

Marking students' essays "face to face", a way to improve NSS scores on feedback?

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Introduction

In 1978, Harold Good¹ argued for a "modest re-allocation of teaching time into interview marking" in which the exam script was marked in conference with the student who wrote it. This seems a radical proposal in an era of anonymous marking and increasing class sizes, but it's a proposal which we felt was worth investigating, since marking of work takes up staff time away from the student, and students regularly request better feedback. This seemed a way of bring the two together and giving tutor and student a chance to engage in two way communication²

Method

1. Students signed up for a 10 minute meeting with one of 3 members of staff.
2. Module leader gave tutors the relevant essays.
3. All essays marked according to the same marking criteria.
4. "Face to face" marking allowed discussion of reasons for marks given, but not negotiation of marks. Students could take notes.
5. Student left meeting with essay, marking criteria sheet and mark.

Results

Results in Table 1 indicate that, although there is some evidence that the better students selected the "face to face" sessions, there is also evidence that the markers were more likely to give higher marks to these students.

Table 1: Results

	"face to face" marking	Anonymous essay marking	Difference between the means (t-test) p value
Mark for essay	72.1% (n = 45)	63.4% (n = 160)	$P < 0.001$
Mark for an independent test	80.2%	77.1%	$p = 0.12$
Mark for module	73.8%	68.2%	$P < 0.001$

Student feedback

"I think that getting the automatic response to the essay is more informative than written comments. You can focus on each aspect of the essay individually which is more informative than generic comments."

"It made it much clearer where I had gone wrong, and it was really good to hear positive remarks, I feel it really boosted my confidence in my skills. It was also nice to meet tutors on a closer basis."



Written feedback is helpful, however the main limitation is that you can't question the marks or results and such like. I preferred the face to face session much more, and found it much more useful."

Discussion

Despite apparent inflation of marks, the team felt that the benefits in terms of feedback, (detailed and within two weeks of submission), make this worth pursuing, and extending into other years. This method took no more time to mark the essays than if done in the traditional way.

¹Good, H (1978). Interview Marking of Examination Scripts. *Assessment in Higher Education* 3(2): 122-138

²Dowden T, Pittaway S, Yost H, McCarthy R (2011). Students' perceptions of written feedback in teacher education: ideally feedback is a continuing two-way communication that encourages progress. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*: 1-14 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2011.632676>