

Student's misinterpretation of written feedback on their degree programmes: can IFPs do more to help?



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Quotes and egs

Research outline

Findings

What is the problem

How can IFPs help

- ▶ SSS difficulties relating feedback comments to parts of their essays,
- ▶ identifying marks on their essays,
- ▶ and uncovering meaning through context.

The research: the contribution of written feedback to writing development

- ▶ Nine Taiwanese students at a UoR
- ▶ Had attended EAP pre-sessional - now on Master's programme in business
- ▶ Collective instrumental case study which included:
 - ▶ a series of four interviews with the students coinciding with delivery of written feedback
 - ▶ observation of classes including...
 - ▶ pre-writing advice sessions
 - ▶ post writing feedback session
 - ▶ interviews with three lecturers

Difficulties facing students

Pre-sessional - feedback on multiple draft essays delivered by linguists

UG and PG degree programmes - feedback on single draft essays delivered by non-linguists

- ▶ Handwriting
- ▶ Idiomatic language use
- ▶ Reluctance to approach lecturers
- ▶ Relating global comments to essay sections
- ▶ Identifying 'marks' on the text
- ▶ Uncovering meaning through context

Relating global comments to essay sections

“The link between case studies and your arguments is not very clear.”

“Your comments are mainly descriptive.”

“A lot of your essay doesn’t answer the question.”

“Underlying theory is somewhat under-explained”

“Linking of theory is imperfect and the use of evidence is not compelling in many instances”

“A sound attempt but needs greater depth in places”

Relating global comments to essay sections: students' comments

- ▶ FBC: You have failed to answer the question.
- ▶ Joanne: *But I cannot understand where... where in my essay is this not answer the question, I don't know how she means.*
- ▶ FBC: Your essay does not cover the topic
- ▶ Steve: *What part, it doesn't tell what part does not cover topic.*

Identifying the meaning of 'marks': ? !

_____ X ✓

“the basic principle of marketing
is the same all over the world however
the practice of it might vary in different
parts of the world” (sic)



*“I don't know it means good or it's ... yeh maybe it's good but just don't know ... maybe it's because it's... I re-write from the book, so it means ok you are right or I put there good”
(Anna Interview 2)*

Uncovering meaning through context

- ▶ Key words which could be expected to help students uncover meaning include verb phrases such as:
 - ▶ expand; define; focus
- ▶ And noun phrases such as:
 - ▶ be more concise; not specific enough

But.....

Uncovering meaning through context

FBC	Student's interpretation
Expand this idea	Maybe write more detail but not sure what he means, ah no he mean I need to find more idea yes.
Define your terms	I need to analyse more.
Focus more on the question	Not help exactly, focus what? My friends don't know too.
Be more concise	I think I didn't use enough example in my essay
Not specific enough	Maybe the teacher need you need to have some evidence not just your thoughts.

I: [reading] More depth could be useful here think about the risks at each stage and the changing state of the market.

S: *Mhm.*

I: Was that helpful for your future writing?

S: *Yes, mhm.*

I: What could you use from there? [pause] What do you think is the key word for use in the future?

S: *'risks' ...*

I: ok

S: *'changing state of the market'*

I: Is there one word in there that you could apply to any writing that you do?

S: *I think 'risk'.*

I: You still think that that's the key word?

S: *Yeh.*

I: Ok what about more depth?

S: *Oh, more depth ... ahh so maybe I should write it more detailed.*

Advocating the genrefication of feedback

Genre is:

A “structure, style and content” which its intended audience is able to interpret.

Characteristics of a genre:

- ▶ A class of communicative events in which language plays a significant and indispensable role.
- ▶ Communicative events must share a communicative purpose.

(Swales, 1990, p.58)

Feedback: a genre to be taught by writing teachers

- ▶ The vocabulary of feedback:

Interpreting polysemous lexis (glossary?)

e.g. *sound solid deep abstract range*

Design exercises using essay sections illustrating the message conveyed in key words/phrases e.g.:

expand; define; focus; be more concise; not specific enough

- ▶ designing interventions to encourage students' engagement with feedback

Feedback: a genre to be taught by writing teachers

Make students aware:

- ▶ they will receive feedback from many different people;
- ▶ these different people have different practices;
- ▶ it's ok to ask;
- ▶ don't just accept things as they are, persist in seeing your lecturer if you want something explained;
- ▶ at the beginning of your course ask your lecturer to explain how feedback will be given and what its purpose is to raise awareness in lecturers, maybe getting them to question their own practices.

Feedback: a genre to be taught by
writing teachers

What else can we do.....?

Thanks for listening - over to you.....



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