Seeing Read: An evaluation of the impact of colour coding on student engagement with feedback

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1. Introduction

- Feedback is 'one of the most powerful ways to… enhance and strengthen student learning' (Hepplestone et al 2009)
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that students don't use their feedback (Higher education Academy 2006, Swythenby 2006)
- Improving student engagement with feedback to raise student achievement remains an important theme in contemporary practice (Hepplestone, et al 2009a, Ball et al 2012)
- As resources in HE reduce, academics must work faster and smarter to achieve the same in less time (Hepplestone et al 2009a)
- E – submission and marking allows for higher quality feedback to be produced (Denton et al as cited by Hepplestone et al 2009b)
- Quality feedback is an indicator of good quality provision in the current National Student Survey with results published to prospective students (NSS, 2014)
- The Quality Assurance Agency for HE assess feedback as part of the UK Quality Code for HE benchmark (QAA, 2012)

2. Professional Context

- Online submission of course work standard across all modules in 2014-15
- Improved online marking tool
- Online marking is one way to work smarter and faster whilst meeting best practice in summative feedback/feed-forward
- Students repeating the same mistakes despite previous e-feedback
- Despite e-feedback comments boxes hard to read (red background)
- Comments on script not clearly differentiating between good/ developing/poor academic practice
- KIS data: low feedback scores

3. Hypothesis

The use of a colour coding system helps students to engage more effectively with summative feedback to feed-forward improvements in performance in subsequent submissions

