

Engineering Undergraduate Students' Perception of Feedback

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Many student satisfaction survey results including those from the National Student Survey in the UK have led many to consider feedback as the most discussed topic in Higher Education in recent years. Feedback can be placed in a broader context, but when receiving it for a single activity in higher education, it is always associated with an assessment. Feedback related problems are mostly associated with this written assessment component. There is a sense of dissatisfaction, with learners experiencing a range of issues associated with feedback as a barrier for engagements. Content surplus resulting in time pressures, the summative nature of the assignments and lack of social interactions have an impact on this. Within the context of education, feedback must be a learning tool for undergraduate students and feedback must be a part of teaching. Many discussions in literature in education drive Higher Education Institutions to reform feedback to set the principles for best practice in response to societal challenges that incorporate social - cultural and historical dimensions. Through focus group interviews with 1st and 3rd year undergraduate students, this research places the research question 'The student perception of what feedback is?' at the centre of the study to explore student views across year groups. This study then seeks to judge whether undergraduates having received feedback for a year, are sufficiently developed to think what feedback is to them and are prepared to engage with feedback within the purpose of the Higher Education and the self-regulated role.

The Activity Theory was used as the theoretical framework to investigate students' perception of what feedback is, how it changes within the students, how they connect with feedback and factors influencing it, that disclosed tensions and hence disturbances within the activity system. These disturbances deviate the standard process, so have detrimental effects on students engaging with feedback. Findings emphasized that in some respect desirable attributes are not supported in the current feedback giving practice for the anticipated outcome. A broader array of perceptions that are unique to individuals that link to their social and cultural environments, together with many interpretations of feedback, were identified. Barriers, assignment issues, and course structure were identified within the current feedback process as tensions within the activity. These examples of an ongoing study helps to identify tensions within the current feedback process in changing teaching and learning environment, when placed within the activity theory.

Keywords: feedback; activity theory; student perception; engagement; tensions