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LEARNING, TEACHING + TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

An Evaluation of Formative Audio Feedback within Part Time Professional Development Programmes in DIT

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An Evaluation of Formative Audio Feedback within Part Time Professional Development Programmes in DIT

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Evidence from the literature indicates that learners often view feedback in terms of assessment only, even though it can play an important role in improving engagement and consolidating and enriching learning. It is well accepted that the feedback strategy used should be appropriate to the purpose and context of the work, but in order for feedback to be truly helpful, it needs to be goal-referenced, tangible, transparent, actionable, user-friendly (specific and personalized) timely, ongoing and consistent. Technology can play a useful supporting role in achieving this.

This paper explores the impact of formative audio feedback across part time programmes in the Learning Teaching and Technology Centre (LTTC) in DIT. Anticipated benefits were that the audio mode would enable provision of more detailed and clearer feedback as well as the opportunity to use tone of voice to help convey meaning and add a more personal element to engage learners more effectively.

Audio feedback was incorporated within four modules. Generally, individual formative feedback was provided on either one or two occasions. However, for the fully online Supporting Virtual Communities module, weekly audio summaries were recorded providing general feedback on e-activities to the entire cohort of learners.

Many participants were academic staff or were involved in designing and delivering online training and consultancy. Their responses to end-of-module survey questions on their experience of audio feedback and their thoughts on implementing it in their own practice will be discussed. In addition, the perspectives of the LTTC tutors involved will be considered.

This study demonstrates the potential of formative audio feedback to engage learners more effectively in the process of developing and improving on work that is in progress. It also emphasises the value to educators of experiencing this approach as a learner in allowing them to evaluate it for implementation in their own practice.

Themes

- ▶ Audio feedback pilot project
 - ▶ Asynchronous audio formative feedback on draft assignments
 - ▶ MA in Higher Education
 - ▶ MSc Applied eLearning
 - ▶ PG Diploma in Third Level Learning and Teaching
- ▶ Rationale
- ▶ Process
- ▶ Feedback on the feedback!
- ▶ Outcomes and what next



Rationale

- ▶ Crucial for early establishment of participant engagement
- ▶ Enhance quality and participant experience of feedback
- ▶ Can mix audio and typed comments to personalise the experience more
- ▶ Evaluate participant opinion of audio feedback, including how they listen to it, any technological issues, and compare with written feedback component of modules



Participants & Modules



62 postgraduate participants across 3 part time programmes

- ▶ 22(2013-4) & 16 (2014-5) MA in Higher Education

Academic Writing & Publishing module – audio feedback on journal article proposal & final draft

- ▶ 12 Postgraduate Diploma students

Professional Practice in 3rd Level Learning & Teaching module – audio feedback on one formative task within the semester

- ▶ 12 MSc in Applied eLearning

Supporting Virtual Communities module (online) – weekly summaries for the **group** on online activities

Process

- ▶ Equipment:
 - ▶ Digital audio recorder
 - ▶ Microphone attached to computer / device
 - ▶ Mobile phone (set to flight mode!)
- ▶ Software:
 - ▶ Audacity
 - ▶ Free converters e.g. M4A to MP3
- ▶ Keep technical demands on participants to minimum
- ▶ Used own microphone headset



Practicalities



- ▶ **Need quiet space**
- ▶ With handset, flexibility of location (and time)
- ▶ Maximum length of 6 minutes (better if 5 minutes)
- ▶ Good to have a script template with an introduction and categories / headings (can hand write in comments)
- ▶ Use pauses to identify mistakes easily if using an editor (e.g. Audacity)



(See **Sounds Good** guide: Practice Tips on Using Digital Audio for Assessment Feedback, B. Rotherham, Leeds University;

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxzbnZ3VuzHNNb29kdWt8Z3g6M2ZhNTYxZDU5MjM5ZmZiOA>)

Timescale

Best incentive to get started was to have already told our students we were doing it!

Once about 5 feedback files had been recorded, we felt we had become accustomed to the process;

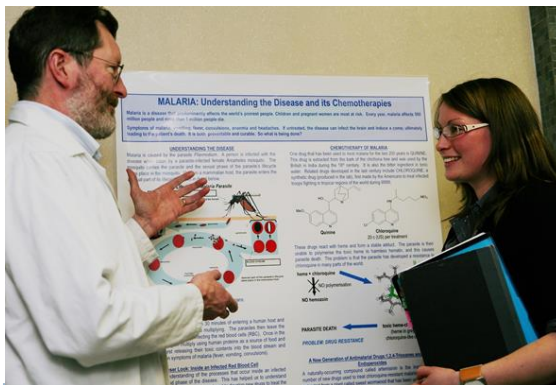
- Read the work and make your own notes (handwritten or using track changes and comments facility on PC)
- Select the aspects you want to focus on (may be easier to add notes to a feedback template sheet)
- Decide whether some written annotations to the work are needed (e.g. an example of a specific change such as citing correctly or rephrasing to improve clarity)
- Record the audio feedback

