

What lies beneath: exploring the deeper purposes of feedback on student writing through considering disciplinary knowledge and knowers

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Abstract

Feedback plays an integral role in students' learning and development, as it is often the only personal communication that students have with tutors or lecturers about their own work. Yet, in spite of its integral role in student learning, there is disagreement between how students and tutors or lecturers perceive the pedagogic purpose of feedback. Central to this disagreement is the role that feedback has to play in ensuring that students produce the 'right' kinds of knowledge, and become the 'right' kinds of knowers within their disciplines. This paper argues that, in order to find common ground between students and tutors or lecturers on what feedback is for, and how to both give and use it effectively, we need to conceptualise disciplinary knowledge and knowers anew. We offer, as a useful starting point, the Specialisation dimension of Legitimation Code Theory as both practical theory and methodological tool for exploring knowledge and knowers in English Studies and Law as two illustrative cases. The paper concludes that this analysis offers lecturers and tutors a fresh understanding of the disciplinary knowledge and knower structures they work within and, relatedly, a clearer view of the work their feedback needs to do within these.

Introduction

Feedback plays an integral role in students' learning and development, because it can make the tacit expectations of a discipline explicit, which aids in students becoming successful learners. Yet, in spite of its integral part in student learning, there is dissonance at times between how tutors or lecturers and students perceive and make use of feedback as a learning tool. There may be misperceptions about the implicit and explicit goals of the discipline in terms of student learning, and, consequently, the pedagogic role feedback should play. These misperceptions can lead to a misalignment of feedback practices to their underlying purpose, and therefore lead to the given feedback being confusing for, or even unusable by, students trying to improve their writing. Much research has been done exploring student perceptions of feedback, as well as how students' and tutors' perceptions may differ on what is considered to be useful and effective feedback (in this study, tutor refers to a senior postgraduate student who facilitates tutorials, which students attend in addition to lectures and other teaching activities). This paper will begin with an overview of the most relevant or widely cited literature exploring tutor and student perceptions of the roles, purposes and methods of giving feedback. These perceptions of feedback are connected to the

