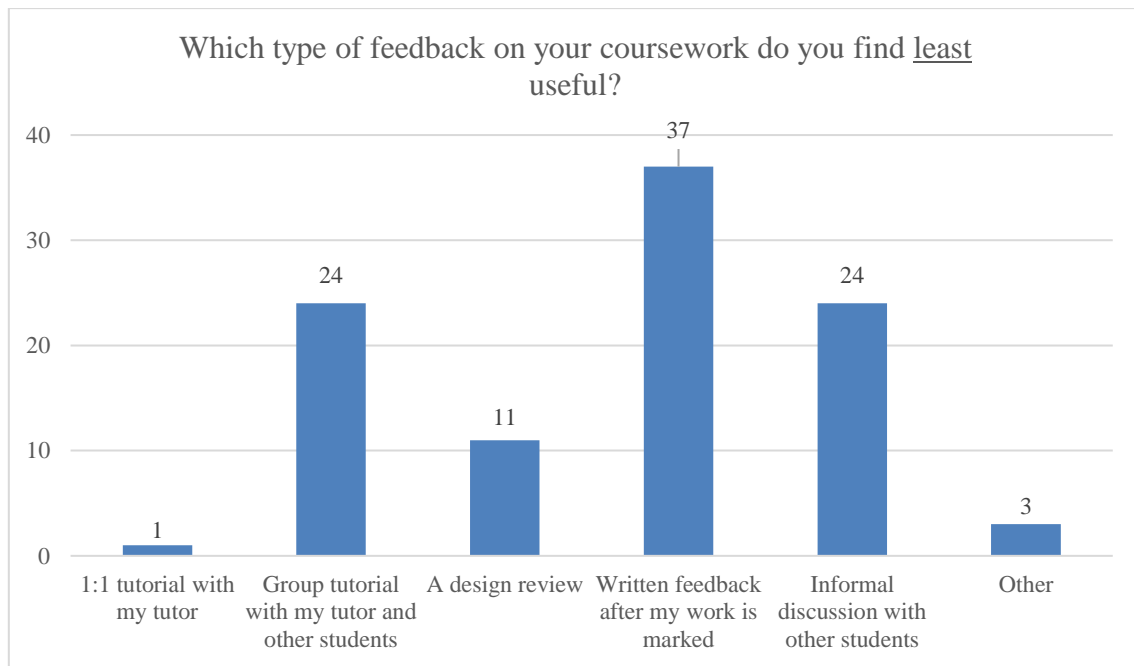


Figure 2: Percent responses of which type of feedback on their coursework respondents considered least useful.

The analysis identified three themes that influence feedback's perceived utility from the different sources the students experience. Feedback environment encompassed the context in which feedback took place, and included the sub-themes of tutor contact, conducive to recipience, and focused and personal. Feedback discourse encompassed the exchanges through which feedback was communicated, via written and verbal media, and included the sub-themes of interaction, generative, and record of the discourse. The third theme was message content, and included the sub-themes of detailed, relevant and directional.

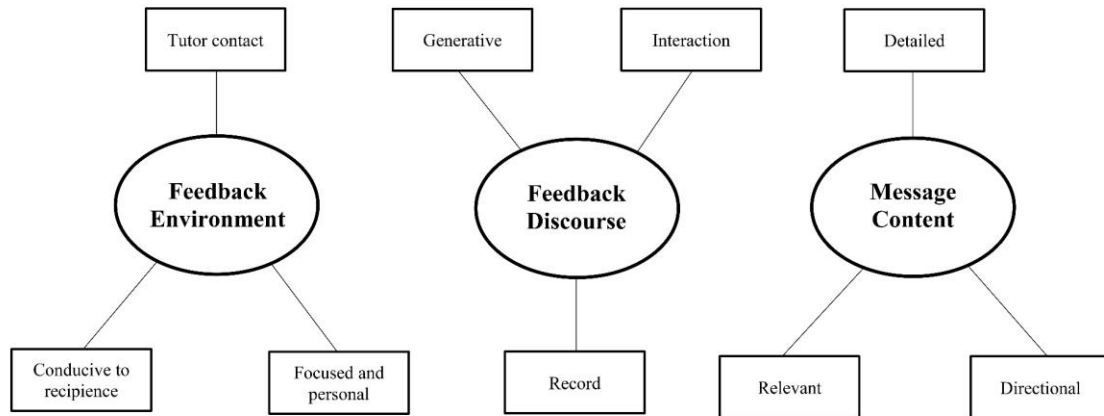


Figure 3: Thematic map, showing final three themes and associated sub-themes.