The intention wasn't to save time, it was to provide more effective feedback while not adding to the time



Results: What Went Well (our perspective)

- ▶ Higher order concerns get focused on more so than in written feedback (global instead of local)
- ▶ Enjoyment/engagement and personal touch
- ▶ Encouraging tone of voice – not easy to incorporate to written feedback



Results: Online Survey [MA(Higher Education)]

Survey implemented both years since introduced (14 responses)



Prior experience

- 11 had not received or given audio feedback before;
- 2 had received audio feedback before
- 1 had provided audio feedback to students already

Was the feedback clear? 9 strongly agreed & 5 agreed

Was the feedback effective? 10 strongly agreed and 4 agreed

Results: What Went Well [MA(Higher Education)]

▶ More personal:

It mimicked a tutorial in such a way that I felt the tutor was doing a one-on-one

Audio feedback was useful. I would consider using it myself

▶ Better understanding / clarity:

I could get the sense of meaning from tone

▶ Better way to receive constructive criticism:

Feedback felt more positive when receiving critical comments which could be viewed as negative when read off a page

▶ Repeated listening / engagement:

I thought the audio feedback works really well. I listened to it, took it in, listened to it again and made a checklist of improvements suggested, and then implemented it

Results: What did not go so well [MA(Higher Education)]

- ▶ Technology anxiety:

I was anxious about the process of being able to access the actual feedback but it wasn't a problem in practice

- ▶ Need to create own written feedback from the audio / Engagement:

I felt I had to transcribe the feedback so that I could keep referring to it. While this was annoying, I came to fully understand it and interacted with it more.

I wrote out the feedback in bullet points: took time.

- ▶ Not searchable and harder to summarise

Scanning through the paper to locate the issues being highlighted was a negative

Results: What Went Well [Diploma]

- ▶ Repeated listening – more inclined to listen more than once:

Easier to 'absorb' the feedback (voice catches an intonation not easily communicated in written form)

- ▶ More engaging:

More personal, and as a student I felt more compelled to properly sit down and listen through the audio clip in its entirety, probably more so than if it was traditional written feedback [...] some tones and emphases may be hard to convey effectively in writing, but when communicated orally may be a lot clearer

I can hear intonation and listening requires less effort than reading

This is certainly something I'd consider using myself

Results: What did not go so well [Diploma]

- ▶ Fear factor:

Afraid of getting bad news

- ▶ Less effective?

- ▶ cannot ask for clarification as in conversation
- ▶ ..but equally cannot interact with it as you would written feedback

- ▶ Tendency to create their own written feedback from the audio:

- ▶ easier to refer back to this and scan than to listen to full clip again

- ▶ Not searchable and harder to summarise

Higher cognitive load required to identify the relevant points and arrange them yourself

Results: MSc(Applied eLearning)

▶ Flexibility

It was great to have them downloaded to listen to on the train, while walking etc. Quite liked them as a way of prepping for a session

▶ Have adopted:

I thought this was an excellent idea and is something I have already incorporated into my own practice.

Would they implement it themselves?

Are academic staff or design and deliver online / blended training

MA - 7 would but 7 were undecided
PG Diploma – 3 people out of five would



- ▶ Concerns:
 - ▶ time needed to do it
 - ▶ finding suitable space
 - ▶ Issues with following up later?
 - ▶ easier to check written feedback to see whether students have acted on the points
- It would also be more difficult to locate specific feedback points I provided to students if they were only in audio clips*
- ▶ Would use it in cases where there are no instructions for further assessments
 - ▶ (Students could be asked to summarise how feedback was addressed in this situation?)

Outcomes & What Next

- ▶ Personalisation
- ▶ Student choice
- ▶ Screencast instead



- ▶ Issues of scale?

Does seem to take same amount of time as when written feedback is already provided

Further reading & Other Applications

- ▶ Chris Anson www.ansonica.com Will be video on www.dit.ie/lttc soon (DIT, INEW, FACILITATE & Maynooth U. Writing Centre)
- ▶ Sounds Good project- <https://sites.google.com/site/soundsgooduk/>
- ▶ Cavanaugh, A.J. & Song, L. (2014) Audio Feedback versus Written Feedback: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives *MERLOT JOLT* 10(1) [accessed 27th May 2015]
- ▶ McGarvey, D., & Haxton, K. (2011). Using audio for feedback on assessments: tutor and student experiences. (HEA Physical Sciences) *New Directions*, 7, 5-9.
- ▶ iAnnotate app (can write with stylus and add audio comments at particular points on a PDF)
- ▶ IMPALA Project – tips on creating podcasts



Thank You!

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Any questions?



Shameless plug



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