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# A Participatory Action Research Study on Handwritten Annotation Feedback and Its Impact on Staff and Students

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**Abstract** Annotation was introduced to a United Kingdom (UK) School of Nursing following an institutional audit within a UK University. Handwritten annotation (writing in the margins of student assignments) was introduced to the grading procedure to enhance the quality of student feedback and learning. Once in practice, annotation could be examined and an action research study facilitated the process. Post-qualifying essay scripts were examined for styles of annotation to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Five staff participated in action research to examine staff perceptions of annotation. Findings showed that words or telegraphic signs that stand alone in the margins of a student essay can be seen as abstract signs to the novice reader and need contextualising. If there is a negative tone in the markers' annotation it can be detected by the student and interpreted as unhelpful or disparaging. There are a number of ways of improving annotation, and good practice guidelines are offered in the conclusion to this paper.

**Keywords** Participatory action research · Annotation · Student feedback · Transformative experience

## Introduction

Assessment and feedback is an essential component of all Higher Education teaching (Brown et al. 1997). It is employed to guide and lead the student along a trajectory whereby learning and skill acquisition can occur and be identified (Hyland 2000). There are many feedback styles to suit course content, assessment and context and all are used to relay information back to the student to facilitate understanding and progress. All feedback depends on engaging with the student's work and, indeed, none more so than handwritten annotation which interacts directly with the student's work on the page. The very functionality of annotation (or marginalia) is to create a reading apparatus for the student who is both seeking meaning and a ready reference for when assignments are returned with

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feedback comments. The close reading undertaken by the annotator means that the student has direct reference-points throughout the assignment, highlighting strengths or weaknesses in the text. Writing in the margin or on the page instead of a separate templated-frontsheet, orchestrates a more intimate exegesis between reader and the host text, for that reason it is imperative that the assignment feedback is written in a way that can ascertain the degree of engagement with the text without encoding harsh attitudes towards it. Much has been written about how negative feedback and its impact on student motivation can so easily thwart student progress (Blair 2006; Harrison 2006). It follows that annotation should inscribe comments or signs to support ongoing student learning. However, questions about annotation practices—registering a reaction to the host text, highlighting syntax—remain largely unanswered: annotations are employed but not examined or taught, at least not methodically (Feito and Donahue 2008). Indeed, from an extensive literature review findings reveal very little evidence to support hand-written annotative practice (Ball 2009a). In more than 40 years only seven published articles were located on hand written annotation (Marshall 1998; Wolfe 2000, 2002; Wolfe and Nuewirth 2001; Diyanni 2002; Liu 2006; Weaver 2006). This is in contrast to the many articles written on the subject of computer-based annotation technologies and their impact upon student learning, which has been fairly well documented (Sutherland 1997; Yang et al. 2004; Denton et al. 2008). However, of the many publications populating the literature, few are concerned with the *content* of inscribed comments. Moreover, little systematic research has been conducted to consider how the more traditional forms of annotation influence student learning and assessment and help tutors employ annotative practices (Storch and Tapper 1997; Juwah et al. 2004; Jewitt and Kress 2005). What is more, there is scant evidence on ways to heighten students' self-awareness when their essays are returned with annotated feedback (Storch and Tapper 1997; Feito and Donahue 2008).