Feedback Environment

There are several variables that influence how students experience the feedback environment: the degree of amenity they feel during feedback exchanges; how comfortable they feel in the open sharing of ideas, questions and clarifications; how supported they feel; their sense of engagement with the feedback process; and the extent to which the feedback process is perceived as personal to them. Some methods inhibit students engaging with the feedback process, potentially to the detriment of their learning.

A reason that one-to-one tutorials were considered the most useful medium through which to receive feedback was in creating an environment that students feel is more conducive to feedback recipience – how effectively they are able to absorb and utilise the commentary being made (Winstone et al. 2017a). Respondents describe feeling more comfortable, relaxed and under less pressure; much more so than in group tutorials and design reviews, which were described as intimidating, condescending, rude and negative, where students can struggle to present their ideas in a group context. Both written feedback and design reviews were perceived as an unnecessarily harsh

environment; a disheartening and negative atmosphere in which tone of commentary impacts upon them. Conversely, one-to-one tutorials were described as more conducive to enabling respondents across all cohorts to articulate themselves better, as giving them more confidence to speak freely, openly ask questions and seek clarifications – thereby facilitating greater discussion between the feedback participants, and enabling them to absorb information more easily than other feedback methods; the feedback was also described as more honest and genuine.

I don't feel under pressure like I do in a design review as when I do design review I am more concentrated on my nerves that I find it hard to process the feedback given to me. 1:1 I can ask all questions I have without being embarrassed if they are a little stupid.

Level 6 student on one-to-one tutorial

One of the reasons participants considered group tutorials as one of the least useful methods of feedback was that students were less inclined to engage and contribute, due to feeling intimidated and uncomfortable in expressing their ideas. Respondents observed that there was little participation from their peers; consequently, they became a one-way conversation from the teacher that achieved little.

Usually don't feel comfortable to give my ideas so I become silent during group tutorial.

Level 5 student

Another dimension to the feedback environment concerned the nature of contact with the teacher. The respondents describe how one-to-one tutorials create a feedback environment they consider is much more personal and engaging, in terms of both the process itself and the commentary given; one in which attention was focused on them and their work more than in other feedback methods, and both the teacher and student could concentrate on the work better.

Tutorials tend to allow for more of a conversation between the parties. These allow time to discuss and address concerns rather than just pointing them out which can feel the case in reviews.

Level 7/2 student

In contrast, both written feedback after assessment and group tutorials were described as vague, generalised towards the group and not specific to each student. Whilst to some extent the latter is understandable in reference to group tutorials it is surprising in the context of written feedback, which is provided as a separate Assessment Record Sheet for each individual student uploaded through the virtual learning environment (VLE); this is discussed in greater detail under message content, below.

Feel like information is bleak and sometimes general to the whole group rather than personal to my work.

Level 5 student on written feedback after assessment

Despite design reviews typically being of a similar duration to one-to-one tutorials, and group tutorials often lasting longer, the respondents commented more positively about contact time in their one-to-one tutorials. This perception is reiterated in why respondents considered group tutorials to be the least useful method of feedback; whilst teachers might believe that comments made to one student could be perceived as pertinent by others around the table, respondents from across all cohorts described them as a waste of time.

Although they do provide some clarity I feel as though they mainly waste time that I could be using either getting feedback from the tutors or other students or working on my projects.

Level 4 student on group tutorials

Feedback Discourse

Whereas the feedback environment influences how conducive different methods are to interaction, feedback discourse is concerned with the exchanges themselves.

Encompassing both written and verbal communication, the medium through which the discourse takes place has significant impact on students' perceptions of feedback. In part this is due to the degree of interaction facilitated, which varies considerably between the different methods.

Around a third of the respondents who considered one-to-one tutorials to be the most useful referred directly to the discursive interaction that took place, such as discussion, debate, asking questions and receiving explanations; far more so than the other methods of verbal commentary. Also notable was the high proportion of Level 4 students who commented on one-to-one tutorials in this respect – double the number from any other cohort.

Provides a greater scope for more diverse subject matter. Less 'pressure' from outside parties such as in a group tutorial. Also provides a chance to discuss written feedback or review feedback and make sense of this through discussion.

