

Short Paper

Feedback: A Construct in Search of Contemporary Investigation

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Abstract

Feedback is a construct that has been around for decades, but its utilization in online classes and in Zoom has only been cursorily investigated. This paper briefly reviews the types of feedback and discusses the need for empirical examination of the construct.

Feedback is quite frequently given by some instructors, minimally given by others, and haphazardly administered by still others. While feedback is important, empiricists must examine its use and research conducted regarding its impact.

1. Types of Feedback

- 1) Formal-in terms of grades. This is the most formal type of feedback-typically in terms of a grade (A, B, C, D, F) and in some instances numerical feedback.
- 2) Formal in terms of statements regarding student writing, logic, reasoning, rationality and comprehensiveness of understanding. This type of feedback is neutral in nature- but attempts to provide some assistance regarding student writing and clarity, and student grasp of the material.
- 3) Chats on Zoom- or email. A chat on Zoom may be needed as some students are suffering from stress, health or medical problems that may be short term or long term in nature. Feedback on Zoom may be more emotive and evocative than a simple text message. Further Zoom provides an instantaneous response, whereas an e-mail could sit on a student's box for a few hours or days.
- 4) Formative- at the beginning of the course as the student may propose a research topic. Formative evaluation and feedback also allows faculty to probe as to student readiness for a course. A faculty member can quite quickly grasp if a freshman is attempting a senior level class or has been poorly advised.
- 5) Summative- at the end of the course as the instructor reviews student progress. In some instances, the instructor does notice a good deal of improvement and wants to provide some

clear positive feedback as to growth and development. Some students are not aware of the fact that they have in fact improved- and they need to receive some acknowledgement or recognition for their efforts.

- 6) Student to student feedback- In some Discussion Boards- students provide each other with varying degrees of feedback. Students typically are non-committal and make various vague, neutral comments and provide innocuous feedback.
- 7) Supportive Feedback- “atta boy:” types of statements. This could be linked to positive praise, positive statements or simply positive remarks and this could be delivered by e-mail, comments on paper or Zoom or even the old fashioned telephone.
- 8) Constructive Feedback-Suggestions by the instructor regarding their writing, grammar, syntax, spelling, use of theory, and theorists. Some universities have graduate students who will spend time reviewing sentence structure, run on sentences, verb usage, noun usage and other difficulties such as missing commas, parentheses and other small details.
- 9) Positive feedback-specific to one concern or analysis. This could relate to the student using Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives. Some students are able to follow Bloom’s hierarchy, and others simply do not seem to grasp the nature of the question or have not read the question thoroughly or have misinterpreted what the question was asking!
- 10) Symbolic feedback—smiley faces! These are easy to apply but lack the specificity of a written statement.
- 11) Appreciation feedback- do males and females differentially respond to different types of feedback? This is a question that needs empirical investigation or at least theorizing! We do need to know if students also respond to feedback initially or if feedback is administered later in the course, if it is rejected or seen as last minute criticism.
- 12) Questioning feedback-asking for more in-depth analysis or clarification. Often a student will minimally respond or reply to a question, and the instructor seeks additional information in order to provide an accurate assessment of the student’s work. This may be seen as “probing” or “prompting” for additional supplemental information.
- 13) Providing guidance feedback-perhaps about statistics or methodology or an additional source. Since instructors are generally well read, they can suggest a theorist or theory to help students grasp complex problems, or suggest a text to help with difficult statistical methods.
- 14) Encouragement-asking students to probe more deeply into a topic or reflect or think more about it. Students will often express an interest in a topic- and this should be encouraged. Faculty can support this interest and encourage them to read more about a topic or perhaps even do research into a topic or at the very least a literature review.
- 15) Friendly feedback-perhaps seeking to solidify a relationship with a student. Student engagement is part of learning and developing a rapport is essential. One way to do this is to provide some cordial congenial comment, so that the student feels valued.

