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What is effective feedback in a professional learning context? A study of how examination markers feedback to each other on their marking performance

Conference Paper Abstract

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Abstract

The importance of feedback as a general concept for learning processes has been widely recognised, including professional and work-based contexts. Examiners in large examination boards often work in teams, with a team leader monitoring the quality of the marking performance of examiners in each team. It is also the responsibility of the team leader to give feedback to each examiner on their marking performance. This feedback helps the examiner to align their understanding of how to apply the mark scheme with the practices of senior examiners. Therefore a key aim of feedback is to support the convergence of participants' thinking and practice. In addition to this alignment function, the feedback context implicates professional relationships and the recognition of expertise at a social level.

Feedback is a complex area of study. Professional feedback often involves participants managing the communication of bad news. It is a forum where the social recognition of expertise is displayed and where participants work to maintain face. It also has an impact on performance motivation through its underlying connections with emotion. As a result, the professional feedback environment may be a challenging one for promoting professional learning and inducting others into a community of practice.

My study data are 991 feedback messages that took place between three team leaders and 27 examiners working for a large assessment organisation. My analyses draw on sociocultural theory which suggests that intrapersonal development is a function of the quality of interpersonal communication. I integrate methods associated with thematic content analysis, conversation analysis, and corpus linguistics to (1) identify the characteristics of examiner feedback, and (2) evaluate how these features relate to theories of feedback effectiveness.

My initial findings suggest that team leaders use feedback to convey both informational and interactional information, with examiner experience and familiarity influencing the nature of feedback. Indications also suggest that examiner feedback is a discourse that focuses on disagreement, and that the nature of this discourse shifts over time. The study outcomes have implications for anyone involved in the delivery of professional performance feedback. This is particularly the case for those working in organisations where there is asymmetry in expertise and relative professional status. It is hoped that the outcomes can be used to inform the development of expertise in feedback giving.