Level 5 student on one-to-one tutorials

The discourse facilitated through face-to-face contact between participants in the feedback process was directly referred to as contributing positively to students' understanding and ability to make sense of their feedback. Written feedback without perceived opportunity to discuss it inhibited respondents' understanding, and thereby potential opportunity to apply it in subsequent learning. The contrast to the immediacy with which students are used to receiving verbal formative feedback was one reason that respondents identified written feedback after their work is marked as least useful; nevertheless, several did comment that it was still of use to them for future assignments. When proposing what change would make feedback more useful, participants across all

cohorts proposed that summative written feedback be replaced with face-to-face discussion, either before or after submission. This respondent commented on resorting to verbal means anyway.

Feedback after work is marked provides little help when continuing with a project. This is due to the fact that it is provided 15 working days after being submitted. I have either resolved issues myself by verbally asking a tutor or moved on to a different module.

Level 6 student

There was an iterative dimension identified in one-to-one tutorials. Respondents commented on the familiarity and understanding their teacher had with their work, and how they saw the developmental process and evolution of the coursework. It becomes a continuous form of feedback, progressing over a period of weeks.

I feel as though the 1:1 with the tutor is more useful as they follow the design journey and have the best understanding.

Level 6 student

Some feedback methods were perceived as much more generative – providing insights, developing ideas within the session and revealing new approaches to coursework. More respondents identified this explorative quality in one-to-one tutorials; however, those who considered design reviews and group tutorials as the most useful also commented on this. Interestingly, although informal discussion with other students was rated jointly as the least useful method of feedback by the second largest number of participants – with most citing peers' lack of experience, even in the higher levels – several responses identifying group tutorials or design reviews as the most useful made specific reference to the value of input from their peers. This may be because the teacher in these sessions can mediate peer contributions.

I just personally find this feedback most useful as I can bounce ideas off my tutor regarding my project as opposed to one sided written feedback.

Level 4 student on one-to-one tutorial

It is helpful to receive feedback on my own work and is helpful to listen to how other students resolve problems. Can also have a wider input from other students.

Level 6 student on group tutorial

For those who considered design reviews to be most useful, two-thirds cited this being because they generate a range of different perspectives and opinions, increasing the scope of the discourse; in a divergent and subjective discipline this increases students' cognisance of potential routes through which to develop their work. Other participants in design reviews associated with the generative dimension of feedback were guest critics; one reason their contributions were particularly valued seems to be because they often come from professional practice, which validates their opinions.

Because I find obtaining people's different opinions and ideas is very useful; especially from people outside of university who are in industry.

Level 6 student on design review

Whilst verbal discourse was perceived very positively for several reasons – immediacy, facilitating discussion, questioning and clarifications – its ephemeral nature rendered it difficult for students to refer back to. In design reviews a peer takes notes of the verbal discourse, as it can be challenging for students to absorb that commentary whilst they are presenting their work and responding to questions. These, however, were criticised by numerous respondents; the key reasons being lack of detail, missing out key information and misinterpreting the verbal commentary. Many respondents proposed alternative strategies, such as more peers taking notes, notes by the reviewers, and several suggested voice-recording the feedback.

The verbal feedback is always good but the physical notes taken by other students are often poor. Recording feedback in reviews could be very useful.

Level 6 student

Message Content

In answer to whether they usually understood their feedback, 86 percent of responses were 'yes' or 'mostly' (Level 4 – 81 percent, Level 5 – 81 percent, Level 6 – 96 percent, Level 7/1 – 88 percent and Level 7/2 – 89 percent). Those who identified barriers to this – predominantly in Level 4 – cited issues including: jargon and terminology, lack of opportunity for discussion, apparent contradictions, and lack of direction on how to improve. Most often these were associated with written feedback after work has been marked.

Language written in these written feedback reports may make sense to the tutor but is sometimes wrote too broad and abstract to completely comprehend.

Level 4 student

Whatever environment the feedback discourse occurs in, the content of the message was still very significant. Participants' perception of the utility and relevance of comments to their coursework varied according to which method they received it via. One reason that many described one-to-one tutorials as most useful was that commentary was tailored to them. Conversely, in group tutorials the commentary was considered less specific and therefore least useful, often because the students were working at different stages or developing different narratives.

This limits responses from the tutor more relevant to your individual work and sometimes becomes unbalanced as other students receive more communication than others.

