Investigating different types of criteria-based assessment through student data: towards optimization of assessment designs

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2013

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Investigating different types of criteria-based assessment through student data: towards optimization of assessment designs

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Introduction
Currently, there is a trend in higher education towards formative assessment practice in the hope that assessment can serve as a feedback tool for learning rather than of learning (Hannell et al. 2006). In this context, criteria-based assessment is often advocated on the argument that it provides students with transparency and clear articulation of learning goals – facilitating deep approaches to learning. Crosby (2006, 2009) states that formative assessment practices, our study presents and discusses the role of different types of assessment and feedback channels in the assessment of student data. We look at three sources of data for triangulation of data collection methods: reflective texts, student data, and feedback. We used action research methodology to investigate our own practice. Students connected the two forms of feedback to different learning goals – facilitating deep approaches to learning. In-text commentary was experienced as referring to lower-order concerns, while rubric-articulated feedback emphasized higher-order concerns related to writing development achievement. Further, students generally found that both channels were necessary, but even though we tried to balance comments in the two feedback channels, some students experienced difficulties in navigating between feedback channels. Thus, there is room for improvement and optimization of the assessment design.

Aim and research questions
In light of the challenges involved in designing successful formative assessment practices, our study presents and evaluates an assessment design in a first-year university writing class for academic purposes. The set-up combines two types of criteria-based assessment: in-text commentary and rubric-articulated feedback. We asked the following research questions:

- How do students understand, integrate and act on the feedback channels? In-text commentary and rubric-articulated feedback?
- Are there benefits in a combination of feedback channels or would just one suffice?
- How effective is the current assessment design for a combining the two feedback channels?

Method and Material
We used action research methodology to investigate our own professional practice through systematic and reflective study of student data. We looked at three sources of data for triangulation of data collection methods: reflective texts, student data, and feedback. Students connected the two forms of feedback to different learning goals – facilitating deep approaches to learning. In-text commentary was experienced as referring to lower-order concerns, while rubric-articulated feedback emphasized higher-order concerns related to writing development achievement. Further, students generally found that both channels were necessary, but even though we tried to balance comments in the two feedback channels, some students experienced difficulties in navigating between feedback channels. Thus, there is room for improvement and optimization of the assessment design.

Looking ahead
As a way of looking forward, we list a number of strategies for creating synergy effects between the two feedback-channels, with the aim of generating an assessment strategy serving both short-term and long-term learning outcomes:

- Supplement in-text commentary and rubric-articulated feedback with a third feedback type that can serve as a bridge, e.g. recorded oral feedback or screen caption.
- Color code in-text commentary to the rubric category it corresponds to.
- Ask students to write reflective texts on the relation between the two feedback types received.
- Ask students to write a short memo describing changes made between drafts.
- Time self-assessment differently for a more gentle introduction of this activity.
- Follow-up early assessment activities with teacher-student discussions of feedback.

Literature


Further information
Part of the study was funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfonds.