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Direct vs. Anonymous Feedback: Teacher Behavior in Higher Education, with Focus on Technology Advances

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Abstract

The paper aims at analyzing how feedback and valuations from students impact on the behavior of the teacher. It offers a broad view on the effectiveness of feedback, based on the direct experience of the author, and the discussions and interviews held in the previous years with other faculties. What follows is an in depth analysis of the students reaction to various learning approaches and how their opinion and feedback are formed. The behavior of teachers is then described, according to the actual feedback received by the students, especially relating to how the form of feedback influences the will of the instructor to accept and implement it. A description of the role of technology is taken into account then, with in depth analysis of the impact of such a methodology on the general behavior of the teacher. The conclusion is that higher education is characterized by high sensitivity on both sides. Students can reveal strong and even harsh opinions, which are usually followed by well determined reactions by the teacher in terms of the adjustments made to the course structure and teaching material.

1. Introduction

It is pretty clear how higher education plays a major role in spreading knowledge and economic competitiveness around the globe. Education is at the basis of improvement of employment skills and institutions are called to contribute to that target.

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The Bologna Process stands as a primary debate about regulation and incentives, setting the rules of competition among private and public institutions, towards the target of high quality teaching (OECD 2009).The scientific society is primarily concerned with the quality of programs offered in the context of high competition. Public internal and international rankings help to distinguish the best universities. The main issue in valuing educational institutions is the high weight that research plays in that valuation. Is it then fair to assume that a high rank institution may deliver high quality teaching? Or is the ranking barely assigned in name of high standard research outputs? These questions are at the basis of higher education valuation and institutions assessment. And the issue is transferred to the valuation of the single course or teacher, which stands as the focus of the paper. There are empirical ways to foster quality in teaching, and are characterized by the direct intervention of the institution time by time, besides the contribution of the literature, which plays a marginal role. Technology plays a big role in improving pedagogy and connections among students, and the teaching benefits from the support of modern means of communication and knowledge distribution. Quite much has been done in terms of how students react and valuate the quality of teaching, but not much has been said about how the teachers themselves absorb the criticisms they receive, and how they implement them. The aim of the paper is to give an overview of the behavioral aspects involved in the reception of both direct and anonymous feedbacks by students, with the focus on how teachers valuate them, and how the two-ways interaction between teacher assessment of students and student feedback to teacher builds into an equilibrium of some kind.

The matter is then put in the framework of technology support for teaching valuations and feedback delivery, in order to assess the actual system and conclude about the behavioral aspects of the online valuation platforms. Based on the personal experience of the author during the last eight years of teaching major courses to master students in finance, the theory is then applied to real cases and actual feedbacks received in the years. The first section is devoted to a review of the concept of constructive alignment as a mean of construction of trust between the teacher and the students. Second section deals with the perception of teaching by the students and how this can translate into actual learning. The third section focuses on the differences between direct and anonymous feedback. The fourth part of the papers is about how the different means of feedback impact on the behavior of the teacher. Finally, some conclusions are provided on the role of teachers' behavior in the development of education.

2. The Students Perception of Teaching

It has been empirically determined that effective teaching has direct and measurable impact on the overall learning experience. In particular it enhances active involvement of students fostering their understanding through experience, application, practice and reflection (Kember et al, 2008). A good curriculum planning also provides a well-organized structure with defined goals, learning objectives and standards for performance (Knight, 2001), with the open opportunity for students to receive frequent feedback, contributing to a complete learning experience. Assessment assumes a particular role in that it anticipates what the ground for the following feedback from students will be. There are some points one may consider when exploring options on how to assess students.

First of all the method of assessment has a crucial impact on the learning experience, in that it may encourage or discourage some common behavior of the students, like believing that surface learning will suffice. Students perceive learning as a sum of many pieces composing the overall learning experience. Since they are mostly interested in the assessment, the paper aims at discussing further openings in the range of possible methodology for students examination (Lizzio et al 2002). Moreover one should consider that different skills are measured by different assessment methods. This is why it is recommendable to use a mix of methodologies in order to assess all aspects of the learning. Getting access to a potentially wide range of competencies and skills, the instructor can form a better opinion on the student's preparation, challenging the latter besides the disadvantage given by a particular assessment method. The issue of the variety of assessments poses also an issue in terms of how many teachers should take care of the examination, given that it is very unlikely for only one teacher to be expert in all of those (Brown et al. 1994).This is the most difficult aspects of multi-method assessment, in that it is much more common that a single person, usually the responsible for the whole course, will be assessing the students. The new way to fair and correct assessment could then be for example collegial preparation of the assessment material, with one or more meetings having place towards the half of the course in order to start a brainstorming about the best possible examination to give. Only few institutions in the world use this methodology as a common practice, and in the