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Feedback, Iterative Processing and Academic Trust - Teacher Education Students' Perceptions of Assessment Feedback

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Abstract: *Feedback and reflective processes play an important role in learning with both teachers and students required to play active roles. The importance of feedback processes and practices takes on an added dimension in the field of teacher education as the assessment and feedback processes are also professional practices that students themselves will be enacting in their professional roles. To this end, feedback provides opportunities for students to develop their own professional assessment literacy but also draws attention to the role of the teacher-education lecturer or assessor and the roles and relationships involved. This article reports on a research study which investigated teacher education students' perceptions of assessment feedback and how they used it. Drawing upon a sociocultural framing, findings highlight the importance of different mediating means including rules, roles and relationships, the practice of iterative processing and the importance of 'academic trust'.*

Introduction

The contribution of feedback for learning and improvement has been widely recognised in the assessment field (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, Biggs & Purdie, 1996). This includes seeing feedback as involving social practices, shared responsibilities and roles that both teachers and students play in the generation of formative information and subsequent action. In the higher education context consideration must, therefore, be given to the roles of both lecturers (tutors and others involved in assessment processes, henceforth lecturers) and students in feedback processes. This research, therefore, includes a focus on the nature of feedback provided in courses, as well as how this feedback is perceived and used.

Teacher education provides a unique context within higher education to consider these issues. As part of their professional preparation pre-service teachers are expected to gain knowledge and understanding about assessment practices including the provision of feedback (Grainger & Adie, 2014). It is also anticipated that they will design and carry out assessment for various purposes in the classrooms in which they complete practicum placements, and ultimately in their own classrooms. As pre-service teachers, students are also experiencing assessment as students, receiving feedback and using that feedback. In this way they are taking on dual roles as student and professional in training. The actions of the tutoring and lecturing staff also take on an added layer of significance, with lecturers formally teaching about assessment and how to assess, and also acting as role models with their own actions in assessing their students being critically regarded by those students.

The aim of this study was to develop an understanding of pre-service teacher education students' perceptions and use of lecturer assessment feedback within education

courses (or subjects). The study was underpinned by a sociocultural framework (Daniels, 2004; Engeström, 1987, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978) based on the understanding that learning and assessment practices are mediated processes involving various tools, socially enacted through and situated in relationships. The research began with questions about the effective use of feedback and in particular how students used feedback. The subsequent findings and discussion identified the importance of both student and teacher roles and other mediating means and practices. The presence or absence of these impacted on how feedback was perceived and used.

Key Concepts from the Literature

It is now well established in the formative assessment and research literature that effective feedback processes clearly contribute to improvements in student learning and achievement. Hattie's well-known meta-analyses of influences on achievement identified significant effect size improvements associated with the use of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). A growing body of related research has identified certain factors of effective feedback, including the provision of quality, timely feedback that identifies how students can improve with the option for on-going interactions between teacher and student (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2001; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002; Stobart, 2006).

Research on feedback in higher education has been largely directed towards the analysis of feedback as a tool or artefact provided by the lecturer to the student. Generally, students identify good feedback as: both supportive and critical, with a balance maintained between the two (Ferguson, 2011); specific and providing guidance (Hounsell, 2003); related to transparent assessment criteria (Weaver, 2006); and supportive of students in the improvement of their work (Ferguson, 2011).

Assessment and Professional Practice

In considering the field of teacher education, the outcomes are more specifically about becoming a graduate 'professional' teacher. This professional needs to demonstrate facility with assessment literacy, to be able to assess and provide feedback as a professional.

This therefore requires students to make links between the feedback they receive, their assessment practices as undergraduate pre-service teachers and trainee professionals. Existing research about feedback processes in teacher education tends to give emphasis to mentor teacher feedback in school practicums or student peer assessment processes, or to the development of feedback skills as part of dedicated assessment courses (Al-Barakat & Al-Hassan, 2009). There is little research at present focussing on education lecturers as role-models for preparing pre-service teachers for their work as assessors in classrooms, although Elwood and Klenowski propose that teachers of assessment (in education) in universities should reflect on their own practices "in line with current thinking of what constitutes effective educational assessment at the classroom level" (2002, p. 244). The extent to which students are able to recognise feedback processes as providing them with valuable experience to apply to their professional practice is unexplored.

Feedback as Relational

There is growing recognition of the importance of affective and relational components in how feedback is perceived and acted upon by students (Dowden, Pittaway, Yost &

McCarthy, 2011; Ferguson, 2011; Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Rowe & Wood, 2008; Weaver, 2006). When described in this way, feedback is no longer simply a tool to be analysed for its efficacy, but is more directly related to interactions and, therefore, the rules, the community, and roles and relationships of the activity system. In her work aimed at engaging pre- and in-service teachers in the process of evaluation, Francis (2001, p. 126) has drawn attention to the "complex politics of interpersonal communication processes involved in the generation of criteria and the giving of feedback". Adcroft (2011, p. 406) has more directly addressed aspects of the social process of assessment, agreeing that "the fundamental points of analysis are the human relationships involved".

A message gaining traction in the field is that the relationship between lecturers and students strongly influences students' perceptions of the feedback they receive (Carless, 2009, 2013; Pokorny & Pickford, 2010; Poulos & Mahony, 2008). This suggests that relationships can play a mediating role both positively as an enabler, or negatively as a contradiction and barrier in the effective operation of the assessment and feedback system.

Carless (2009) furthermore outlines the importance of trust in assessment practices, including trust both in the received feedback and the teacher: "For formative feedback to flourish it is necessary for students to be willing "…to invest trust in the teacher" (p. 82). Carless advocates the development of trust through what could be described as rules of dialogic feedback through "relationships in which there are ample opportunities for interactions about learning and around notions of quality" (p. 90). This signals the importance of productive interactions between students and teachers, which may in themselves, then become a model of practice for students in their professional practice (Nicol 2010).

Research Design

The impetus for this research came from the experiences of the researchers in teaching undergraduate education students at a regional university. It was recognised that while considerable effort in recent years had been focussed on improving the quality of lecturer feedback on student assessment, students reported that they were not consistently engaging with the feedback provided on assessment items. Moreover, few students seemed to takw advantage of the feedback opportunities offered to approach their lecturers to discuss the feedback received and engage in ongoing dialogue and goal setting. Based on these concerns and understandings about the use of feedback in higher education, the researchers applied for a university level Scholarship of Teaching and Learning grant to study feedback processes and students' perceptions of feedback drawing on a sociocultural framework. The following research questions were identified:

1. What types of feedback and processes do students find most useful and least helpful?
2. What role does the student play in using feedback for improvement and learning?
3. What is the nature of the lecturer's role and practices in encouraging the effective use of feedback?

The university's research ethics committee granted approval for the research to be conducted. Consent packages were provided to students and participants engagement was to occur based upon their voluntary consent. Given the potential for a conflict of interest to occur in talking to students about the feedback they had received from the researchers as lecturers, conditions for gaining ethical clearance included not contacting students until they had completed the assessment for the term, and ensuring that no student took part in a focus group run by a lecturer who had taught her/him that term.

The research methodology adopted was case study using a mixed methods approach. The choice of this strategy for case study research is often appropriate as it provides a "better understanding of research problems" than either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5). To strengthen the study's findings the collection and analysis of data, the integration of findings, and the drawing of inferences used both methods in combination. Informed through the adoption of a sociocultural theoretical frame, this research recognised the importance of human interactions, the environment and mediating tools (Daniels, 2004; Engeström, 1987, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

The main forms of data collected included survey questionnaires and focus group interviews with students. The survey questionnaire included a combination of Likert response scales to selected questions as well as several open-ended questions. The online survey instrument Survey Monkey was used. Survey and interview work conducted in previous research studies was used to inform the design of survey questions, including interview questions about the processing of tutor feedback used by Orsmond and Merry (2009). The survey questionnaire data was tabulated and mean calculations determined. Most of the analysis was univariant, with some bi-variant analysis, focussing on patterns in the range of responses. The open-ended questions were collated and coded and this data organised around content themes that related to the research questions.

Focus group interviews were organised with self-nominating students who responded to the survey and these took place in small groups, with six students participating. The focus was on student accounts of the nature of feedback provided and how they used it. A set of questions was drafted to guide the interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. Interview transcripts were also coded manually, and as with the open-ended questions, were then analysed according to key thematic concepts related to the research questions i.e. perceptions of effective feedback, less effective feedback, how students use feedback, and perceptions and expectations about the lecturer/marker role.

Context and Survey Responses

The study was conducted in a multi-campus regional university that includes students who study on seven different sites as well as through distance mode. Students were drawn from three different education degrees: Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Secondary Education. In the majority of undergraduate education degree courses students are required to submit two assignments for course assessment. Students generally receive feedback in the form of annotated criteria sheets and written feedback.

In total 111 responses were received across campus sites and study modes. Key demographic information is outlined in Table 1. Approximately 25% of the cohort of education students enrolled in that term participated. The majority of responses were from female students: 88% of respondents were female, and 12% male. This generally reflects enrolments in the undergraduate degrees offered through the university. Participants ranged in age from 17 to over 45.

	Response Percent n=108
Gender	
Female	88%
Male	12%
Degree enrolled in	
Early Childhood education	30%
Primary education	47%
Secondary education	23%
Age range	
17-25	49%
25-35	17%
35-45	19%
Over 45	15%

Table 1: Summary of demographic information

Findings

The research findings and discussion draws on respondents' answers to questions from the survey and is organised to respond to the three research questions with a focus on student perceptions of feedback, student role and practices in relation to the use of feedback and the lecturer's role in relation to feedback. In each section, further information is elaborated upon which draws on the open-ended survey question responses and focus group interviews.

