

Adapting to class sizes: what feedback fits best?

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Abstract

“One size fits all” is an outmoded paradigm for assessment and feedback. Practitioners must be mindful of the inherent limitations and opportunities that the class size brings when selecting effective methods of assessment and feedback in terms of enhancing the learning experience and as a consequence, increasing student satisfaction.

In this presentation, we share our experiences teaching both small and large classes, with a focus on practices that scale well as the class size increases, as well as those which we found are only practicable with either small or large classes but not both.

Specific assessment examples, both formative and summative are presented, including learner-centred feedback provision, with evidence of levels of student satisfaction. One example under consideration, which has been repeatedly proven successful, refers to the opportunity given to a small class (under 20 students) to submit an early draft of an assignment four weeks before the final submission. Students then receive detailed formative feedback on the topic chosen and their intended scope. The formative feedback includes comments to help students improve their understanding of the chosen topic as well as their development in scientific writing, which are the intended learning outcomes. Another example includes the use of audience response systems (“zappers”), with a large class (over 80 students) using sets facilitated by the Hartley Library and by the Centre for Innovation and Technologies in Education (CITE). CITE’s tutorials for using zappers in lectures were followed for using the TurningPoint software, and additional effort was spent in selecting relevant questions that could use well the technology. This effort was worth investing as it was both satisfactory to students and beneficial to the lecturer to inform the planning of subsequent activities in the large class scenario but was proven as a less effective use of effort in small classes.

Improving student satisfaction with assessment and feedback conference.
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