Feedback as scaffolding: Senior Examiner monitoring processes and their effects on examiner marking

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UK awarding bodies increasingly use technology to distribute digital copies of students' examination scripts to examiners for marking. This process allows Senior Examiners (Team Leaders) to remotely monitor and feedback on the marking quality of examiners under their supervision throughout the marking period.

The objective of this study was to gain an overview of Team Leader monitoring behaviours in the context of ongoing, situated decision-making. This overview included specific analysis of the types of feedback behaviours employed by Team Leaders as well as the motivations behind their use. A second objective was to gain an understanding of the effects of any feedback on recipient examiners.

A key challenge of research in a high-stakes assessment context is the requirement to gather authentic data without influencing the processes it aims to understand. Technology was used to capture non-intrusive, video observation data of four Team Leaders as they monitored examiners' marking and provided feedback (e.g. by email or by telephone). This video data was then used in stimulated recall interviews to give insight into the motives behind such behaviours. A second data collection phase involved interviews with six examiners to understand the perceived impact of interactions with Team Leaders on their marking practices.

Sociocultural theories suggest that the co-construction of meaning is based on dialogic social interaction, and these theories have resulted in the identification of a number of scaffolding strategies which support meaning making. These strategies have relevance to participants in assessment systems which rely on a standard interpretation of a mark scheme being cascaded from more expert Team Leaders to less expert examiners. We were interested in whether a digital monitoring environment can create favourable conditions which allow the scaffolding of meaning to take place through the facilitation of synchronous interaction between participants.

The study identified that all Team Leaders proceeded through three distinct stages of monitoring. The study was also able to identify some variation in behaviours between the different Team Leaders, particularly in the extent to which feedback was dialogic in character, and this had apparent effects on the co-construction of meaning. The study outcomes provide a useful methodological solution to the challenges of gathering data on situated practices in a dynamic, high-stakes environment. The outcomes also usefully illuminate monitoring processes which have training implications for Team Leaders.