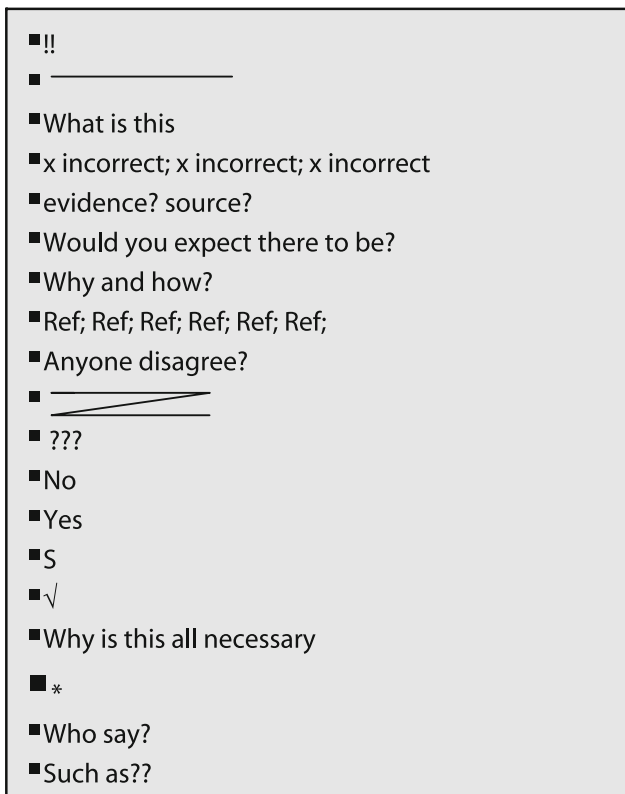
### A Definition of Annotation

The different modes and combinations of annotation include written words, and visual symbols such as underlining, circling words and phrases, highlighting passages, drawing arrows to link related points, and using question marks to draw attention to the assignment's confusion or strengths (Diyanni 2002). The inscribed comments not only signal importance but operate to indicate the reader's engagement with the text; all annotation is employed to guide the student and appears self-explanatory and helpful, or so it seems: textual moments of the kind possibly noted in underlining and highlighting seem straightforward and yet there is evidence to show that underlining a text does not add to the student's cognisance or learning process (Wolfe 2002). Following a lengthy and comprehensive study, Wolfe (2002) explains that a line under a sentence is innocuous and has no impact on students' understanding. The interpretive response the annotator thinks may be brought into play in the student's reading is perhaps based more upon a repertoire of assumptions, beliefs, habits and literary knowledge (Feito and Donahue 2008), but there is evidence to indicate that students are outside of the interpretive community to which academics belong and need significant support before their own range of skills is developed to engage with those of lecturers' (Lea and Stierer 2000; Paley 2006). It would seem that scant annotation does not create opportunity for transferable understanding or enable students to suitably assess their work for correction. This is further compounded by the semiotic signs and practices that form annotation's textual content. Marshall offers the following observation:

Many annotations are telegraphic and incomplete. A highlighted sentence, a cryptic marginal “No!” an unexplained link, a reading history, or a bookmark all pose interpretive difficulties for anyone other than the original annotator (and the passage of time sometimes erodes that privilege)... Annotators make symbolic notations, draw on and over text, write between the lines, underline, circle, box, and highlight (1998, pp. 41–42).

Once the annotative mark is divided into signs and units of meaning, it stands alone without preface or addendum and any real clarity is put into question. Stripping words of their chain of signification (de Saussure 1987) is a simple structural device showing that words need context if they are to signify meaning. I have illustrated Saussure’s structural device in figure below by providing single examples of annotation. In the case of annotation, words that stand alone in the margins of a student essay can be perceived as abstract signs to the novice reader that need contextualising. Figure 1 offers some examples in the scripts examined for annotation as part of this study (see section Research Methods).

In Fig. 1, the repeated words reflect how they were written in the essay: each consecutive line of the student’s assignment had a cross and incorrect next to it; similarly, *Ref* was repeated six times on one page. These examples were not chosen to surprise or make examples of rogue markers or flawed annotative practice, in reality when annotation is examined for itself and stands in isolation of the host text, the gloss makes a marked shift in subtlety and meaning.