Level 7/1 student on group tutorial

Written feedback received after assessment was identified as being generalised, and in some cases similar or even the same for each student as opposed to being specifically tailored and personal to them. This undermined its perceived relevance and credibility. To see such similarities students are evidently comparing their written feedback with that of their peers even though it is delivered individually through the VLE.

The feedback (written) can be vague and repetitive (similar to other students).

Level 5 student

Different feedback media, and different messages in the same medium, were identified as containing varying levels of detail. Whilst one-to-one tutorials and design reviews were perceived positively in this respect, respondents from across all cohorts commented on the brevity of written feedback after assessment. There were also perceived inconsistencies in the extent of feedback provided by different teachers, especially in relation to written feedback.

It is hit and miss if it is useful or not. Some feedback sheets are plentiful, others are bare. Quite inconsistent, especially with good vs improvements...

Level 4 student on written feedback

Participants desired more direction and guidance regarding how to improve their current and future coursework, particularly in summative written feedback, which they described as being stagnant and vague – the latter criticism also being given about group tutorials. Some respondents commented that even if they performed very well, they still wanted to know how to do better. Others highlighted that written feedback after assessment criticised weak areas but often gave no direction on how to improve them. Although only a small minority considered design reviews the least useful form of feedback (11 percent), several attributed this to being because they didn't give a clear

direction to progress, or they are given different options but left uncertain which they should pursue. Confusion was also the reason informal peer discussions were considered least useful, as well as being ineffective with unspecific commentary.

Sometimes this form of feedback is too limited and does not present enough information on how to improve, but only on how you failed on certain parts.

Level 7/1 student on written feedback

Sometimes this may confuse one another if both are struggling with their project

Level 4 student on informal peer discussion

Students' desire for more direction extended to the format of the feedback message. Numerous respondents sought more concise identification of areas to address, suggesting a bullet-point list of improvements or action points, as opposed to verbose sentences, and the provision of examples or practical steps to potential resolutions.

I think it needs to be clearer, in a sense, it should be explained better and I think we should be given set tasks to help improve further.

Level 4 student

Respondents highlighted conflicting messages occurring at successive feedback sessions; examples cited include design reviews that follow tutorials and written summative feedback that follows design reviews. Although recognising that contradictory messages are inherent in a creative subject, they wished teachers would recognise this. Respondents from several cohorts suggested continuity in the teachers providing their feedback, and better communication between them over what students had been advised.

Understand that different tutors will have different opinions and perspective and after reviews you may be advised to work in a different direction to what your personal tutor asks for.

Level 4 student

Participants considered the message in both written feedback and design reviews to be overly negative and unnecessarily harsh. Across the cohorts they desired a more balanced perspective, with positive as well as critical commentary that would enable them to identify their strengths as opposed to just singling out weaknesses. This was not only because they find it disheartening, but – insightfully – so they know which aspects of their work were successful and therefore what to repeat in future, as well as the confidence boost given by such encouragement.

If they clearly showed what went well and what could have been done differently so then in future projects you know what to repeat.

Level 4 student on making feedback more useful

In response to what would make feedback more useful, participants from all five cohorts sought more visual content in their feedback, reasoning that they would better understand what is being referred to, enable the teacher to explain their ideas more clearly, and help them to remember feedback more. Their suggestions included sketches by the teacher, images, photographs, diagrams and marking up their drawings. Relatedly, one reason respondents considered one-to-one tutorials most useful was because they facilitated sketching and drawing within the session more than the others.

More drawn feedback. As I personally tend to memorise better when looking at a sketch, rather than written information.

Level 7/1 student on making feedback more useful

Discussion

One-to-one tutorials and design reviews were considered the most useful feedback medium by 89 percent of respondents. In contrast, only 7 percent of participants considered group tutorials the most useful method of feedback, and 24 percent thought them the least useful. Whilst each align strongly with a socio-constructivist approach to

learning, in which student and teacher are involved in a social process of collaborative interaction through loops of dialogue (Askew and Lodge 2000), the feedback environment significantly affected students' recollection (Winstone et al. 2017a).

Swann (1986) argues that the one-to-one tutorial model of pedagogy in art and design is outmoded and should be supplanted with planned group teaching; whilst this view might have renewed traction in the current context of massification in higher education and diminishing resources (Orr and Shreeve 2018), it is at odds with these findings. A key factor explaining this is the participants' sense of agency within the feedback discourse, which a socio-constructivist approach depends on (O'Donovan, Rust, and Price 2016), but which the participants described as curtailed in group tutorials.

