Feedback Calendars: Lessons so far

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For links and materials related to this talk, see:

http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/talks/fcal

http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/rap/fcal/

GU L&T conference 12   17 April 2012

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An example of a feedback calendar

Excerpt from the Feedback calendar for Computer Science CS1P Level 1 Semester 1										
Assignment	Work start date	Student hand-in date	Feedback available	Marked by	Mark	Comments (show generic + individual)	Writ ten / oral	Discussion?	Feedback shared with peers?	Alternative good answers shown?
Friday lecture preparation	Wed	Fri	Fri	Lecturer	Yes	0-10 mins per EVS question	Oral	Yes	Group	Sometimes
Weekly Lab prep	Lab	Lab	Lab	Tutor	Tick/ cross	1 – 10 mins total	Oral	Yes	Solo	Yes/depends
Weekly lab – student questions	Lab	Lab	Lab	Tutor	Yes	On demand	Oral	Yes	Solo	Depends
Weekly lab – summative	Lab	End of lab	End of lab	Tutor	Yes	On demand	Oral	Yes	Solo	Depends
Feedback in lecture following lab	Lab	Lab	Wed	Tutor	No	30 mins using EVS, plus 7 mins other talk	Oral	Yes	Group	Yes/depends

Feedback calendars are ...

Feedback calendars are a sheet published to students on a course, not only of hand-in dates, but of when their work will be returned and with what types of feedback (marks and comments).

If they are beneficial, then they are very attractive because they are simple, cheap, and sustainable; at least once they are a regular part of how a course is administered.

Feedback calendars' aims, audiences

Feedback calendars have two audiences, and hence aims:

A. The students: to make them aware of feedback delivery as a significant part of the course. This is partly to raise NSS ratings on feedback; but more importantly because students tend not to attend to feedback and use it even though we believe it is important for learning.

When students are shown a calendar, they are generally approving of it: it improves their view of the course. But little sign of changing behaviour so far.

B. Staff: A reminder and reflective prompt for staff: what do we do about feedback on this course? should we adjust or redesign the kinds of feedback we give?

This talk, like the calendars, may prompt some of this discussion.

Pilot uses this session (2011-12)

CompSci L1: paper handout week 7, sem.1

Music: Delivered on Moodle
MUSICAL CULTURE IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY *MUSIC2021, 4046*
MUSICAL TECHNIQUES, INTERMEDIATE *MUSIC2007, 4020*

Philosophy L1: adapted per tutor, week 3 some distributed by Moodle group forums

Physics: designed but not deployed this year.

Psychology:
L1: In course handbook
L2: In course handbook
L3: distributed as separate document

Main problem so far

Securing interest and agreement in principle from course teams has on the whole been easy.
The main problem so far in spreading the use of feedback calendars has been getting effective action in a timely manner.

Perhaps it is because so little work is needed that it doesn't get scheduled.
First it's too early and we don't know what exactly we'll be doing.
Then it should really be agreed by several committees that don't meet until everyone is back and term is advanced.
Then it's too late in the session to be in the course handbook.
The next year, this repeats.

Probably it only happens if/when it is adopted by the course leader who proceeds to make it happen without agreement, offering only times for comment.

Part B:
Fields (columns) for feedback calendars

Structure of a feedback calendar

Nothing is fixed for a feedback calendar: the only requirement is that it communicates successfully with its student readers.

In the ones done so far, there is usually one line (row) per activity. Most obviously, one row per assignment, with the date work may start (e.g. essay title announced), hand-in date for students, hand-back date for staff. And probably it should also always have the date when the feedback is to be used for the next related assignment.

In CompSci's interactive course, there is also one row for each step in the weekly course cycle (pre-lecture reading, lab prep, the lab, the interactive lecture).

In all forms of "Just In Time Teaching" this cycle will be important: this approach requires students to read the text before the lecture and complete some quiz and/or submit questions

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JimB

A weekly cycle in a course, based on student virtual groups in a VLE.

Assignment	Work start date	Student hand-in date	Fback available	Marked by	Mark	Comments	Written / oral	Discussion?	Feedback shared with peers?	Alternative good answers shown
Group VLE exercise	Monday	Monday (week later)	Tuesday	Tutor (peers)	No	generic + best examples	written	yes (on VLE)	group	Yes

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Structure of a calendar (2): Fields

The big questions are: what properties to have as columns in a feedback calendar (besides the hand-back date). Here are some to consider.

