

What happens when verbal feedback is used to facilitate online learning?

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Rationale

Verbal feedback is a common tool utilized in classrooms on a day to day basis. To give verbal feedback not only aids learners with understanding their strengths and weaknesses but helps with showing the next steps of progression. Learners are more reserved with written feedback but have been shown to be more willing to discuss next steps when approached verbally. (Kerr K, 2017) By speaking to learners about progression positive relationships within the class can be developed which has a larger impact within the class environment. Learner satisfaction in the class is greatly enhanced with verbal feedback no matter what ability level they are. (Burnett P.C, 2002)

With the shift to online learning the opportunities to give verbal feedback have been severely limited. The Scottish Government has been slowly shifting towards the usage of digital technology to enhance teaching which has made the shift to online learning easier. This movement not only improves the learning experience but aids with teacher's workload when using online assignments that allow for automated marking and feedback. (Scottish Government, 2016) Feedback produced through this method is however in text form for learners to read.

Aims

For this enquiry the aims were:

1. To find out what effect verbal feedback had on learner's engagement rates and performance in online assignments
2. To assess any other benefits of verbal feedback with focus on learner's wellbeing

Methodology

A 3rd year class was chosen and over a 3-week period they received verbal feedback. Due to the global pandemic schools have been closed since Christmas which has prevented learners from receiving high quality feedback. The reasoning for choosing a Broad General Education class was down to the larger class size when compared to a senior class and the variation in performance and engagement already present in this class. This variation is a result of difficult tasks which require clear instructions due to the concepts they were learning online which included cell division and hormones.

To achieve this verbal feedback was given for all assignments handed in during the 3-week period. The voice clips were recorded and uploaded to the learners private Class Notebook section in their Class Teams. These voice clips went in detail the questions that learners got wrong along with next steps to improve and encouragement. Verbal feedback was also given during live lessons during the questioning period of the lesson.

To collect data learners were asked to complete questionnaires at the end of each week. The structure of the questionnaires were as follows:

Week 1 – Initial thoughts on verbal feedback

Week 2 – Opinions on verbal feedback and if it is consistently accessed

Week 3 – Final thoughts and if learners wish to continue receiving this after this online learning period

Learners are aware that these questionnaires are used for research into verbal feedback and will be used as ways to improve feedback received in the class. Other potential data was collected. These consisted of looking at the engagement rate for assignments and the performance on each assignment by learners. Performance on each assignment was decided on the score they achieved in a Microsoft Quiz or the quality of the work received for presentations/posters. The level of depth for answers was also a factor in the learner's performance. All data collected was done anonymously with letters assigned to learners. By having letters assigned to each learner any trends in data throughout the weeks can be linked to a letter.

Findings

Questionnaires

Written vs Verbal feedback

From the initial stages 54% of learners (13) that participated in the first questionnaire preferred written feedback. 3 of the learners preferred this due to the feedback being in more detail and in an easier to digest format. 1 of the 3 learners found verbal feedback to be overwhelming. Learners that preferred verbal feedback found it to be more personalized and 1 learner stated that it made her feel her work was more appreciated.

Confidence

Biology is a subject that relies heavily on building a good foundation and without the confidence to do so learners will struggle to understand difficult concepts. 5 (38%) of the learners found the verbal feedback to be a confidence booster meanwhile the majority (61%) did not feel that verbal feedback had an impact on their confidence with the online work. This is translated over to the confidence to ask question as 30% of learners felt more comfortable asking questions after receiving verbal feedback. Some of the learners that felt more comfortable asking questions did not feel more confident after verbal feedback, so this shows that confidence is not the only factor that effects the willingness of a learner to ask questions. An interesting thing to note is that 38% of learners were more likely to do online work when verbal feedback was given. This could be due to how digital verbal feedback aids in creating

an online classroom environment and that learners feel that the teacher has a stronger digital presence.

Motivation

After the second week of receiving verbal feedback, 91% of learners felt more motivated to do online work due to verbal feedback. The same 91% of learners felt that verbal feedback made it easier to see where they went wrong, how to do the online work and looked forward to the verbal feedback they received. This demonstrates how powerful verbal feedback is and that no matter the circumstance delivery of verbal feedback is invaluable in motivating learners.

The Online Experience

By the end of week 3 80% of learners wanted online verbal feedback to continue even if normal school days returned. Every learner that answered the last questionnaire (5) felt that the verbal feedback had improved the online experience. 40% of learners however do not want all of their teachers to give them verbal feedback online. The reasoning was due to their existing relationship with certain teachers.

Live lessons / Drop-in sessions

During live lessons learners were questioned and given feedback live. At the end of each session learners were given the opportunity to speak about the verbal feedback not just in the session but for the assignments. From these sessions the following opinions were gathered.

“I appreciate the verbal feedback and it makes me feel like my work is valued”

“It is motivating to hear my teacher speak about my work and helps me improve”

“My parents love the idea and think it is great”

From these opinions it shows the benefits to motivation and wellbeing for learners. With the disconnect between learners and teachers the ability to show appreciation for effort has become much harder but verbal feedback has created an opportunity to show this appreciation. Learners also demonstrated appreciation for the effort put in to create digital verbal feedback which translated over to enhancing positive relationships.

Progression Through Assignments

There was an improvement in average results for 20% of learners when comparing the previous 3 weeks to the 3-week period in which verbal feedback was given. Learners that required clearer instructions in class benefitted the most from the verbal feedback with the greatest improvements. When looking at the change in engagement there was a 10% decrease in learners engaging with the assignments when verbal feedback was given. This is an interesting statistic and may have been due to the overall downward trend with all learners as the weeks progressed. When compared to a National 5 class it was an improvement as the

National 5 class had a decrease of 18% in engagement when comparing the same time periods.

Conclusions

To conclude, giving verbal feedback digitally had a great effect on learners' performances in their online assignments and was more effective at maintaining engagement rates when compared to classes without digital verbal feedback. Although it was not a style of feedback preferred by all, the majority of learners enjoyed the verbal feedback more than written feedback and it has greatly benefitted the learners' overall wellbeing. The levels of motivation and confidence increased for most and by giving a sense of appreciation for learners work existing relationships can develop.

Implications for Future

Digital verbal feedback is a strong tool that is underutilized. I will perform further research to gather more information on digital verbal feedback and explore the different potential tools that online learning has to offer. I will also maintain this for learners that cannot attend school and must work from home. This is also effective at reducing workload so I will gradually implement this into my other classes so that as many people as possible benefit from this including myself. This personalisation is a wonderful touch that is much needed during these testing times. Lastly, I will promote this and try and convince other teachers to at least attempt this style of feedback as we all develop our digital skills.

Bibliography

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