O'Donovan, Rust and Price (2016) highlight that oral feedback can be more effective than written; face-to-face dialogue compels students to engage critically with their work and empowers them in their learning (Hill and West 2019). As the discipline's signature pedagogy centres around verbal discourse, students were unsurprisingly less versed in interpreting written feedback. However, whilst several feedback methods utilise verbal discourse, the perceived value of that dialogue in providing meaningful discussion and clarification over their work varies, with one-to-one tutorials facilitating students' understanding more than design reviews or group tutorials. Winstone et al.'s review (2017a) suggests limitations to peer feedback in identifying weaknesses and suggesting amendments. In this study informal peer discussion was rated jointly as second least useful, with reasons cited as lack of experience, unspecific commentary, and mutual confusion.

Although one-to-one tutorials, group tutorials and design reviews all have direct contact with the teacher, the nature of that contact differs – not least due to the student-

teacher power dynamic. The respondents describe being less able to articulate ideas behind their work in design reviews, and commentary as more evaluative than the directive suggestions they receive in one-to-one tutorials. Adding that students felt uncomfortable to engage in group tutorials demonstrates the complexity of interaction dynamics at work between the participants in the feedback environment. Steen-Utheim and Wittek (2017) identify the significance of emotional and relational support to students' dialogic feedback recipience and emphasise that feedback is likely to be enhanced where participants are within a supportive atmosphere.

The stark differences perceived between one-to-one and group tutorials suggest that contact time be considered in qualitative terms as well as quantitative – that it is not a matter of the duration but of the nature of that contact. In this research shorter one-to-one tutorials were considered much more useful than longer group tutorials, which were described as a tedious waste of time and lacking direction. When suggesting what change would make feedback more useful, perhaps unsurprisingly participants sought more one-to-one contact with teachers, not least because this method is particularly effective in facilitating discourse. Whilst participants engage in weekly dialogic formative feedback in their design modules, feedback on their essays is only provided through written commentary after assessment; they suggested tutorials on essays before submission as one way to make feedback more useful. Incorporating face-to-face discussion of draft essays has been shown to be valued by students and improve both task outcome and future learning strategies (Hill and West 2019).

The participants' concern over lack of continuity between one-to-one tutorial and design reviews, and difficulty reconciling different perspectives on their work, highlights that even when embedded as the core curriculum strategy there is still potential for students to struggle in applying such dialogic iterative feedback. As noted

above, the proportion of respondents who considered design reviews to be the most useful feedback method is notably larger for Level 7/2 than all other cohorts.

Interestingly, a larger proportion of students from that cohort cited this being because of the range of different perspectives they generate. This indicates that by the final year of the postgraduate programme students are more adept at reconciling the different – sometimes conflicting – suggestions design reviews often generate, and therefore welcome more varied insights and opinions.

Echoing Weaver's (2006) study, summative written feedback was described as vague. Respondents sought more concise identification of areas to address, such as bullet-points of improvements, and examples or practical steps to potential resolutions. Students were seeking feedback that is more directive – on strategies to improve their work and learning strategies – than evaluative commentary on what they had done. Other studies similarly suggest that direction on the skills students need to develop has more utility than feedback focusing on the task just completed (Hattie and Timperley 2007; Winstone et al. 2016). However, Winstone et al. (2017b) caution giving overly explicit advice on exactly what students should do, favouring practices that encourage students' agency in the feedback process as opposed to reliance on explicit direction. Carless et al. (2011) propose that exploratory as opposed to directive feedback places onus on the student to interpret and use it.

One of the barriers to students utilising their feedback is understanding their teachers' language and terminology (Jonsson 2012; Winstone et al. 2017b). Whilst most participants understood their feedback, additional barriers identified by this study were lack of opportunity for discussion, apparent contradictions, and lack of direction on how to improve. Encouragingly, several participants described employing strategies to seek

clarification over feedback they did not understand; however, these were predominantly in the higher levels of the programme.