- Peer feedback is important, and in some ways better than staff feedback. It should be in the calendar if it is part of the design. SO a col. should say peer/expert as author of the feedback.
- Tutor feedback shared amongst peers? (I got this idea from a student)

- Mark (summative success metric)? yes/no
- Comments (formative information)? yes/no
- Written / oral?

- Discussion / dialogue: Often thought to be the most important bit of feedback, but often omitted. "with tutor" "with peers", "with both tutor and peers", "only on request", etc. are some ...

Fields (cont. 2)

- Generic / personalised? Best practice is often to use comment banks (electronic, or paper pro-formas) with ticks to tell the individual which apply to them.

- This field could / should be used also to state the approximate amount of comments e.g. 900 words generic is quite likely for a comment bank (generic commentary to the whole class on their work), +35 words individualised written feedback.
- And/or + 10 sec.s oral if adding some oral comments to each person in a group; or calculating the amount of question-answering in a feedback session, divided by the number of students in the class.

- Being accurate in these estimates is a good way of thinking through what your practice really is.

Fields (cont. 3)

- Model answers shown?

- Example answers shown?
     (e.g. all of: an excellent, middling, poor case)

- Alternative good answers? A big lesson badly neglected in some subjects is that a real expert could answer a question in several quite different ways: whether this is Physics or History. Students are frequently fascinated to read others' work, primarily (I think) because it shows quite different ways of tackling the same problem.

Part C:
## Timelines: the 2nd representation needed

Need for timelines

The calendar structure so far focusses on single pieces of work and the kind of feedback organised.

Another aspect is not well represented by that: How do different pieces of work interact with each other for students:
Either positively (when is the next piece of work which should be affected by the feedback you received from piece 1? and how should it be affected?) E.g. a student oral presentation might be used as a rehearsal for a written paper.
Or negatively: with clashing deadlines all at the end of term; or a special piece of work where there will never be another opportunity to apply it.

Timelines (2)
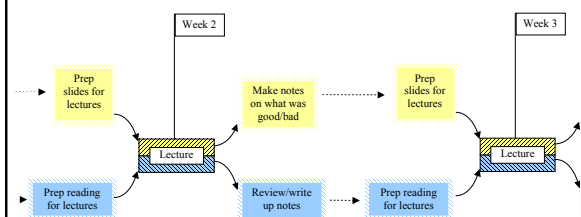
Part D:
What underlies students' relationship with feedback?

What is wrong with students' relationship to feedback?

The questions:

Why don't students use feedback?

What is the real goal of feedback?

What is the real issue behind students' use of feedback?

The symptoms:

They don't pick up written feedback

They say they don't get feedback

They say it's not applicable to any future work they'll do

They look at the mark not the comments

They won't do any formative work, only if there's a mark/credit

Possible analysis

A. For many students, it is as if they have absolutely no concept that feedback is part of their learning.
Either they have never had any feedback that helped them, or they didn't notice it was helping them; and no-one actually talks to them about its role in learning and in university courses.

B. When their work is ready to return, it has wholly gone from their minds.
• Consequently if they read the comments, it won't be helpful since the context has gone and anyway they aren't thinking about it: it is unrelated to their current work and deadlines.
• Looking at the mark is done to decide whether there is any emergency requiring action: if not, then no further attention need be paid to the comments.

The measure of feedback value

Feedback is of no use whatever unless it changes some student action.
The criterion of teaching success here is: whether and what action the learner takes as a result.

How fast the feedback is returned has no value in itself.
All the advice about the content and style of feedback has no value in itself.

We have to focus on what the student is going to do with it.
(See also Draper, 2009: "What are learners actually regulating when given feedback?")

Making comments useful to students

For essay feedback: they have to re-read their own essay as well as the comments: perhaps 30-60 mins work for a 4,000 word piece. (When have we timetabled this?)

I have however had a bit of success with a simple prompt exercise I ask them to do as soon as they've read my feedback:

"Prompted student processing of feedback"

— basically asking them what they found useful, how they would re-write their essay if they had to, what lesson if any they would apply to the next essay they write.

Making marks useful to students

For a different kind of feedback, marks from a quiz, a different kind of prompting seems effective.

For comprehension, increasing amounts of evidence suggests that explanations are not what students mainly need: once motivated, they'll find them themselves. Instead, they need to know what it is they don't yet understand. I.e. no comments, but "marks".
However what makes a mark into a signal that the student believes tells them that more work understanding this topic is needed?
Eric Yao has an answer. (Session 7C)

A place to stop

Takeaway mottos:

A. To have students act on feedback is the objective.

B. Feedback calendars help move feedback use into focus for both staff and students.

For the slides, handout etc. see:

http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/talks/fcal.html

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