Students‘ responses to academic feedback provided via MP3 audio files

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Aims

- To consider students' responses to the provision of feedback in MP3 format
- To consider how students use feedback when it is provided in MP3 format and how this usage might differ from their the use of conventional written feedback
- To explore the practical feasibility of providing feedback to students via MP3 audio files

Introduction

- Providing feedback is time consuming for academics (Carless *et al.,* 2006) yet that feedback may not be effectively used by all students (Higgins *et al.,* 2002)
- Students need to develop the ability to use feedback (Sadler, 1989)
- The form in which students receive information may influence their ability to assimilate it (Flemming, 2007)
- Electronic means of delivering student feedback (e.g. Pitt & Gunn, 2004) may meet many of the requirements for effective feedback outlined in Brown *et al.* (2003)
- “Think-aloud reading” (Shriver, 1992) enhances writers awareness of the needs of their audience
- Electronic forms of feedback may be more easily archived and distributed for quality assurance purposes

Method

- 15 self-selected Human Biological Sciences students
  - 9 Level 2 and 6 Level 3 students
  - 11 full time and 4 part time students
- Feedback as mp3 audio files was provided on formative submission of draft written work
  - MP3 files were generated on a desktop PC using freeware
  - MP3 files were sent to the students by e-mail
- Semi-structured interviews of all students within 3 weeks of receipt of feedback
  - Interviews focused on interpretation and implementation of feedback

Results

Students' response was very positive

'I mean feedback's good anyway, but if it's more helpful then it's better all round'

'It seemed more conversational'

'Found myself listening to it three or four times'

'Could pause and think with the audio'

'Audio can convey more complex thoughts than written'

'[audio] is more practical'

BUT

- The student's were a self-selected group
- The experience was novel for them

Results

Students' comprehension of audio feedback [clarification (Orsmond *et al.*, 2005)]

- Detail

'This feedback was quite longer than I expected, but on written feedback it can be just a few ticks, It looks really rushed. Not much to it'

'*If they're writing it down, you can only write down a few comments, but when it's spoken you've got so much more time and things like that, to say what you want to say and get across to the student what you mean'*

- Understanding

'Tone of voice conveyed information as to whether the changes [needed] were minor or major'

'Circles and question marks written are difficult to interpret'

'The spoken word meant more than words on a piece of paper'

- Legibility

Results

Students' usage of audio feedback

[learning, reflection, motivation (Orsmond *et al.*, 2005)]

- Learning

'I think "yes", I know what you mean". I understand…..whereas reading the written feedback I did not really understand how to do it'

'in speaking you can hear the thought processes'

'[audio feedback] sticks more than written'

- Reflection

'*Hearing somebody say that to you, you do go away and um have something to eat and think about what's been said whereas you read it and it doesn't fit, it doesn't seem to ring quite the same…you've got somebody's words in your head'*

- Transferability

'It seems like written feedback just goes with one essay, but the audio feedback could go with other essays as well'

Results

Providing feedback via mp3 audio files is feasible

- Staff are interested
- It can be done

BUT

- MP3 files were 6–11Mb
  - Large to e-mail, but could be posted on a VLE
  - Downsizing by reducing recording quality could make them less “personal”
- Did not save staff time, but it might do so with more practice

Conclusions

- MP3 audio files can enhance the quality of student feedback
  - Students perceive and implement MP3 audio feedback in different and more meaningful ways
- MP3 feedback is feasible, but may not save staff time

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