**Fig. 1**

## Identifying a Problem

Identifying a problem as a topic for action research is often located within the researcher's field of work. Following an Institutional Audit visit by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education (2004), it was recommended that annotation be introduced to the marking assessment process in a School of Nursing. Guidelines for all staff and students were directly set in place "to promote good practice in the management and implementation of giving feedback to students on assessed work along with the annotation of scripts" (Jenkins 2005). Once in place, it was important to assess the perception, value and practice of annotation amongst both students and staff. This was undertaken via a formal mixed methods study in which a review of current literature, policy and practice was examined. A random sample of student scripts analysed for versions of annotation such as content, difference, length, approach and clarity was undertaken. Questionnaires distributed to staff ( $n = 74$ ) and students ( $n = 249$ ), and analysed using SPSS and thematic analysis; the findings of which are in press (Ball 2009b). Funding for the study was obtained via a successful bid to a University Teaching and Learning Quality Initiative Scheme. However, as a formal study with strict feedback guidelines it left out much of the experiential data of the team members. Therefore, the research lead/author undertook a three month action research study alongside the formal mixed method analyses to report on the researchers' personal and transformative aspects of findings left unreported and in the margins of the original study. As a result of looking at annotation through another lens, five academic participants were able to report annotation findings that would equate more readily with the student experience.

It became apparent very quickly that asking the participants to share their perceptions was really asking them to share their *realities* of annotative feedback within the context of an academic arena. What transpired was more far-reaching than the term "perception" could deal with: individual realities, transformation, political inferences, raised consciousness, evaluation, analysis and so much more that went beyond the encapsulation of the title's initial aims and objectives.

## Research Methods

Action research culminates in multiple traditions (Heslop et al. 2000). This study employed key features of action research and favoured elements of participatory action research (PAR). No one particular model was utilised (Koshy 2005), but adapted principles of action research helped explain the evidence as it emerged. This was a three month study (October 2006 to January 2007) and involved seven stages. Freirean-inspired action research was used to analyse and interpret findings and support the reflective process:

1. Reflection and analysis of current practice;
2. A review of current literature, policy and practice in relation to annotation within the academic arena;
3. Analysis of a random sample of scripts ( $n = 40$ ), selected from undergraduate post-qualifying level 3 modules;
4. One-to-one semi-structured interviews, undertaken with lecturers from an expert group who will be known as participants from here on ( $n = 4$ );
5. Reflection;
6. Plan; and
7. Proposed action.

## Ethical Considerations

The research was carried out by the author and issues of confidentiality, objectivity and anonymity were agreed by the author and participants before the start of the study. As action research, it was necessary that the participants felt supported and had confidence in the author as researcher to honestly report their perception of annotation (Heslop et al. 2000) who would act as a facilitator in the action research process. Every attempt was made to carry-out an unbiased and scrupulous study: during the analysis phase, data were anonymised and routinely checked by the author's academic tutor. The study was approved by a formal internal university process where ethics forms are reviewed and confirmed. Written informed consent was obtained from participants willing to participate in the research. The information sheet ensured both anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research process.

The participatory element posed ethical dilemmas around ownership of the research and telling the narrative story of the participants. As the 'scribe' and narrator, it was important to preserve participant observations, this was achieved by checking-out their story so they could verify or refute the re-telling of their perceptions and version of events. More time to consolidate their ideas would have benefited the study, but it had a strict three month time-limit. Reassurance, however, was gained by the large body of literature that supported a participant directing an action research narrative (Munnukka and Kiikkala 1995; Soltis-Jarrett 1997; Johnson 1997). A further ethical issue related to what to call the action research participants. In the former study they identified as experts of annotation within a School of Nursing operating in an expert group on annotation as co-researchers. In the action research study, they went from being the researcher to the researched as group participants (though their participation was limited). Finally, some evidence was found to verify their participant role. A study "qualifies as [PAR] because group members were involved in other phases of the research, such as data analysis, and because participants' understandings of their beliefs and practices were deepened and several were moved to action" (Herr and Anderson 2005, p. 90). This was definitely the case with this study, especially with regard to transformation. What was perhaps most important to this part of the action research cycle was the ability to recognise ethical issues as they arose—time constraints emerged as an issue and were something not factored into the research process.

