

Use of peer feedback to enhance engagement in a physiology cohort

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It is well recognised that feedback to students is an educational practice that has one of the largest positive impacts on student learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In order for feedback to elicit these positive changes in student work it must provide information that is specific, detailed and directed (Colthorpe, Liang & Zimbardi, 2013). However, increasing workload pressures, time and budgetary constraints, and increasing cohort sizes may restrict academics' capacity to provide effective feedback to undergraduate students. An alternate approach is to facilitate the giving and receiving feedback between peers. It is known that one of the key benefits of feedback is in the provision of feedback itself. Those who give feedback can benefit by increasing their understanding of an assessment task through engagement with criteria and standards, and by viewing alternate approaches to its completion (Lui & Carless, 2006). In addition, they develop their skills in critique, and together this can enhance their self-efficacy (Lui *et al.*, 2001).

In this study, 3rd year undergraduate biomedical science students were asked to provide anonymous, written feedback on the quality of an oral presentation of a primary research article by a group of three of their peers. Students giving feedback were assigned to a specific group, so that each group received feedback from three peers. Specifically, the students giving feedback were provided with double-sided sheets; their identification details, guidelines on effective feedback practices and the criteria against which their provision of feedback would be graded appeared on one side; on the other side was printed a series of prompting questions, with space for the receivers' identity and the feedback to be written. These sheets were collected and graded by an academic, and then only the second side was copied and distributed to the feedback receivers, so that the provider remained anonymous. Importantly, students were not asked to grade the oral presentations, that grading was performed by an academic.

Students gave extensive, rich and detailed feedback to their peers. The quality of the feedback given was high, with most students receiving a grade equivalent to a distinction or higher for the feedback they provided, and students demonstrated considerable engagement both during the oral presentations and in the feedback provision. The method described here provided an opportunity for students to benefit from both the giving and receiving of feedback from their peers. While it was associated with a small increase in administration and marking time for the academics involved, this was considerably less than the time required to provide an equivalent level of feedback. The arrangement of three students each giving feedback to three of their peers, and therefore also receiving it from three peers, means that this method would be adaptable for a variety of group assessment tasks and scalable to varying cohort sizes, particularly if automated through a learning management system.

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