



CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT

Researching effective feedback in a professional learning context

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Abstract

In the UK, many school and professional qualifications are delivered and administered by Awarding Organizations. The administration of these qualifications involves a great number of examiners who are responsible for assessing individual performances according to pre-specified mark schemes.

A feature of this context is that it is highly regulated. This means that the government has an interest in ensuring that the conduct of agencies is guided by agreed procedures which ensure that, for example, assessments are administered fairly. This situation has similarities with other safety critical systems; which are so called because a failure in such systems can have profound implications. This description is commonly used to describe healthcare, police, military, and aviation environments where decisions about the allocation of public resources or the use of a particular intervention strategy have far-reaching implications.

My study explores the characteristics of the dyadic feedback that senior examiners communicate to examiners in their marking team about the professional performance. This study context is of interest because, in line with some sociocultural theories, these interactions possess professional learning potential.

What are the main theoretical concepts/principles used in the presented work?

I seek to use a socio-cultural activity theory framework for conceptualizing some of the complexities of the professional assessor role and to explore the idea of feedback effectiveness. Feedback is a form of discourse that is often rooted in misalignment and can be characterized by its conveyance of negative information from one participant to another. This misalignment is important because studies of discourse suggest that misaligned perspectives encourage participants to articulate their reasoning to help discourse repair. I argue that senior examiner feedback is a repair mechanism, and its effectiveness is linked with the way that senior examiners structure language so that their own perspective becomes clear to an examiner, and common ground is established.

What will the presentation contribute to the further development of our scientific tradition?

The interpersonal and contextualised notion of communication implicit to this study has methodological implications. I seek to build on the notion of *Sociocultural Discourse Analysis* developed by Mercer and colleagues (Mercer 2004; Littleton and Mercer 2013). This approach has been used to explore how talk in face-to-face situations supports the sharing of personal outlook and influences the development of participants' thinking.

What will be presented?

My study explores whether talk type features also transfer to examiners' remote written and spoken discourse, and seeks to identify features of feedback that may be considered to be effective at remotely aligning examiners' perspectives. In total, these data include 990 feedback interactions, including both email and telephone discourse. To analyse these data I employ methods informed by Conversation Analysis, Thematic Content Analysis, and Corpus Linguistics. This mixed methodology helps to ensure a rich analysis that involves both inductive and deductive elements.

To whom is the presentation particularly relevant?/What will the audience get from hearing the presentation?

In the first instance I aim to use the study findings to raise the feedback giving expertise levels of senior examiners who have responsibilities for supporting the practices of others. In a more general sense, these findings could be used to support the feedback on performance practices for those who work in other professional environments where remote interactions are used as a mechanism for inducting new members into a community of practice.

References

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