

THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK IN TEACHING WRITING

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Abstract

Using an historical approach the intention of this paper is to identify from the literature better practice in feedback. Assessment is an essential element in the learning cycle, and is central to an understanding of how learning outcomes are achieved. It is through their assessments that we come to know our students, if our teaching has been successful and plays a significant role in determining the students' success. However, unlike the teaching process, assessment does not have the same dialogic element that learning and teaching now has. While feedback is a key element in formative assessment, we do not know how our feedback is understood by the learner, or what meaning they make of it.

Keywords: feedback, teaching writing, effective feedback, student learning, motivation, peer collaboration, growth mindset, writing instruction.

Introduction

In the realm of education, the journey of mastering writing is both personal and profound. However, the path to proficiency is often paved with challenges and uncertainties. Amidst the complexities of the writing process, one guiding light emerges: feedback. This article delves into the pivotal role of feedback in the realm of teaching writing, exploring its multifaceted nature, its impact on student learning, and its transformative potential. Feedback serves as a compass, guiding students through the labyrinth of writing. It provides invaluable insights into their strengths and weaknesses, illuminating pathways for improvement. Effective feedback transcends mere correction; it is a dialogue that empowers students to refine their craft, nurturing their growth as writers. From corrective feedback that addresses errors to constructive feedback that offers guidance for enhancement, the spectrum of feedback in writing instruction is vast. Formative feedback, delivered throughout the writing process, facilitates iterative refinement, while summative feedback, provided at the culmination, offers holistic evaluations. Moreover, peer feedback enriches the learning experience, fostering collaboration and diverse perspectives.

The art of delivering feedback lies in its clarity, specificity, and timeliness. Tailoring feedback to individual needs, utilizing rubrics and exemplars, and scaffolding feedback progressively are strategies that amplify its impact. Additionally, fostering a culture of feedback literacy empowers students to engage critically with feedback, catalyzing their growth as autonomous learners. Feedback transcends correction; it cultivates a growth mindset, wherein challenges are embraced as opportunities for growth. By celebrating progress and providing actionable steps for improvement, feedback ignites

intrinsic motivation, fueling students' passion for writing. Embracing a growth mindset transforms setbacks into stepping stones on the path to mastery. In the ecosystem of writing instruction, peer feedback is a powerful catalyst for learning. Through collaborative dialogue and reciprocal feedback, students not only refine their own writing but also develop critical thinking and communication skills. Peer collaboration fosters a sense of community and shared ownership of learning, enriching the writing process.

If we adopt a rather one-way transmissive view of feedback, with tutors simply making comments on completed student assignments, then many of the limitations sketched above are likely to persist. Whilst feedback is generally considered to be most helpful if it is timely and can be acted upon by students, the crux of the matter is how students interpret and use feedback. Possible ways of enhancing feedback processes involve viewing feedback more as dialogue than information transmission and the development of iterative dialogic feedback cycles. Dialogic feedback suggests an interactive exchange in which interpretations are shared, meanings negotiated and expectations clarified. Dialogic approaches to assessment can guide students on what is good performance by facilitating discussions of quality in relation to specific assignment tasks and also support them in developing enhanced ownership of assessment processes. Underpinning student involvement in assessment is Boud's notion of sustainable assessment: practices which meet immediate assessment needs whilst not compromising the knowledge, skills and dispositions required to support lifelong learning activities. Building on this, Hounsell introduces the notion of sustainable feedback and addresses three strands: a focus on the provision of 'highvalue' feedback carrying impact beyond the task to which it relates; enhancing the student role to generate, interpret and engage with feedback; and developing congruence between guidance and feedback by orchestrating teaching and learning environments in which productive dialogue arises from core module learning activities. In his exemplary treatment of the topic, Hounsell does not explicitly define sustainable feedback and so we propose our own definition:

- Dialogic processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks.

For the purposes of our analysis, we interpret feedback practices as being represented by a continuum ranging from conventional to sustainable feedback practices. The former refer to strategies which involve tutors commenting on aspects of student work through various means, such as: written feedback on drafts or final versions of assignments; verbal comments in individual or small group tutorials; e-mail correspondence for suggestions or comments; and collective in-class guidance or feedback. These, or similar, tried and tested practices are part and parcel of many tutors' repertoires. Developing these practices in a more 'sustainable' direction principally involves variations which enhance the student role, so that the main onus is not on the tutor to deliver the feedback, but the student to self-regulate their work.

The kinds of practice congruent with a framework for sustainable feedback have not been widely reported in the literature, but neither are they unfamiliar. In addition, to those sources cited above, a well-known example is the justly celebrated work at Alverno College. Key aspects relevant to the current discussion are outlined in Riordan and Loacker (2009): The most effective teaching eventually makes the teacher unnecessary ... students will succeed to the extent that they become independent lifelong learners who have learned from us but no longer depend on us to learn ... a key element in helping students develop as independent learners is to actively engage them in self-assessment throughout their studies.

However, teachers sometimes do not know how to give an effective feedback that can help their students improve their ability especially in writing skills. A previous research by Junining which focused on the formative feedback in writing, mentioned that in current practice, giving feedback in writing classes tends to be conventional such as correcting grammar, spelling and editing instead of giving more emphasis on the purpose, audience and text type. She highlighted that formative feedback would be the best one for students' writing. On the other hand, the researcher sees that corrective feedback is also important in writing skill. In writing activity, both content and mechanics are important. Yet, students may make mistakes and errors in composing ideas in a good and acceptable English language rules. Therefore, this research intends to provide strategies on how to give effective feedback to help students improve their ability in writing skills without ignoring certain kinds of feedback. Mental work of inventing ideas, thinking how about to express them and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. A writer should think about ideas and the mechanics of writing so the reader can understand the writing well.

You are getting students a lot more interested in what they are doing ... When I am marking their portfolios it's like reading somebody's inner world. They're telling you what they have learned, the joy, the worry and the aspirations. I think it's great when you read something like that... What they like about the portfolio assessment is that they know how well or badly they have done and are able to make it better. They have learnt not just how to write this assignment but also how to look for information, knowing how to use it and applying it

In the symphony of education, feedback orchestrates harmonies of growth and learning. Its transformative power transcends correction, nurturing students' potential as writers and learners. As educators, let us harness the potency of feedback to unlock the latent brilliance within each student, guiding them on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. For in the realm of teaching writing, feedback is the beacon that illuminates the path to excellence. Students may need to be pushed to involve themselves in developing self-regulatory practices consistent with sustainable feedback. This reinforces the need for more to be done in terms of communicating with students the purposes of feedback and their central role in the process. It would be necessary to articulate consistently on a program-wide basis, the benefits for students of being able to self-regulate their own learning. Repeated involvement in practices, such as dialogic interaction, peer feedback and self-evaluation in relation to exemplars, performance assessments or work in progress would support this process. An important incentive for students is that developing enhanced self-regulative capacities is likely to lead to better quality learning and higher grades. If this message can be communicated effectively, increased engagement with relevant practices should follow.

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