The concept

QMUL / PMP experience
  - Set-up
  - Aims
  - Process

Findings
  - What we learnt

Conclusion
  - Student feedback

Q & A
**Critical friends: the concept**

- **Organisation / professional development**
  - Participatory approach
  - Not judgemental / asking provocative questions

  ‘...movement away from the expert tradition towards that of the external evaluator as someone who combines the necessary external perspective with a much stronger supportive and developmental role...’  
  
  *(Carlson, 2009)*

- **Building trust**
  - Clear about relationship
  - Good listeners
  - No value judgements / integrity

  ‘...concept of critique often carries negative baggage, a critical friendship requires trust and a formal process.’  
  
  *(Costa & Kallick, 1993)*
Critical friends: the concept

Who?
- Anyone but tutors / assessors / supervisors
- Share goals for development, not background
- Distinguish from helpfulness / sympathy

How?
- Listen closely
- Show detachment
- Show empathy
- Have positive attitude
- Ask provocative questions
- Do not offer solutions

‘...it is impossible to combine the role of assessor and critical friend... your colleague should feel safe and free to explain whatever s/he has in mind without having to think they are being monitored...never be forced to adopt a defensive role...’

(Roosken, 2010)
Critical friends: motivation

- Effort is invested when the estimated probabilities of success and the task value are high

- Assumptions about success or failure determine future behaviour / Judgements regarding skills and capabilities

- Need for solidarity and approval

- Personal worth and value tend to be maintained, esp. under face-threatening circumstances

- Goals underlie human actions and gear behaviours towards achievement

• All we do is behave
• All we control is our behaviour
• All we do is choose behaviours

(Dornyei, 2001)

(Glasser, 1994)
Critical Friends Groups (CFGs)

- Collaborative learning
- Constructive feedback
- Collegial support

- Learner autonomy
- Study skills
- Critical thinking skills
CFGs: the aims

A step towards Academic Culture

- Develop high standards
- Enhance open-mindedness
- Build-up self-confidence
- Overcome unsuitable learning habits
Why groups?

- Shared goals
- Shared responsibility
- Negotiate views / build arguments
- Develop persuasive techniques
- Group as a safety net
- Group as a cohesive unit
CFGs: the experience

- 15 pre-masters students
- 3 groups
- Compact East Asian class
- IELTS: 5.5 at least
- Weak accuracy / fluency
- Focus: Academic Writing
- Same groups throughout the programme
CFGs: the process

Types of tasks
- Essay design
- Summarising
- Evaluating sample writing
- Feedback on writing tasks

Focus
- Line of argument
- Basic essay structure elements
- Varying element / lesson objectives dependent

- Step-by-step guidance
- Strict timing
- Samples of varying quality
- Feedback: 2 versions, student & tutor
- Formal feedback not informed by student feedback
CFGs: the process

- Tutor’s role: facilitator
  - set-up / step-by-step guidance
  - fully inform
  - transfer authority for learning process
  - enhance group responsibility for decisions
  - maintain responsibility for process
  - monitor but not interfere
  - pose problems / raise questions / challenge
Sample student work
Sample student work

Discuss the main reasons why International students in the UK may resort to plagiarism and evaluate possible solutions.

- Different language/second language
- Cultural differences
- Different educational background
- Different academic environments (attitudes, behavior)

Individual perception of plagiarism:
- Evidence: 2000
- Student: provide the view of mentors and guidance
- Teacher: provide the view of mentors and guidance
- Student: provide the view of mentors and guidance
- Teacher: provide the view of mentors and guidance

Review 1: Khome
Review 2: Harel

We need to evaluate plagiarism.

Review 3: Hark

Background:

Themes:
- I will argue that formative solutions to plagiarism have much better results than coercive measures.
CFGs: summary

- Identify errors
- Justify / negotiate opinions
- Make suggestions (not full corrections)
- Reveal flaws in the line of thinking
- Develop argument structure
- Make decisions
What we learnt

- Developing Writing skills
- Critical thinking skills
  - Group dynamics
  - Student’s role
  - Instructor’s role
Skills development

- Final products
  - Initially: no variation within the group
  - Gradually: learn to accept different views
  - Later: insist only on reasonable line of argument

- Process development
  - Taking responsibility
  - Making decisions
  - Gaining respect
  - Developing work standards
Student development

- Developing within the group
  - Views of teamwork
  - Acceptance
  - Empathy
  - Limits

- Developing outside the group
  - Classroom life
  - Study life
  - Personal life
Roles within the group

- Leaders / peacekeepers / energisers / coordinators / followers
- Dominant / shy
- Skydivers / explorers
- Gaining respect

‘...very soon a process of role differentiation begins and a variety of group roles develop [...] Although the emerging roles are not unchangeable [...]...it has been found that roles, once established, tend to persist.’

(Dornyei & Murphey, 2004: 111)
Disagreement / Conflict

- Personalities clash
- Roles clash
- Viewpoints clash

Potential problems: outcasts

‘...an effective way for groups to exercise control over a public display of anger is to develop norms that explicitly prohibit such behaviour.’

(Dornyei & Murphey, 2004: 144)
Variety or Stability?

- Fossilisation

Variety for language tasks
Stability for writing feedback & design
Cross-group feedback tasks

‘Groupthink is evident when loyalty undermines critical thinking, […] members not only suppress their objections but may even reach the point they are unaware of any objections.’

(Dornyei & Murphey, 2004: 71)
Student feedback

Positives

• ‘good for us to exchange ideas’
• ‘the other is easier to see our weakness than ourselves’
• ‘I can get some ideas & opinions’
• ‘easy for us to identified some writing mistakes, and easy to remember’
• ‘not just listen what the teacher said, got more advice from the others, collect more writing style on structure, ideas and so on.’
• ‘make us know each other well and can help each other after class’
• ‘relevant to study and CFG will help us to improve in detail’
• ‘most of time we can discuss in group, during the discussion we must thinking, so it avoid that we just listening but do not thinking’
• ‘improve teamwork skills: how to communicate with other people’
• ‘they have strong ability in different aspect, so when I got problem, I can asked someone help me in specific aspect’
• ‘we can see the working of other people, which can get useful factors from them, it let me know which factors of my working need to improve’
Student feedback

Negatives

• ‘it is hard to discuss, everyone have different opinions, it will spend too much time to discuss’
• ‘taking group members work back home to do is almost impossible’
• ‘some of the questions the group members cannot help’
• ‘limited group members’
• ‘maybe sometime we will waste our time on chatting’
• ‘maybe will separate class into each group, only communicate with our own CFGs’
• ‘become dependent on the set group, sometimes it doesn’t work, not everybody has comments, or say something about the writing work’
• ‘the same group stayed for a bit long time, the exchange connection will from the same people’
• ‘I think we also need more fresh air, that means new members coming that we can have more different ideas’
• ‘when all of us do not know stuff it is not effective’
Student feedback

Would you trust a random group for feedback on your writing / IRP?

• 8/15 avoided responding
• 4/15 would trust feedback from random groups
• 2/15 would partly trust random groups if they were objective and rational
• 1/15 trust only their group (and possibly only few others)
References


Roosken, B. 2010, That’s what friends are for; frequently asked questions and provoking answers, *Teacher Development*, vol. 64, pp 22-24
Q & A
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