4. Method

- Colour coding used in marking submissions on 2 modules
- Fast track ethics approval obtained
- Evaluated using a mixed methods approach incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis:
  - Qualtrics survey
  - Personalised feedback form attached to the next submission
  - Review of feedback and grades on the subsequent submission
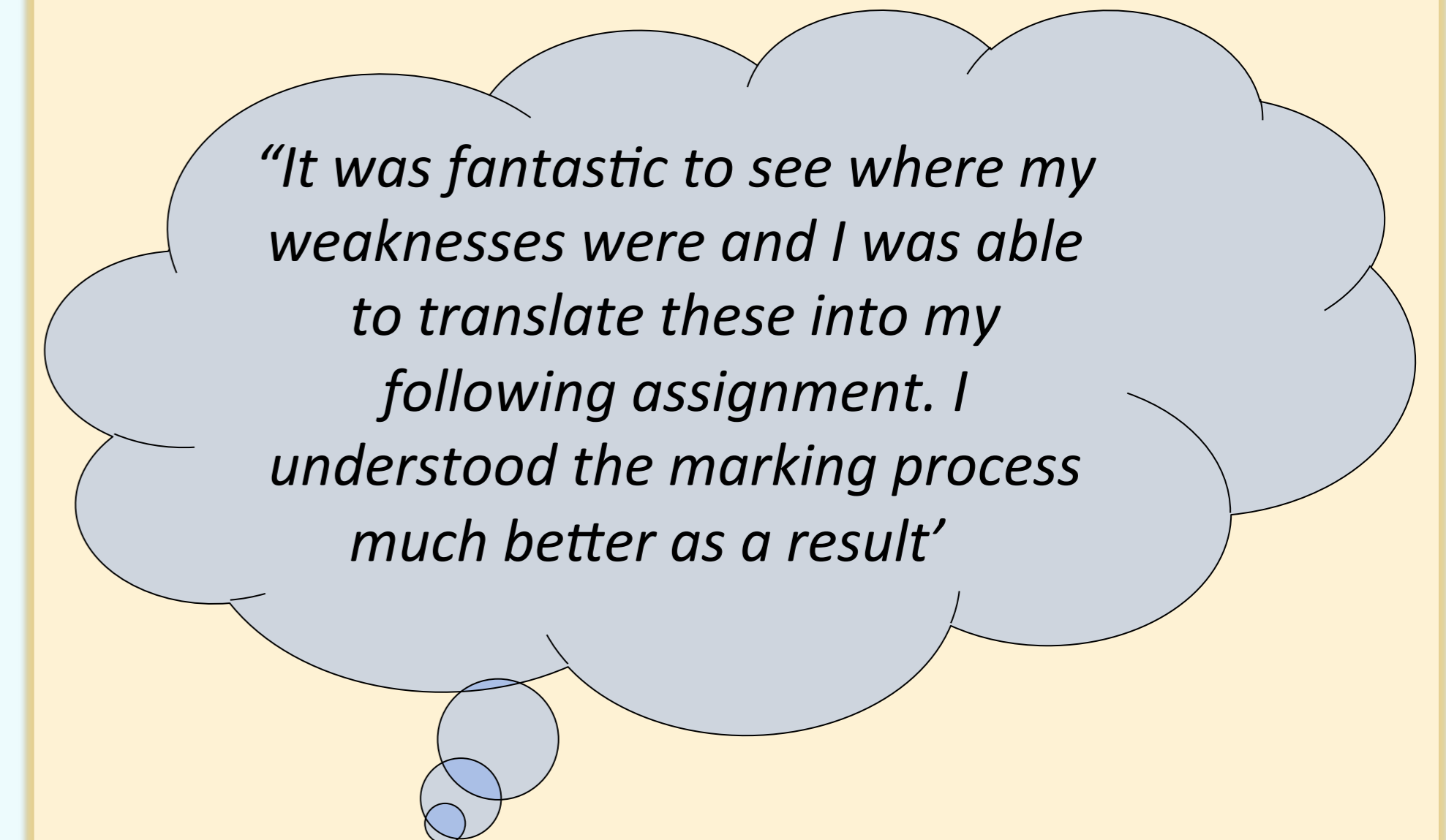
5. Research Participants
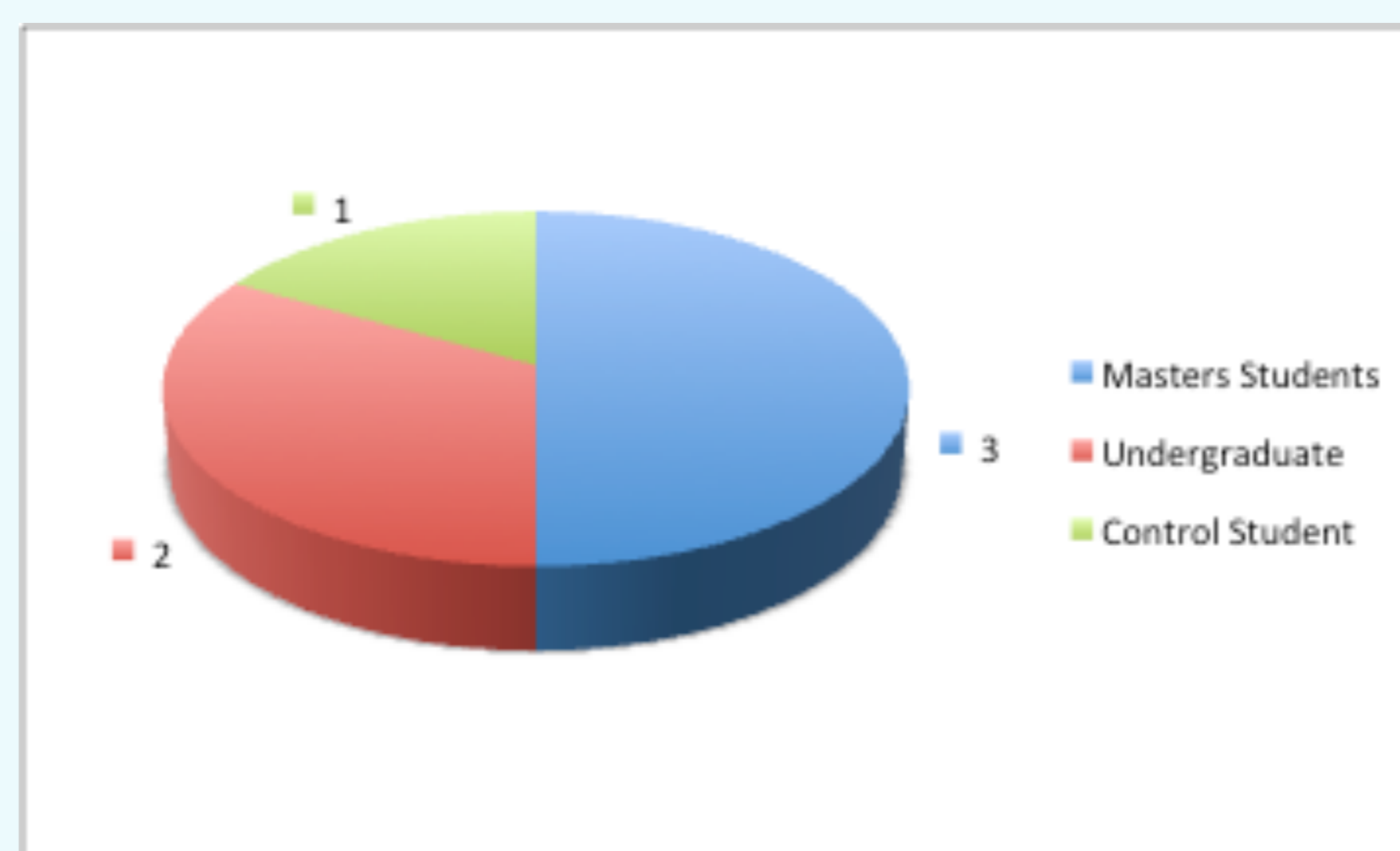
- 10 potential participants were identified ; 7 participants eligible to complete all 3 aspects with a further 3 eligible to complete the Qualtrics survey only.
- One further participant acted as a control.
- Invitations to participate sent by email enclosing informed consent.
- This resulted in 6 participants. 4 eligible for all 3 stages, one eligible for the survey only and one control.

6. Results

Key results
Qualtrics Survey

"It was fantastic to see where my weaknesses were and I was able to translate these into my following assignment. I understood the marking process much better as a result'

- 100% of students found accessing and reading feedback easy or very easy (3/3)
- 100%)of students stated they found colour helped them to identify good/ developing/poor academic practice in their work (3/3)
- 100% of students described the feedback on this assignment as either more detailed or much more detailed than on previous submissions. (3/3)

Personalised Feedback
- 5 participants including the 'control' participant completed the personalised feedback form
- For 3 out of 4 participants the areas on which specific feedback was requested matched the areas identified as areas of weakness or developing practice on the previous submission
- Control student also matched areas for feedback with feedback on previous submission.

Student performance
- 5 out of 6 students' performance improved , including the control student
- 1 student's performance reduced

7. Conclusion

- Too small a sample to provide reliable data
- May be helpful but data is not in any way conclusive
- System may impact just as much on quality of feedback provided as on student engagement

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