Implications for feedback excellence of the revolution in feedback thinking

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The problem with feedback

• Students complain that they do not get enough of it
• Educators resent time generating comments of which students take little notice
• Educators typically think the information they provide is more useful than students think it is
• Feedback is typically ‘telling’ often lacking strategies for improvement, and often lacking opportunities for further task attempts

Ende 1995, Hattie 2009, Boud and Molloy 2013, Johnson & Molloy 2017
Our dilemma

• Is it just a matter of doing what we do now just with more vigor and more systematically?
• Is our use of the term feedback based on a misconception?
This is *not* feedback

“I left feedback on their essays, which they never collected”
What is the feedback revolution?

• A major conceptual shift in the past eight years led by scholars in Australia, Hong Kong and the UK.
• From a teacher-centric view to a learning-centric one
• Unless inputs (from others) lead to worthwhile effects, feedback has not occurred, it is merely ‘hopefully useful information’.
Need for a new definition

“Feedback is a process in which learners make sense of information about their performance and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.”
Examples of effective feedback practices

feedbackforlearning.org

• Survey with 4,514 student responses in two large universities identified examples of feedback working well

• In-depth interviews with multiple teaching staff and students to understand what is occurring and why

• Case studies of exemplars of effective feedback and lessons learnt in enabling feedback
Assessment versus feedback: An important distinction

Mark or grade justification
• Judgements and comments about what students have completed
• Identifies areas of deficiency
• Essentially backward-looking

Feedback information
• Comments about what students can do to improve their work
• Essentially forward-looking
Key points about feedback

• Feedback provides one of very few ways in which courses are tailored to the individual needs of students

• Feedback processes need to be carefully designed
  – Giving comments to students is only a part of any feedback process
  – Without active involvement from students before and after inputs, feedback can’t influence learning
  – Unless the loop is completed, feedback has not occurred

• Feedback can, ultimately, only be judged in terms of its effect on student learning
Designing opportunities for feedback

- Start with the student
- Provide opportunities for action
- Build early feedback opportunities
- Construct feedback-rich environments
- Facilitate co-construction of understanding between learners and others
- Encourage multi-source feedback
- Explicitly prepare learners to acknowledge and work with affect in feedback

Henderson, M., Molloy, E., Ajjawi, R., and Boud, D., (2019)
Is this enough to improve feedback?

While it is the overall feedback process that makes a difference, the information we communicate to learners is still very important.

However,

- Some kinds of comments lead to negative outcomes
- Many feedback processes do not lead to improved learning
The notion of feedback literacy

“the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies”.

Key features identified:
• appreciating feedback
• making judgments
• managing affect
• taking action.

Carless and Boud (2018)
Mechanisms for embedding feedback literacy

- Eliciting
- Processing
- Enacting

Eliciting, processing and enacting feedback: mechanisms for embedding student feedback literacy within the curriculum

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ABSTRACT
Recent feedback literature suggests that the development of student feedback literacy has potential to address problems in current feedback practice. Students' feedback literacy involves developing the capacity to make the most of feedback opportunities by active involvement in feedback processes. How the development of student feedback literacy can be embedded within the undergraduate curriculum has not yet been discussed in any depth. This conceptual paper fills that gap by elaborating three key mechanisms for embedding feedback literacy within the curriculum: eliciting, processing and enacting. These are illustrated through enhanced variations of four existing practices: feedback requests, self-assessment, peer review, and curated e-portfolios. The discussion summarizes the key implications for practice and identifies the need for further empirical work investigating how students elicit, process and enact feedback in situ, and longitudinal research exploring the impact of curriculum design on the development of student feedback literacy.
We also need feedback literacy

- **At the macro-level** in the design of entire programs
- **At the meso-level** to design course units/subjects
- **At the micro-level** to design appropriate inputs to individual students
So, what then is feedback excellence?

- Thinking of feedback in terms of what learners do
- Designing feedback processes into courses—how many feedback loops can be completed?
- Students need their learning from feedback inputs to land in subsequent tasks
- Development of students’ feedback literacy is needed, especially in early course units

If it isn’t designed to improve students’ subsequent work, whatever else it may be, it isn’t feedback!
References


