



Feedback Board: An Innovative Way to Adapt Classroom Teaching

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ABSTRACT

There is much discussion in the literature on the effectiveness of end of semester summative evaluations of teaching and those who teach. Educators cite many reasons why they are dissatisfied with summative student evaluations, but the most significant issues are related to the lack of specific constructive feedback, poor response rates, and lack of student engagement. Whereas, formative student feedback provided throughout the semester has been proven more effective at improving student learning and outcomes. Formative feedback provides educators with an opportunity to adjust teaching practices throughout the semester in response to student feedback thus creating a learner-center learning environment. The purpose of this article is to present the “Feedback Board” as means to collect formative feedback from students at the end of each class session throughout the semester and its role in improving learning.

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Student evaluation of teaching is the most frequent form of assessment of faculty competence and teaching performance in higher education (Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Emerson & Records, 2007; Lyde, Grieshaber, & Byrns, 2016; Ruiz-Primo & Brookhart, 2018; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). Students typically fill out faculty evaluations on teaching effectiveness at the end of the semester (Annan, Tratnack, Rubenstein, Metzler-Sawin, & Hulton, 2013; Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Brickman, Gormally, & Martella, 2016; Cleary, Happell, Lau, & Mackey, 2013; Patka, Wallin-Ruschman, Wallace, & Robbins, 2016). Often, these surveys are a measure of student satisfaction rather than teaching quality, and concerns for their validity and reliability have been extensively discussed in the literature (Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Colley, 2012; Emerson & Records, 2007; Jimaa, 2013; Lyde, Grieshaber, & Byrns, 2016; Ruiz-Primo & Brookhart, 2018; Winchester & Winchester, 2012; Wolf, Bender, Beitz, Wieland, & Vito, 2004). Despite faculty concerns related to their reliability, these evaluations have continued to be used in the determination of promotion and tenure (Annan et al., 2013; Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Brickman et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2013).

Even though the summative end-of-semester student evaluation has proven to be a poor indicator of teaching effectiveness or student learning, faculty still place great value in student feedback and input (Annan et al., 2013; Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Brickman et al.,

2016; Cleary et al., 2013). Faculty will review and reflect on student feedback to make improvements in instructional strategies. It is unfortunate that this feedback is often given to educators weeks after the semester has ended, and any changes to instruction would not benefit the student who gave the feedback (Annan et al., 2013; Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Brickman et al., 2016; Cleary et al., 2013; Patka et al., 2016). As a result, the delayed summative feedback negates any opportunity for improvement related to teaching practices and/or student learning outcomes throughout the semester (Patka et al., 2016).

If faculty had an opportunity to receive formative student feedback throughout the semester, teaching effectiveness may be enhanced (Bedggood & Donovan, 2012; Patka et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012). Whereas faculty are considered content and instructional experts, the student is the expert at “sitting in classes, understanding new concepts, and creating their own learning” (Cook-Sather & Motz-Storey, 2016; Sorenson, 2001, p 179). The purpose of this article is to describe the feedback board, an innovative strategy that encourages anonymous formative student feedback on an ongoing basis to improve teaching practices and student outcomes.

Background

The goal of a summative evaluation is to evaluate learning at the end of a course and is used to determine the extent to which desired learning outcomes have been achieved (Candela, 2012; McCarthy, 2017). As previously mentioned, for most faculty, the end-of-semester student evaluation is the only measure of faculty competence and

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the sole form of instructional feedback (Bedgood & Donovan, 2012; Brickman et al., 2016; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). The literature is wrought with decades of evidence describing serious limitations with end-of-semester summative student evaluations (Bedgood & Donovan, 2012; Jimaa, 2013; Rowles, 2012; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). Winchester and Winchester (2012) and Bedgood and Donovan (2012) conducted extensive research to specifically examine the intent and purpose of formative and summative feedback in pedagogy. Winchester and Winchester (2012) focused on the student's perspective of formative feedback. They conducted an exploratory study to investigate the student's perception of and use of a weekly formative feedback tool that could be used to support enhanced learning opportunities in the classroom. Their findings indicated that student motivation in completing the weekly survey was a concern but were more apt to submit formative feedback when their input was taken into consideration and discussed at the beginning of the next class.

Bedgood and Donovan (2012) were more concerned with the measurement of student learning and outcomes as a means to improve teaching effectiveness through ongoing formative feedback rather than summative evaluation at the end of the semester. Their research also focused on the development of reliable measurement tools that could be used by administrators to evaluate pedagogy and teacher effectiveness rather than personality traits. They focused on separating and independently measuring the concepts of student opinion and student learning for the purpose of empirically evaluating teaching strategies and/or faculty performance. Through their research, they developed two distinct robust measures that reliably reflect student learning and student satisfaction. These tools provide a means to separate and quantify student outcomes and student satisfaction when evaluating faculty and/or pedagogy.

