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| **Session Title:** | **Supporting students' learning through a program focusing on formative feedback** |
| **Proposal Type:** | Concurrent Assessed Institutional Initiative Proposal |
| **Session Topic:** | Curriculum and Teaching |
| **Date and Time :** | Monday, February 12, 2018 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM |
| **Session Abstract:** | Designed in order to support learning and success of First-Year students enrolled in the same programs at the University of Liège (Belgium), the « Feedback First-Year Project » has been successively implemented in five different Faculties since its creation in 2013. This structured project consists in providing a customized pedagogical support - teams of advisers made of specialists in instructional sciences and content-domain experts - to the professors in charge of First-Year courses in those schools in order to discuss the opportunity to regulate or optimize some aspects of their teaching (collectively or individually), focusing on their formative feedback practices with Freshmen. |
| **Detailed Summary:** | Aiming to support learning - and corollary chances of success - among First-Year students enrolled in the same curricula at the University of Liège, the « Feedback First-Year Project » (FFYP) was designed by IFRES (Institute for Training and Research in Higher Education) and the Study Guidance Service of the institution. Successively implemented in five different faculties (Applied Sciences; Law, Political Sciences and Criminology; Sciences; Architecture; Veterinary Medicine) since 2013, FFYP is a structured program of pedagogical support directly provided to the professors in charge of First-Year courses in those schools in order to involve them (both individually and collectively) in thinking and acting upon their current approaches to teaching, starting from a theoretical background chosen to promote and enhance formative feedback (and Assessment for Learning) practices in their classes. This focus was favored as feedback is considered as an important support factor for learning and success (e.g., Hattie 2009; National Union of Students 2008) especially in First-Year courses (e.g., Tinto 2012; Bovill, Morss, and Bulley 2008).  To optimize the chance for professors to endorse the project’s objectives and actually apply some of the recommended principles to their practices, the guidance of this reflective work was assigned in each Faculty to a pair of advisers: a specialist in instructional sciences hired by the project’s team, and a content-domain expert appointed by the participating Faculties. This alliance between pedagogy and didactics strengthened program credibility and ensured that the support provided for reflection and action was closely connected to lecturers’ fields. The advisory pair was hosted in the Faculty premises and closely supervised and trained by the project coordinator to support professors’ pedagogical efforts both in groups and individually. Under the project, more than thirty teachers from the university were methodically acquainted with feedback-related issues through structured moments of personal reflection, pedagogical coaching, and collegial meetings, fed by the provision of information, procedures, and illustrations reflecting state-of-the-art literature on the topic.  Explicitly described as a pragmatic and output-oriented project, FFYP resulted in a large series of concrete actions and initiatives undertaken by the involved professors in the service of the instructional quality of formative feedback practices in their first-year courses, such as the creation of very diverse types of new course or program materials, assessments and activities. In order to investigate the way those new resources were used and perceived by the targeted students, specific questionnaires were created and completed for most of them. |
| **Evidence of Assessment:** | Data related to the reception of the project - focusing on its outputs or its main traits - were collected from both the students and the professors’ sides, using various survey instruments (like web-based and paper questionnaires, focus groups or interviews).  As a first step, this communication will focus on data emanating from the answers of students to four selected questionnaires (one for each of the first four Faculties) related to different pedagogical outputs of the project - in four different courses - and specifically designed by the professors involved with the help of the FFYP advisers. Dealing with the way the targeted freshmen had perceived the usefulness of those initiatives or the impact on their motivation and cognitive engagement, those declarative data will be analyzed in parallel.  Secondly, this presentation will discuss the findings of a survey lead through systematic semi-structured interviews conducted with all the involved professors at the end of the process in the first three Faculties (N= 19). This second transversal analysis will especially focus on the way those teachers perceived four main traits of the FFYP structured program (the individual / collective dimension of the process; the « formative feedbacks and Assessment for Learning » entry; the focus on the First-Year courses; the availability and help of the project advisers) and their possible effects on the professors’ willingness to actually commit to the project and regulate their teaching practices. |
| **Implications for Institutional Improvement or Advancement:** | Bearing similarities with AfL related projects like the REAP project (http:// [www.reap.ac.uk/](http://www.reap.ac.uk/)) or the « Keeping Learning on Track » program (Thompson and Wiliam 2007), FFYP turns out to be an inspiring institutional program from a perspective of teacher professional development (for conveying SoTL traits) and especially from a perspective of regulating teaching practices in the benefit of First-Year students. After four years of operation with the first four Faculties, FFYP yielded no less than 65 concrete initiatives, activities or tools that « focus on improving and supporting student learning through teaching practices » (University of Glasgow 2008). These pedagogical outputs can also be considered as practical ways to transfer what the involved teachers learnt within the project about specific challenges of freshmen education, formative feedback practice, and Assessment for Learning. Among those very diverse outputs, a few of them - like a shared digital calendar and a training program for GTA dealing with First-Year students - were designed collectively, but most of them were established at the level of individual courses : ex nihilo or revised formative tests (some experimenting self-assessment or peer assessment features), multiple assignments (allowing students to receive personal feedback if they submitted them), worked examples and reflective documents or grids (conceived as structured opportunities for students to self-reflect on given performances), check-lists of criteria and illustrations of contrasted performances, online devices (using various functionalities of the institutional platform: forums, automated tests, multimedia contents, etc.), interactive question-answer sessions (using for instance electronic voting systems or one minute paper techniques)... Beyond the high rates of satisfaction expressed towards those initiatives by the all the stakeholders in the subjective data (which will be presented during the communication), it will also be interesting to mention here the objective and encouraging participation rates of both Freshmen (to the activities) and their teachers (to the project). |