- 16) Timely feedback-providing feedback almost as immediately as possible. The writer understands that faculty often have other classes, other research projects, and a wide variety of committee obligations, duties and responsibilities. Perhaps a “max time” could be set up in courses during the afternoon or evening hours so that students could receive almost immediate feedback.
- 17) On-going consistent feedback- on a daily or weekly basis- so as to maintain contact. Depending on the length of the course (4 weeks or 8 weeks or 16 weeks) instructors need to be aware of the time frame and the challenges these time frames present- for both the instructor and the student and govern themselves accordingly and make a concerted effort to be available and provide consistent feedback.
- 18) Verbal or Written feedback-there are ways for instructors to leave brief verbal messages-perhaps for up to 2-3 minutes. The sound of an instructor’s voice can be very helpful and in some instances, therapeutic. It establishes some connectivity-if ZOOM or Microsoft Teams is not utilized.
- 19) Feedback “sandwich” refers to praise—criticism—and then praise again. This varies the feedback and helps students cope with the criticism as some students have rarely received criticism in the past. This is a major problem because some students have received minimal feedback in the past, and they see it as harsh criticism and are unsure as to how to respond to the feedback.
- 20) Group Feedback-Perhaps on a weekly basis-feedback can be provided to the entire group. This type of feedback is good if the entire class seems to be moving at about the same pace and doing one module or chapter at a time. This is global feedback and may be very effective, efficient and time efficient.
- 21) Positive then-redirection to the goal of the course or the goal of the chapter or assignment. Instructors can provide some preliminary feedback- then re-direct the student to the over-arching goal and objective of the module or chapter assignment or task.
- 22) Educative feedback- providing a definition for a construct such as reliability or validity. Often students will use words interchangeably or mistakenly and instructors will have to provide exact, specific, precise feedback and correction for them.
- 23) Sensitive feedback-Instructors can sometimes sense when a student is struggling with an assignment or is having difficulty “keeping up”. This could be inquisitive in nature, this could be substantive in nature or perhaps just requesting some information or feedback from a student as to how they are doing, progressing or coping.
- 24) Progress Feedback-As students go thru a course- some improve quite extensively and this should be recognized. Other students may appear mediocre at first and then continue with the same approach to the rest of the class- and the instructor does not see any improvement or even an attempt to improve.

- 25) Compliment Feedback-then Corrective, then compliment again-either on effort or consistency or depth of elaboration. Instructors can complement the effort that a student is trying to make or the use of other sources or even referring to another students comments on a topic in the Discussion Board.
- 26) Multimedia Feedback-Instructors can provide a link to a You Tube to help students learn about a theorist or a theory or a construct. There are many resources out there on the world wide web and teachers need to be able to share them with the students for assistance.
- 27) Referral Feedback-If there is a graduate student assigned to the class- some students may feel more comfortable asking for help from a peer than the instructor. Thus a “referral” or a suggestion that the student may be amenable to some assistance from a writing center or other source on campus is a positive move.
- 28) Evaluative feedback-Grades provide some evaluation, yet do not always tell the entire story of a student’s learning. This could be referred to as “summative evaluation” and this could be done with a sentence or two or a paragraph or two if need be.
- 29) Culturally sensitive feedback-Not all races, ethnicities, cultural groups respond well to feedback and some see feedback as criticism. Students may not have received much feedback in the past or teachers may have just provided superficial feedback (good, well done, good effort).
- 30) Feedback reflecting difficulty-In the past few months, we have all been dealing with the Corona Virus and some students have lost loved ones. This has to be recognized. Things have been difficult for all of us over the past few years and many are still recovering.

2. Some Research Agendas

- 1) Does voice feedback make an appreciable significant difference in student engagement and performance?
- 2) Do students see feedback as an important part of the learning process?
- 3) Do instructors see feedback as an important part of the learning process?
- 4) When instructors are evaluated-do evaluators look at the varying types of feedback that instructors provide- and student response?
- 5) Do student spend adequate time on feedback and do they take feedback seriously?
- 6) Are students simply out for the highest grade for the least amount of work?
- 7) Do students value feedback on the Discussion Board from peers?
- 8) Would students prefer face to face feedback via Zoom or Microsoft Teams? Or perhaps even via cell phone? Would text messages to students have an impact?
- 9) Can we see any correlation between feedback and grade point average or student growth?
- 10) Do graduates and undergraduates view feedback on-line differently than in person feedback?

3. Summary

This paper has cursorily attempted to provide a brief overview of the realm of feedback and has suggested some ideas for future research. In order to assist with student growth and development, particularly in online classes, instructors must be aware of the impact of feedback and student perception of the various types of feedback.