## Search Strategy

Searches on terms relating to annotation, assessment and feedback were performed using the University of Salford's Information Services Division and MyAthens resources database. Ovid Online was used to access full texts from AMED, Medline, PsychInfo and Cinahl. IngentaConnect was also a source of information. Blackwell-Synergy.com was used to search for texts relating to the humanities such as English literature and social and critical theory, as annotation is a reading strategy as well as a modern day literary trope. The Cambridge Journals Online supplemented the search on annotation relating to critical theory. *BMJ* Journals was sourced for any medical journals that had written on annotation. However, annotation in the medical field was linked to gene products and Aspergers syndrome which resulted in a lengthy and largely unproductive search. SwetsWise was utilised providing full text material. METAPRESS, Sage Online and ScienceDirect were accessed. The Enhanced Teaching and Learning environment and ERIC database were

sources for teaching, assessment and feedback. The Higher Education Academy website was a rich source for action research literature.

## Review of Evidence

Given that a more extensive literature review is published elsewhere (Ball 2009a), for the purposes of this paper annotation and tone is given primacy. Early studies on traditional forms of annotation are still influential today. McColly (1965) identified four dimensions of annotation. Although this was published as far back as 1965, it remains worthy of attention (perhaps because there is still so little in the field of traditional annotative feedback). He argued that annotation possessed “general internal properties or dimensions” culminating in a range, or set of dimensions (and are placed in order of importance): “content-style factor”, reflecting the attributes of scope depth and purposefulness; a “tone” that reflects feeling and attitude; “visual impact”, and, lastly, “appropriateness”—reflecting the concept of what an annotation should be. In short, annotation contains content that has scope, depth and purposefulness, visual impact and appropriateness. Although an appreciation of the needs of the student is offered by McColly (his learners were secondary school level), the meaning he attaches to the third dimension is worthy of note suggesting that annotations contain intrinsic properties such as an underlying *tone*. Tone is a difficult concept to describe, but not at all difficult to recognise. It refers to the attitude one holds towards a text or in this case with which the marker approaches an assignment. Tone can be revealed through choice of diction, syntax or grammatical arrangement of words and the annotator’s presence can influence the student’s interaction with their text causing them to evaluate their original writing differently (Wolfe 2002). Ramage and Bean (1995) use two different annotated versions of the same essay to model and contrast “reading as a believer” and “reading as a doubter”. It makes the point that multiple readings can be made of one text, but *how* the essay is read by the tutor has the greater impact on the student (this might be the tone McColly referred to). Annotation defies any stable definition precisely because it can be practised in so many ways. It is vital therefore that the existence, experience and perception of it is understood so that any negative effects of annotations are minimised and the positive effects emphasised. The study was therefore carried out using a cycle of inquiry that was fully immersed in the lecturers’ own academic arena.

## Data Collection

Action Research is about providing a tailored approach to problem-solving, rather than a single method for collecting and analysing data (Cao 2006). The various methods included keeping field notes and a research journal, document collection and analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

### Student Scripts

To ensure the sample of essay scripts reflected as many approaches to annotation as possible, each script had been marked by a different lecturer. When a lecturer provided feedback more than once in the random selection of scripts, the next sequential script was selected. Thereby 10 different lecturers were represented and excluded the action research

study participants. All scripts and feedback sheets were anonymised and coded. The sample comprised scripts selected using a systematic sampling approach; scripts had been handed in and marked, so every module was sampled by taking every 10th script. If it was that a marker had already been chosen in previously selected scripts, then the next (11th) one was used. This process was continued until all scripts and all modules were included and every marker was different.

A random selection of 40 post-qualifying student scripts were analysed for differences in annotation style, tone, clarity, length, approach, difference, similarity, accessibility, comment, phrase, sign and decipherability between markers. Analysis showed differences between markers but then as one participant said, “when you are marking, you don’t feel a tone or value coming through because you are marking the work, not the annotation. When the essay is looked at in isolation there is a difference” (Participant 2). There is some speculation then as to what the student identifies in their feedback which is often read in a private setting such as home, invariably isolated from staff or peer support.

