

Feedback Strategies to Support Student Learning of Sociological Concepts

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Class Size

490

Discipline

Sociology

Feedback Approaches

Exemplars, Peer Feedback,
Generic Video Feedback

Technologies

Padlet, Moodle, Camtasia

Challenge & Aim

I teach a large first year Sociology class of approximately 500 students entitled Global Society. The module is assessed almost entirely through a terminal written exam and past experience suggested that students struggle to comprehend key concepts, theoretical frameworks and terminology used to understand processes and dynamics of globalization. The challenge of the large class context together a lack of continuous assessment and exam only assessment restricts opportunities for student feedback and ways to gauge student learning and progress.

The aim of this case study was to employ a range of technology-enabled feedback approaches including exemplars, in-class feedback, peer feedback, and generic video feedback in order to increase participation in a large class context and provide more ongoing opportunities for feedback and dialogue to help support student understanding of sociological concepts and language.

Evidence from the Literature

Feedback when provided in a timely, appropriate and consistent manner can enhance student learning in significant ways, even in the largest class contexts (Carless, 2015; Boud et al 2013; O' Regan, et al 2016). Research on how to improve student engagement and performance in large class contexts in sociology suggests the efficacy of technology to foster feedback opportunities

that enhance the learning environment as well as student learning (Wright and Lawson, 2005). Padlet, in particular, as a technological tool has significant potential for supporting feedback opportunities yet must be used with clear objectives and instructions (Atwood, 2014; Ellis, 2015).

Feedback Approach

Concept Wall Activity

Student engagement and in-class feedback were facilitated through the use of Padlet – an online post-it wall. How it worked...

A list of key terms were posted on Moodle and students were invited to choose a term and then post a definition in their own words accompanied with a real world example and an illustrative image, video or file.

To support student activity completion and to clarify expectations, I provided two exemplars, one representing a 'poor' effort and the other a 'superior' effort along with guidelines to orient students.

Student developed their definitions postings individually and then posted them on the relevant Padlet Wall. All students had access to all concept walls and could view (not edit) other student posts. In addition, student posts were anonymous.

In class, students provided peer feedback on student posts via small group activities. Class discussion and teacher feedback

was also provided in-class in order to highlight exemplars and clarify any student misunderstandings that emerged.

Generic/Whole Class Video Feedback

A tutorial written assignment required students to trace a product across its commodity chain focusing on the lives of workers and the conditions of employment. An exemplar was provided to clarify expectations of what constituted a 'good' assignment. Generic video feedback was provided to the whole class via Moodle in order to provide timely summary feedback to the group and support feedforward for the exam. To create the video feedback, I created a PowerPoint presentation and recorded the video using Camtasia and it was posted on Moodle for students.

Feedback Approach

Muddiest Point

Padlet was used towards the end of the semester to solicit questions/muddiest point-exercise to get feedback from the students on what areas they were most unclear about in the module. Students created posts anonymously a few days in advance of class. The Padlet

wall served as the basis for a subsequent in-class topic and pre-exam review. The Padlet postings enabled me to assess the level of understanding and sources of difficulty students experienced with the module materials and address them within the exam-review class.

Outcomes

Overall, I found these approaches helpful when class time is limited and material is abstract or new. It promoted additional opportunities for dialogue, and peer review provided students with a safe space to rehearse their understanding in task and revise or refine their learning of key concepts.

The Padlet postings by students accomplished an important pedagogical task: they illustrated gaps in understanding and a lack of precision regarding key terms and concepts in the discipline. This allowed me to pro-actively address these issues in subsequent lectures.

The video feedback, which was viewed by the majority of students (2330 unique page views), at least once was effective in supporting the work of tutors and ensuring consistent feedback across the class. It also preserved valuable lecture time and increased opportunities for dialogue and student engagement in a large class context.

Student Response

In particular, Padlet was well-received by the students. The technological and visual elements seemed appeal to students and it is helpful when

class time is limited and material is abstract or new to first year students. In particular, students reported that they revised their class notes based both on the postings of other students as well as our class discussions.

One student commented:

"I began to think more about what the terms actually mean rather than just vague ideas of them"

"Students engaged well to the Muddiest Point Padlet activity. The anonymity appealed to students with one student noting that"

"This proved a very interactive way for people to ask questions and the anonymity made it easy to ask questions"

Recommendations

Recommend the use of Padlet and in lecture engagement activities as way of gauging student understanding and providing on-going feedback. Padlet tips include:

- Provide clear instructions and guidelines for Padlet use. Some student posts were

inappropriate. Padlet posts should remain anonymous but instructors need to post rules and guidelines for posting.

- Not all students engaged with the Padlet activity as it was an anonymous ungraded activity. Reinforcing the connection between the feedback and exam performance may address this. Alternatively, transforming this activity into an assessed activity could improve engagement but would also create a significant workload.

References

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