

Pigeonhole Questions and Comments
Paper 2. Constant Leung

Q: So are you saying that teachers are central?

A: Teachers are obviously responsible for providing useful learning-oriented feedback, but students are equal partners in making the whole teaching-learning enterprise work.

Q: How did you come up with these categories? Interesting.

A: My categories of student responses emerged from making repeated passes over the data; I went through a process of elimination and comparing alternatives, until I felt I had captured the key 'meaning' in the students' comments.

Q: Is there a universal rationale underlying how students like or react to teachers' feedback? And how much they can learn from it?

A: At this moment I am not at all sure if there's such a thing as 'a universal principle'; from what I can see so far student responses to feedback are likely to vary because of individual differences and a variety of social factors. But my sense is that whatever the individual propensity, there is a lot we can do to make the curriculum environment and pedagogic approach more conducive for active engagement with feedback and learning.

Q: Could the Line 14 of the "Happy let-it-pass" dialog example representative of a 'cultural norm (e.g., not performing well may indicate that the teacher hasn't taught very well)?

A: I cannot discount this possibility. But I think the capacity to engage with learning is malleable, so students can adopt new approaches.

Q: The assumption often seems to be that learners have confused the teacher's intentions vis-a-vis feedback. But what if it's a matter of misaligned or conflicting goals?

A: I think both are possible. For me the task for teachers is to reduce the possibility of misalignment and conflict. So it's a question of being explicit in the first place, so that we minimize the possibility of misconstrual.

Q: What happens when feedback is provided prior to awarding marks, with the expectation that students integrate the feedback into the final version?

A: This would be a positive use of feedback, and I think folks working Dynamic Assessment would approve. Whether institutions interested in differentiation and gatekeeping would tolerate this practice for high-stakes assessment is something that we will need to explore further.

Q: How important is it to equip learners with information that helps them to assess their own performance and decide on their own learning objectives ?

A: Without a doubt, self-assessment (also self-regulated learning) is a very important aspect of learning.

Q: how do you think feedback should be differentiated in a way that is sensitive to the needs of learners who have different proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds and learning styles?

A: This question can be understood as a principle. The art of teaching includes a sensitivity to students' individual and group differences and try to relate teaching (including feedback) to what would work them.

Q: Leung How can one maintain this judicious balance between being too controlling and too open?

A: It's impossible to legislate on this. This is an aspect of teaching that needs to be calibrated with different groups of students

Q: Leung What is the relationship between teacher assessment and teacher feedback? How does it affect classroom language teaching/learning?

A: I think we can make this distinction: assessment can be seen as an effort by teachers to find out what students know and can do in relation to a particular piece of curriculum content; feedback can be seen as an attempt by teachers to offer guidance so that the desired learning can be completed or move forward. So feedback is grounded in assessment. Of course, we must be aware that our assessment is (almost) always influenced by our own knowledge and disciplinary assumptions. For instance, a teacher who believes that learning is largely a matter of mimicry and memory, then their assessment (and feedback) is likely to be influenced by that. Therefore as teachers we all need to be self-aware as to our own values and views. In many ways we should remind ourselves that there is (nearly) always another way, and we need to be open to alternative approaches.

Q: Do you think that teachers (and learners) really have a coherent theory/vision to guide them when they engage w/ learners, give feedback, etc.? Do teachers have a coherent theory/vision th

A: Teachers vary in this. But, to me, teacher professionalism requires us to be aware and explicit about our own 'theory', and to be willing to acknowledge alternative views and approaches.

Q: How does this relate to attributions? e.g., females tend to perceive 'negative' feedback as confirmation of inadequacy?

A: I didn't look at this question at the outset of my enquiries. I understand why the question has arisen. I must admit that in my data there is a hint of this gender issue. I will pay attention to it in the next phase of my work.

Q: How can we shape feedback to make students receptive to it? Is it possible? Does it matter whether they like it or not?

A: Please see earlier replies for Part 1 of the question. As to Part 2 of the question, yes, it does matter. In general we know that positive student orientation can facilitate sustained and productive learning, particularly in North America and western Europe where the education systems promote individual (student) commitment and dedication.