### Interviewed Participants

The next stage of the action research study began with one-to-one semi-structured interviews. Questions were constructed from analysis of annotated essays and a literature review. Participants were interviewed individually by the author (who was then interviewed by a participant) and were given a set of open-ended questions to answer. Assignment to the interview-group was based on lecturers already being expert in annotation on student learning. Participants answered a number of open-ended questions (Geer 1991), prompts were used also to cross-fertilise ideas. The interview schedule anticipated participants would share thoughts and ideas that had both common and distinctive features (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Interviews were taped and some communication was written up directly as fieldnotes to trace statements that either converged or differed through the interview process. Because time was limited, a short-cut at this stage was used that might not have been if the study was longer (in the end it worked to the study’s advantage as data was rich). After the first interview it became apparent that so many interesting points were being made at-that-moment, it would have been disadvantageous to each participant (and the action research cycle) if they did not share readily in the knowledge of the other participants. Therefore, at the end of each interview (having sought their consent) ideas were shared and participants were asked for comments to ascertain divergence or agreement. The participants were asked if they had any concerns about annotation; they stated that too many annotations were not helpful as were too few. I have drawn on the excerpts below as they are representative of the group:

*“over-commenting or too few comments; particularly if cross-marked”* (participant 1)

*“too much annotation and I feel overwhelmed. It’s almost too much to take in”* (participant 3)

*“some are open to interpretation”* (participant 4)

Successful annotations are easy to read and should promote students to think more so that they can progress academically and generally. Its aim is to promote the independent learner:

*“brief, constructive; looking for clarity from the student”* (participant 2)

*“about raising awareness”* (participant 5)



*“a balance between positive elements and the things students need to improve on”*  
(participant 3)

### Improving Practice

It was apparent throughout the study that participants were very engaged in the subject of annotation and their overall desire was to improve practice. They said how much they learnt from each other and being part of a team. Each participant believed that reading the literature review and essay drafts changed their perception of annotation and feedback forever. This, in itself, was a complete revelation to them—each person felt they had undergone a “cathartic moment” in the study. The participants have been lecturers for between 5 and 25 years, yet each stressed they would never mark the same way again; but why? The fact that each participant perceived a cathartic change is interesting if we consider that they are involved regularly in second marking and the marking process; and so this was something we could find the answer to through action research.

### Transforming Perceptions

One of the unique features of action research is that it allows the researcher to construct personal theories based on the evidence (Koshy 2005). As the participants were immersed in discussion, it became apparent that the reason why perceptions of marking had undergone such a transformation was because the scripts were examined in isolation—outside the context of the marking process—and saw comments in a more transparent way, unembellished from the framework of ‘marking’. We felt we had woken up to something because the students themselves also read their essays in ‘isolation’. All participants, independently of each other, said that feedback should not be given back to students unless the mechanics of providing support was available. This, however, would be something to action for a further action research cycle (see recommendations).

Participant 1, 3 and 4 perceived (1 and 2 share an office which may have had some impact on their experiences) that annotation increases both collaboration and corroboration amongst lecturers, but they had never “followed it through” (participant 4) to seek clarification from the first marker. Participant 1, 2 and 3 were “influenced by other people’s marking” (participant 1) (by comments in the margins when they second-marked). Participant 2 had previous exposure to the annotation process and interviewed differently from the other participants, the transition to marking with annotation was made easier by the fact that she had already researched the subject for at least a year. Both her and the author had previous experience of annotation and were not aware that annotation in the margins influenced us. If there is too much annotation on the page both of us (unknowing to the other before the interviews) covered the edge of the essay with a piece of paper, but this may have been something learnt over the years.

### Contextual Settings

This methodology focused primarily on individuals in the organisational setting and yet so little has been said about the organisation and the context in which the participants work.

