Could better feedback improve student retention?

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The traditional theory of student retention / dropout

Tinto's concept of "integration": Divided into:

- Academic integration

- Social integration

Studies at Glasgow, operationalising Tinto's concept in a

questionnaire (http://www.psy.gla.ac.uk/~steve/localed/tinto.html),

suggest that **academic integration** is more important in predicting

dropout than social integration.

Theories of assessment and feedback to students

Naively, we may think of feedback as about telling a student what's wrong with a piece of work.

Sadler however argues that an important target for improving our feedback practices is working to improve students' understanding of what the criteria are, and what these mean operationally, in practice. (Otherwise, even with "feedback" on the discrepancy between criteria and their work, how could they act to improve? How can a student act on a comment like 'Should be more critical' if they don't understand what 'critical' means to the tutor?)

Symptom: students who get adequate marks, yet complain they do not understand why. They don't understand the connection between their effort and the marks, and so have low feelings of self-efficacy. Evaluation studies of Peer Assisted Learning support this observation in part; as do hearing comments such as "I worked really hard on that, I should have got an A", or occasionally "I got an A even though I just slapped it together in a day". Both undermine a student's feeling of connection with the work, the course, and the staff's way of thinking.

The suggested connection
- Not understanding the requirements of (assessed) work
- => Reduced feeling of self-efficacy
- => Feelings of alienation from the subject of study, and indeed the staff's way of thinking.
- => Low "academic integration"
- => Increased dropout, or moving to another subject or university

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