

“Feedback is like a tail wind”: pre-service teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions of feedback

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Summary

Feedback plays an essential role in student learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) define feedback as “information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (p. 81). However, recent scientific literature has strongly criticised this approach to feedback. The critics point out that in this “transmission-focused” feedback approach, the main responsibility lies with the teacher, and the student is only a passive party who receives information (Carless & Boud, 2018). As the authors emphasise, learning is not supported if students are not given the opportunity to apply the information they receive. Also, this result is frustrating for teachers who devote a lot of time and energy to providing feedback to students (Nash & Winstone, 2017).

Based on the above, a “new feedback paradigm” (Carless & Boud, 2018), as well as “learner-centred” (Winstone *et al.*, 2017) or “learning-centred” (Henderson *et al.*, 2019; Molloy *et al.*, 2020) feedback, has been introduced into the literature. In the new learning-centred feedback paradigm, where the learner is an active participant and where feedback is not just a one-way delivery of information, Henderson and colleagues (2019) define feedback “as processes where the learner makes sense of performance-relevant information to promote their learning” (p. 17).

Student and teacher feedback literacy is a prerequisite for implementing the new feedback paradigm. Chong (2020) proposes a three-dimensional model of student feedback literacy based on the original framework presented by Carless and Boud (2018) and consisting of engagement dimension, individual dimension, and the contextual dimension. Teacher feedback literacy is defined as “the knowledge, expertise and dispositions to design feedback processes in ways which enable the students’ uptake of feedback and seed the development of student feedback literacy” (Carless & Winstone, 2020, p. 5).

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New trends in feedback literature suggest a learning-centred feedback paradigm, yet various sources (Dawson *et al.*, 2019; Winstone and Carless, 2020) show that the features of the new feedback paradigm do not appear to be reflected in students' and teachers' feedback perceptions. Since these perceptions influence how feedback is perceived, given, received and implemented (van der Kleij, 2019), it is important to make these perceptions visible. This study aims to understand the pre-service teachers' and teacher educators' perceptions of the feedback. The following research questions were formulated:

- 1) What are the perceptions of feedback and effective feedback among pre-service teachers and teacher educators?
- 2) How do pre-service teachers and teacher educators propose to make feedback more effective?

Methodology

The study was carried out in two phases to understand the perceptions of both parties in the feedback process. The sample of pre-service teachers consisted of 130 students from different teacher education curricula. Data from the pre-service teachers were collected in the autumn semester of the 2020/2021 academic year within the framework of one compulsory subject course, which took place at the end of their studies. The second phase of the study was carried out among teacher educators in the spring semester of the 2020/2021 academic year, and a total of 34 teacher educators participated.

The data were collected using an electronic questionnaire with open-ended questions. Participants were asked to complete the sentence "Feedback is like..." and provide a justification. Additionally, they were asked to describe what they considered to be effective feedback. Students were asked for suggestions on how teacher educators could provide even more effective feedback. The teacher educators were able to seek support from the university to provide effective feedback.

The data were analysed using qualitative thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to increase the reliability of the results, the initial analyses were done separately and then discussed and compared.

Major results and discussion

Results showed that pre-service teachers and teacher educators perceive feedback as information that includes positive as well as critical aspects of student work, along with recommendations for further action. Dawson and colleagues (2019) point out that some ideas inherent in the old feedback paradigm are still

prevalent, most notably the concept of “transmission-focused” feedback. At the same time, Winstone and Carless (2020) emphasise that it is promising if further recommendations are valued in the feedback. This is only true if these recommendations are action-oriented (Ryan *et al.*, 2021). However, we cannot guarantee that learners will act on feedback if it is not embedded in the learning process (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

The source of feedback also emerged in the responses of this study. Students who are feedback-literate understand that feedback of their work can come from various sources (Carless & Boud, 2018), including their peers and themselves (e.g. Tai *et al.*, 2018). Students value feedback as a basis for reflection, but they do not see themselves as a source of self-feedback, a concept proposed by Panadero and colleagues (2019). Although there were students who questioned the reliability of their peers, other students and educators advocated using peer feedback. Regarding peer feedback, it is important to discuss and agree upon the assessment criteria in advance with students (Carless & Boud, 2018) and provide examples of good work before assigning a task to students (Tai *et al.*, 2018).

The results also showed that teacher educators' workload was a concern. Implementing learning-centred feedback and developing teacher educator pedagogical skills (such as instructing students to actively participate in the feedback process) (Winstone & Carless, 2020) will make it easier to organise the work in a more effective way.

The topic of emotions related to feedback provides a separate area of thought. In their responses, both students and lecturers agreed that feedback could evoke different emotions - both positive and negative - and that dealing with the latter can be difficult. The emotional dimension of feedback is embedded in the feedback literacy of both students (Carless & Boud, 2018; Chong, 2020) and educators (Boud & Dawson, 2021). In adopting learning-centred feedback, the feedback process can be made more transparent and safe for students by agreeing on criteria, writing a cover letter to ask for feedback, and having substantive discussions to make sense of feedback.

Students' suggestions for making feedback more effective included the ones related teacher training. There was a desire among teacher educators to receive materials to learn or review feedback principles and thus develop a shared comprehension of feedback with colleagues. Also, in this instance, one should move towards a learning-centred feedback paradigm and consider how to develop skills not only in terms of information transfer but also in terms of planning the whole process (Winstone & Carless, 2020) and by the use of technology. Even a slight change in how feedback is discussed and used will help guide the organisation toward learning-centred feedback as part of a paradigm shift. This

all contributes to providing feedback that supports student learning (Winstone & Carless, 2020).

Despite the fact that the study's findings cannot be generalised, they do offer insight into the perceptions of pre-service teachers and teacher educators about feedback. The results can also be used for both teacher education and the development of university lecturers.

Keywords: feedback, pre-service teachers, teacher educators, perceptions of feedback