For example, participant 2 differed from the others' responses, largely because she had written annotation guidelines, and this may have been the case for the University hierarchy who recommended its practice but offered little guidance into applying it. The School of Nursing responded promptly to the top-down request and asked a senior colleague to provide guidelines on how to use annotation which perhaps eliminated some of the disempowerment (Hart and Bond 1995) ensuing from a university top-down request. These good measures were put in place, but more School members were needed so they could all reflect on the problems encountered with annotation. The study also extended the range and type of knowing to include the experiences and values of the participants. It shaped the participants cathartic experience, and certainly without action research this part of the study would have been airbrushed out (left in the margins). What it provided was a structure in which to explain that catharsis. It was Freire (1972) who claimed that engaging individually and collectively in action raises one's conscious awareness and this is what happened to all the participants. We also became aware of the cultural processes that had positioned us (for example being a product of a university system such as being a hard marker or critical reader) and were enlightened by the practitioner/researcher/actioner process, but these processes can only relate to outcomes when basic assumptions are challenged—starting with our own.

### Isolating Feedback

Once the participants agreed to take part in the action research study, there was a great desire to experience each others' perceptions and realities without judgement. We reserved the harshest judgements for ourself and knew that our own annotations were very similar to the sampled scripts, possibly signifying anger, critical overtones or undertone, an absence of reinforcement or support, and little facility to explain the telegraphic and incomplete marginalia. Below are a range of quotes from the data and are placed as such to allow them to speak for themselves:

(Participant 1)

*“When you are marking you don't feel that comments are unfriendly or unconstructive, but in isolation there is a difference”*

*“There are linguistic differences between students and staff; a different language is used”*

*“Over emphasis on correction rather than building skills is the main thing I've seen”*

*“Annotations are not explicit enough”*

*“What is good annotation”? “Not sure I've seen it”*

(Participant 2)

*“annotation is very good. Feedback is very important to students and ‘good students’ do learn from it”*

*“annotation is helpful where there is good comments; identified positive and negative comments; time taken to write comments, and considered the student at the other side of the comments”*

*“annotation is unhelpful when there is too much comment on one page; particularly if the second marker annotates too”*

*“Annotations asks very interesting questions for the student who would not have made those connections; it gets them to engage and learn”*

(Participant 3)

*“annotation has changed me; I’m questioning myself – have I been clear”*

*“fullness of annotation can be helpful if examples fit the situation, but too much and I feel overwhelmed. It’s almost too much to take in”*

*“you need the student’s view to ask about successful annotation, but I think it would be clear, aesthetic and a balance between positive and things to improve on”*

*“I’m aware of tone and irritation, almost anger the student has not got the point or the annotator is delighted”*

(Participant 4)

*“you can see irritability in lecturers marking. Exclamation marks can be negative. If I was a student I would like comments that allowed me to build on, rather than something negative. But before this I’d never really thought about what I wrote”*

*“lots of scribbles and writing is quite shocking really, it looks aggressive”*

*“I’ll look at annotation in a different light which goes back to tone. Exclamation marks is the anger of the lecturer”*

*“I will never mark in the same way again. Student expect now a standard, but how it is achieved is difficult”*

(Participant 5)

*“I hope I will never mark in the same way again. I always thought well I learnt to write from an inexact science so why can’t others”*

*“I want students to feel supported by what I write and be able to dialogue with the feedback”*

*“tone seems to be the startling revelation for me”*

*“Annotations are time consuming”*

## What is Effective Feedback?

I wanted to see how looking at annotation through another lens would produce different findings on the subject. Although some researchers feel a need to defend action research from other more robust approaches (Coughlan and Coughlan 2002), I am sure it can justify its own terms (Susman and Evered 1978). Through reflection (McKernan 1991) and analysis of student scripts, it was found that if annotation reads differently when looked at in isolation, then the participants were probably performing at a similar level. Because we want the best for our students, it was clear that similarly to our colleagues, we were unconscious of this practice. Annotations containing critical tones, lines, question-marks and exclamation marks offered little in way of comprehension, but more likely signified incomprehension and irritation to the student. Too much annotation was overwhelming, whilst too little was ineffective. Therefore, what did the literature have to say on what good annotative practice was. Phase 2 facilitated this process. Quality-feedback includes:

