"To learn or not to learn" from formative assessment and formative feedback? What the literature says

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“To learn or not to learn” from formative assessment and formative feedback? What the literature says.

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Research Festival – March 2009
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Aims

To disseminate learning and findings from the early stages of my EdD research project such that:

- Learning in respect of the **process** and findings is shared
- Awareness is raised in relation to the subject matter
- Discussion is generated and questions are raised to help me develop the research project
Outline

- Background and rationale
- Literature search
- Literature review
- Ethical approval
- Key issues
- Next steps
Ability to make decisions, problem-solve and [clinically] reason is paramount to graduate practice and professional integrity.

How are these skills learned?

What specific learning opportunities have influenced this learning?

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2006: 20) “…appropriate and timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement…”
Best Learning Strategies?

- “Trial and error” learning is essential to the learning process
  - Race (1994)

- “Trial and error” learning is ineffective, unnecessary and unhelpful
  - Sadler (1989)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback have the ability to encourage an individual to change and modify their activities to promote ongoing learning
  - Black and Williams (1998)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback directly influence learner motivation
  - Brown (1999); MacMillan and McLean (2005); Race (2005); Irons (2008)

- Learners do not always use feedback
  - Irons (2008)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback is reliant upon, in part, the learner’s motivation to reduce this mismatch between actual and expected performance
  - Biggs (1998)

- Assessment strategies can precipitate a strategic and tactical learning approach such that learners aim to understand the “rules of the game”
  - Norton (2007)

- Formative assessment and formative feedback nurture the summative assessment process, especially when the theory/skill being learned is new
  - McAlpine (2004)

- Feedback can have the most powerful single effect on achievement
  - Rushton (2005)
Aim of the Study

- To investigate the worth attributed to formative assessment and formative feedback by learners
  - Discover the impact of formative assessment and formative feedback on the trajectory of learning
  - Correlation between the learner and educator’s view of its role?
What do I hope to achieve?

- Uncover the extent to which learners and educators **truly** understand their responsibilities, and those of other stakeholders, with respect to formative assessment and formative feedback within higher education
  - Students are supported along their individual learning continuum
  - Staff are educated, supported and guided
Definitions

- **Formative assessment** is “any task or activity which creates feedback (or feedforward) for students about their learning”

- **Formative feedback** is “… any information, process or activity which affords or accelerates student learning based on comments …”

  *Irons (2008: 7)*
Theoretical Position and Research Paradigm

- Inductive position
- Interpretive paradigm
- Flexible

“...capture, interpret and explain how a group [of students] ... experience and make sense [of formative assessment and formative feedback] ...” (Robson, 2002: 89)
Central Research Question

What is the value and impact of formative assessment and formative feedback to the learning experience of students?

- What worth do learners and educators place on formative assessment and formative feedback within and across the learning spectrum?
- What role does formative assessment and formative feedback play in the “teaching” experience of the educator?
- Is there difference or similarity between the worth placed on formative assessment and formative feedback by learners and educators?
- Is there difference or similarity between practice-based educators and university-based educators as to the role and merit of formative assessment and formative feedback?
- How is formative assessment and formative feedback used to support the summative assessment process across the spectrum of education?
- What are the key features of formative assessment and formative feedback across education and how can these be implemented more widely?
Literature Search Strategy

- Search Terms:
  - Formative assessment (FA)
  - Formative feedback (FFB)
  - Learning (L)
  - Formative evaluation (FE)

- Search Dates:
  - January 1998 – March 2009

Koh (2008)

Black and Wiliam (1998)
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The Literature: the favourable

- Reactivate/consolidate prerequisite skills/knowledge
- Focus attention on important aspects
- Encourage active learning strategies
- Give opportunity to practice skills and consolidate learning
- Provide knowledge of outcomes
- Provide corrective feedback
- Help students monitor their own progress
- Develop self-evaluation skills
- Encourage self-regulated learning
- Guide the choice of ongoing learning activities
- Help students feel a sense of accomplishment
- Develop deep thinking and deep learning
- Maintain motivation and self-esteem
- Encourage employability skills
The Literature: the less favourable

- Encourage a surface learning approach
  - Gijbels and Dochy (2006)

- Promote “assessment careers”

- Encourage rote learning
  - Irons (2008)

- Promote overconfidence

- Be unnecessary once the summative marks are known
  - Sinclair and Cleland (2007)

- Poor achievers are less likely to seek formative feedback
  - Smith and Gorard (2005)

- Be inhibitory to student progress

- Be underutilised by the learner
  - Covic and Jones (2008)

- Be useless without summative assessment
  - Taras (2009)

- Conflict with learning cultures
  - Davies and Ecclestone (2008)

- Under-resourced area of higher education
Ethical Approval

- National Research Ethics Service (NRES)
- Lengthy
- +/- local R&D Departments
Key Issues

- Need to look across the spectrum of education
- Considering the same
- Keep to task
Next Steps

- British Education Index search to complete first literature search
- Ongoing - read and review the literature
- Complete NRES application and submit for approval
- Schedule of work and timeframes
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