

Giving feedback (Optional Module 1 - LAOS)

In the youtube video there was a learning assistant named Mike and four students from different studies. Mike is interviewing them regarding feedback. First he asks them: “what is feedback?”, second: “what is the purpose of feedback?”, third: “what is good feedback?”, and fourth: “what is bad feedback?”. At last he asks: “how do you use your feedback in your studies?”. In the extension of the topic “Giving feedback”, I will discuss the statement in this exercise: “We judge too much and too powerfully, not realising the extent to which students experience the power over them (Weaver, 2006, p. 381).

The statement itself, as it stands, makes a fair good point, as it happens that feedback from an inexperienced learning assistant without having reflected on its own communication skills, may give feedback that are “too harsh” from the students perspective. For instance, if the learning assistant tell the student that “his/her essay consists of bad language”, but should have formulated the feedback in another way that is less direct. Instead the learning assistant could have mentioned that “the essay shows signs of weak academic language”. In that sense, the learning assistant is more indirect by using the word “essay” instead of “his or her”, and then avoid criticizing the person. Another point here, is that the words “bad language” may be formulated better by saying “ weak academic language”. This example may be linked to Weavers (2006) point on feedback that focuses on the negative rather than the positive, which generates unproductive work, frustration and demotivates students. As a solution Weaver (2006) suggests that learning assistants should seek more balanced feedback, first by bringing up something positive and then some negative comments. This could also be connected to what the students in the video said about good and bad feedback. That the feedback a learning assistant gives to students should be good so that the students can feel some academic confidence. Being a learning assistant can be quite difficult when it comes to giving feedback. As in my case when some students in groups of three asked me to read their text before handing it in. The two first texts was brilliant in both content, structure, academic language and referencing, but the last groups text lacked some of the academic language and content in comparison. After having read their text I had to come up with something positive, and told them they had an interesting topic and good structure, but could have implemented more theories to improve the text.

I think that if I had not been giving them some positive feedback in that lesson, they might have been demotivated and frustrated over the situation, and would not have understood how to improve the text. And if I had left them with no further concrete feedback on how to improve, they might also have taken my feedback as a harsh critic of their text. So in that case I understand how feedback from a learning assistant can be experienced as too powerful and making the students not realising how much feedback can have power over them.