Summative student evaluations focus on student satisfaction recognizing and rewarding student perceptions of teacher-centered behaviors rather than learning and learner-centered instruction (Brickman et al., 2016). As a result, instructors who attempt to incorporate learner-centered instructional strategies into their courses may see resistance to these efforts reflected in student survey comments and/or declines in their student evaluation scores (Brickman et al., 2016; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). Faculty who are perceived as "hard" receive the lowest student ratings, whereas teachers who are perceived as "easy" receive higher ratings making the student survey a popularity contest (Bedgood & Donovan, 2012; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). Faculty cite many reasons why they were dissatisfied with summative student evaluations, but the most significant issues are (a) the lack of constructive information, (b) poor response rates, (c) the lack of student engagement, and (d) the disconnect between the evaluation survey and the course objectives further reinforcing the lack of useful information to inform instructional change (Brickman et al., 2016; Winchester & Winchester, 2012).

Formative Student Feedback

The goal of a formative evaluation is to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by faculty to improve teaching and/or by students to improve their learning. Formative feedback is focused on improving learning (Rowles, 2012). More specifically, formative assessments will help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need improvement. It will also help faculty recognize when and where students are having difficulty with course content and provide an immediate opportunity to reevaluate teaching and learning strategies to support student learning (Candela, 2012; McCarthy, 2017). Formative evaluation is a powerful diagnostic tool when used effectively. It has the capacity to help faculty and students identify opportunities for improvement in the course and maximize student

learning outcomes (Candela, 2012; McCarthy, 2017). High-quality and timely feedback for formative evaluation is a fundamental factor in improving student learning and developing faculty–student relationships (McCarthy, 2017).

Golding and Adam (2016) conducted a study to examine how teachers use student evaluations to improve their teaching. They identified three common themes that the best rated teachers used to approach and assess student feedback: reflective, formative, and student centered. They called it the *improvement approach* of feedback evaluation. The key to the success of these teachers was the ability to receive formative, not summative feedback, and to maintain a reflective open mind with a student-centered approach to improve learning outcomes.

Iterative Formative Student Feedback

Iterative, ongoing, or continual formative student feedback throughout a course is much more effective at improving teaching and instructional pedagogy and student learning and student outcomes than the summative end of the semester evaluations (Palazzo, Westmoreland, & Salvatierra, 2016; Rowles, 2012). A feedback that can occur during a course is much more effective at improving teaching and pedagogy and, therefore, student learning outcomes (Palazzo et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012; Winchester & Winchester, 2012). Ongoing formative student evaluation provides faculty with immediate feedback and insight to the efficacy of their teaching. Information gleaned from ongoing formative student evaluations would provide concurrent information allowing teachers to reflect on how to modify instruction for upcoming classes to best meet the learning needs of the students (Palazzo et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012; Winchester & Winchester, 2012).

Patka et al. (2016) conducted a study to evaluate the efficacy of ongoing formative evaluation using "exit cards" with undergraduate students enrolled in two separate research classes. They found that, although summative evaluation was important, the information and opportunities gleaned from formative evaluations throughout the course provided faculty with opportunities to make adjustments in teaching strategies and improve the course based on student feedback. In contrast to summative evaluations, formative evaluations have the potential to directly improve learning outcomes because feedback occurs while instruction is still in process (Patka et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012). Exit cards were used as a means to document class attendance, and students were given participation points for completing the reflection exercise. At the end of each class, students were asked to complete and submit short reflections written on index cards that focused on four questions: (a) What did you learn today? (b) What are you confused about? (c) What hindered your learning? (d) What helped your learning? If three or more students wrote that they were confused with the material, the faculty would review the contentious content at the beginning of the next class. The "Exit Cards forced faculty to adapt instruction to our students' level of understanding rather than our own instructional agenda" (Patka et al., 2016, p. 665).

An ongoing formative student evaluation has broad-reaching benefits to the faculty and the students. It creates an environment of inclusivity and trust where students feel respected and connected to the teacher. Learning becomes fluid in a highly flexible, highly responsive environment (Palazzo et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012). Despite overwhelming evidence to support the efficacy of formative student evaluation to inform pedagogy and improve student outcomes, the practice has not been widely accepted in higher education in the United States (Patka et al., 2016; Rowles, 2012).

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