One strategy proposed to increase engagement with summative feedback is restricting students' access to their grade until they have responded to written commentary (for example, Rust, O'Donovan and Price 2005; Sendziuk 2010). Students in the postgraduate programme had experienced receiving feedback in this sequence; interestingly, several commented on it negatively, citing it had caused what they saw as unnecessary anxiety. This echoes Parker and Winstone's (2016) study, in which students strongly disliked receiving feedback before their grade as it is likely to result in apprehension and second-guessing of what the mark was.

A particularly striking and unique insight was the desire for more visual feedback. Although teachers often draw formative suggestions during tutorials, and in design reviews they sometimes mark-up students' drawings, the feedback record students take away from the reviews are written notes by a peer. Furthermore, summative feedback for design modules is always written. Given that the signature pedagogy is centred around visual material – predominantly drawings and models – this offers significant potential to develop a signature feedback process that aligns with it.

Implications for practice

This study shows that the medium through which feedback occurs has significant impact on its perceived utility, but that the content of the message remains important. Not only does utility vary between whether feedback is formative or summative – as might be expected – it also varies significantly as to which medium formative feedback occurs through, and whether feedback is verbal, textual or visual.

With increased attention on dialogic approaches to feedback (Winstone and Carless 2020), this study provides insight on students' perceptions of the relative utility

of several dialogic feedback methods. The participants' observations highlight the significant value they place in and learning they take from one-to-one tutorials and design reviews, which exemplify the conceptualisation of feedback as a dialogic process in iterative cycles over time (Carless et al. 2011; Esterhazy and Damşa 2019). Creating more congruence between these and other feedback methods the students experience might increase their perceived utility. For example, written feedback could be complimented with group discussion evaluating exemplars, drafts or discussing the feedback itself (O'Donovan, Rust and Price 2016). This would more closely align feedback methods around a coherent dialogic approach; Carless and Boud (2018) suggest that enhancing students' feedback literacy will be more effective if strategies are systematically embedded throughout programmes. However, it would likely place additional demands on teachers in the preparation and delivery of these sessions, against which the potential value and benefits would need to be evaluated.

Group tutorials can provide many benefits to learning, especially during the initial stages of coursework where they enabled participants to see what others were working on, gain design ideas, help one another, and fostered a sense of collegiality. However, only a small minority of participants recognised these – more often they were reticent to contribute and considered them a waste of time. To harness the benefits of this approach the weaknesses identified need to be addressed, creating an environment in which all students feel confident to engage and ensuring dialogue is applicable to all those present. Smaller groups of shorter duration might facilitate this.

It is notable that participants valued the different perspectives offered by other teachers, peers and guest critics, but these sometimes resulted in confusion. Managing these different perspectives did improve, demonstrated by a reduction in comments about this after Level 4 and the increased preference for design reviews at Level 7/2.

Participants also expressed desire for more directive feedback, which might be at odds with the over-arching aim of fostering independent learning and student autonomy. This study demonstrates that a delicate balance needs to be struck between directive commentary and strategies predicated on student self-reflection and agency in identifying how their work and learning strategies should develop (Orr, Yorke and Blair 2014); excessive external feedback may inhibit students from deploying internal feedback processes (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006). Feedback messages should be scaffolded iteratively at each Level.

Like Orr, Yorke and Blair (2014), this study suggests that consideration be given to the ephemeral nature of dialogic verbal feedback, and that audio recording could offer a viable strategy; this need not place additional duties on teachers, as almost all students possess mobile devices capable of recording voice memos. Another strategy to enhance the feedback message is the inclusion of visual feedback – such as images of precedents and annotated sketches and diagrams – to compliment written feedback especially. For example, teachers often refer students to precedent projects, however it can be difficult for them to discern specifically how that precedent could inform their work. The author has since experimented with embedding images into summative feedback – such as drawings or concept sketches – and highlighting why they relate to students’ projects. Similarly, teachers could sketch diagrams within the feedback, and annotate how they inform the student’s work. Another strategy would be for teachers to provide drawn responses as audio-visual feedback through the VLE; examples of screencast feedback suggest that, although not reducing workload, after learning to use the technology this method does not demand more time from the teacher, whilst facilitating more meaningful feedback exchanges (Winstone and Carless 2020).

Participants also highlighted how the tone of commentary impacted on them. As feedback methods move from written monologue to verbal dialogic interactions, in which intonation is more discernible, teachers need to be increasingly mindful that the tone in which feedback is delivered is one of the most critical aspects of how students react to it and can significantly affect their engagement with it (Carless and Boud 2018).

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