Writing balanced comments that encompass both the strengths and weaknesses of the essay

Annotation that helps to close the gap between the current and desired performance of the student (the next cycle of action research would look at what was required to achieve this)

Annotation that is defined by a student-centred approach to learning

The following phases included more reflection and planning and generated more emergent theory. It was in these phases (interviewing and reflection) that we moved from insight to transformation, and where I found that data generated from action research cannot be readily captured by other approaches (Schein 1993a, b; Eden and Huxman 1996). For example, there are few methodologies that allow one to build oneself into a study in such a way that insight and personal transformation can be classed as an outcome. As such, while the early study lent itself to more precise measurement and quantification, the action research produced very sincere findings retaining the outline of the researcher and the experiences that went with research in action.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study identified that annotation is more open to interpretation than had previously been assumed. In addition we, as lecturers, might think we have a balanced and supportive marking approach, but the action research process revealed hidden complexities in both the feedback process and role in an organisation driven by forces often unaware of (assumptions that led us to believe we were skilled markers). By challenging those basic assumptions, we let go of some of the institutional and personal constraints which limit our power as individuals in the workplace (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Mutch 2003).

Going through the process of action research and the learning it generated left the participants feeling inexperienced (Zuber-Skerritt 1991), but not hopeless—the whole process was a transformative and cathartic experience that left everyone saying: “I will never mark in the same way again” (participant 4), but will make every effort to build on the knowledge I have acquired and use annotation to “promote the student to think more, [and point them] where to go to develop the work more” (participant 3). This corresponds with PAR in which one of its possibilities lies in “strengthening of people’s awareness of their own capabilities” (Hagey 1997, p. 2). Isolating the student essay from contextually and culturally embedded feedback practices (Argyris and Schön 1978), enabled us to examine how we used annotation in our marking (Argyris et al. 1985). Freire suggests that we labour between dualisms, in our case they were linked to the macro/micro structures of the University, and the theory/practice gap found in feedback.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study explored staff perception of annotation on student learning in a university School of Nursing. The conclusions drawn is that annotation as a feedback device is not as arbitrary as one might have thought and calls for sensitive wordings and non-telegraphic statements. Students expressed a preference for this type of dialogue as long as the annotation was constructive and did not translate a harsh inflection or tone. In summary, for annotation to be successful the following elements should be included in its delivery:

- Ensure the feedback and annotations are written with a helpful attitude and tone
- Provide balanced comments by identifying good points and areas of weakness
- Phrase comments in the form of questions

Give attention to inscription: comments should be easy to read, annotations should be clear, precise, and transparent  
 Give an explanation and justification of grade/mark awarded  
 Give a clear indication of how the student could improve the work  
 Keep comments to a minimum in the margins. If lengthy comments are needed then use a number in the margins and comment on these in the feedback sheet  
 Annotation should be considered as a vehicle for confidence building, so that criticism is part of an evaluation and assessment process

## Recommendations for Future Cycles

The way forward is to share what we learnt with colleagues, which is not only how to give students quality annotation, but to offer a personal account of our development and provide an opportunity to read scripts in isolation to examine their own practice. Including others in a collaborative process helps discover areas for change that includes exploring their own practices within an organisational setting. Annotation was introduced into the feedback process to benefit students, but that shift in the education continuum applies not only to students, but also to staff. Lecturers themselves need to be supported in coming to terms with a different emphasis on marking. Action research supports a process of change by encouraging a philosophy of learning highlighting openness and equality.

In light of the above, the following recommendations are made:

Although a resource issue, students would benefit from essays returned in a supportive setting and discuss their mark and feedback with a tutor. If not possible, at least support from the personal tutor (though this is not the best option, given the tutor is not the marker), or a group feedback process in the classroom would largely eliminate reading comments in isolation

Further strategies in preparing new tutors to use feedback could be developed

Lecturers of long-standing might benefit from a revision of practice; achieved by looking at a number of scripts in isolation and forming groups to discuss findings.

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