Student Perceptions of Different Feedback

As part of the survey, students were asked to identify the degree of importance they placed on different types of assessment feedback. The strongest response from all students was that they value feedback that specifically identifies what to improve. They also value feedback that encourages them.

The strongest responses were for feedback that included:

- Those that tell you what you could do to improve (100% of students responded agree or strongly agree)
- Annotations within the assignment (98% agreement)
- Those that explain and correct your mistakes and weaknesses (97% agreement)
- Feedback that encourages you in your work (94% agreement)
- Parts highlighted on the criteria sheet (92% agreement).

Less importance was placed on feedback that reflected tutors' opinion or correct grammar and punctuation (see Table 2).

Answer Options n=95	Not important	Of little importance	Moderately important	Very important	Rating Average
Those that tell you what you could do to improve	0%	0%	12%	88%	3.88
I go through the assignment and read any annotations given	0%	2%	25%	73%	3.71
Those that explain and correct your mistakes or weaknesses	0%	3%	25%	72%	3.68
Feedback that encourages you in your work	1%	5%	30%	64%	3.57
I look carefully at the parts	0%	8%	35%	57%	3.48

highlighted on the criteria sheet					
Those that focus on the subject matter	0%	9%	37%	54%	3.44
Those that focus on critical analysis/higher order thinking	0%	7%	52%	41%	3.34
Those that correct your structure and grammar	4%	18%	37%	41%	3.15
Those that focus on the tutor's overall impressions	4%	17%	55%	24%	2.99
I just want the grade	12%	34%	32%	22%	2.65

Table 2: Degree of importance placed on types of feedback

In addition, open-ended survey questions and the focus group interview data were coded for related themes and revealed strongly held ideas about the effect of good feedback (See Table 3) and supported the Lickert scale findings.

Many students prioritised explicitness in their comments, showing that they valued detailed feedback in the form of annotations and 'helpful' comments (10+ responses), finding feedback that is 'confusing' or 'vague' to be less then useful. The importance of marker engagement with the assignment is strongly identified; students are highly critical of grade-only feedback with short comments and no annotations and the use of ticks without comments (12 responses). High achieving students found comments such as 'good work' or 'great work' with no further explanation did not provide them with the information to improve their work further. This notion of improvement was prioritised by others, who specifically valued feedback that promoted reflective practice.

Students in this study strongly identified the usefulness of critical feedback where it appeared as part of a mix of both positive and critical. The critical feedback must, however, provide detail on how and what to improve in order to be effective. In addition, students identified the importance of feedback that links to the task, and the criteria and standards. The timeliness of feedback was an important issue for students, who felt that feedback on summative tasks must be returned early enough so that it can be used to improve future tasks (11 responses).

Qualitative data themes:	Survey comments (n of participants=34)	Focus group comments (n of participants=6)
Numbers below indicate the number of times particular comments were made.		
Aspects of feedback students like	**Feedback characteristics** Annotations – relevant comments (2) Helpful feedback (3) Positive comments (4) Feedback + shaded criteria Identifies where I have gone wrong (4) Suggestions about how I could improve (5) Promotes reflective practice (3) Consistency (1) **Conditions** Timely (2)	**Feedback characteristics** Detailed (spells things out) (5) Constructive criticism that can be used (2) Criteria + overall comment that reflects work as a whole (1) Identifies where I have gone wrong (1) Suggestions about how I could improve (5) Promotes reflective practice (1) Personalised (1) Includes criteria references/criteria explained in class (3) Improves teaching practice (1) **Conditions** Timely (3) Good feedback on each task (1) **Other feedback sources** Feedback from high achievers (1)
Aspects of feedback students didn't like	**Feedback characteristics** Grade/tick and no detailed comment (3) Minimal comment (3) Doesn't tell you how to improve (3)	**Feedback characteristics** Grade/tick and no detailed comment (6) Doesn't tell you how to improve (4)

	Confusing/vague (3) Poor feedback (1) Feedback that lacks understanding of the task (1) Lack of fairness and consistency (2) Personal comments about the author (1) Contradictory advice (1)	
	Timing	**Timing**
	Feedback that comes back late and cannot be used before next task is due (10)	Feedback that comes back late and cannot be used before next task is due (1)
	Readability and relevance	**Readability and relevance**
	Illegible (1) Vague criteria sheets/author's marks not related to criteria (1)	Vague criteria sheets/marks not related to criteria (4)

Table 3: Open-ended survey questions and focus groups – perceptions of feedback

Student Role and Feedback Literacies

The next set of statements (Question 7 on the survey) sought to explore student use of feedback and so asked them how they responded to and used assessment feedback. This included a series of statements that related to paying attention to feedback, using it to inform future learning, using feedback from one task to inform their work on later tasks and so forth. A number of statements also identified their interactions with others regarding their use of feedback (discussions with other students or lecturers). Some statements also focussed on students' receptiveness to feedback and criticism and the emotional response to feedback. Finally, one explicitly asked about their interest in using online tools for summarising feedback and goal-setting. Several statements were also written in the negative and sought to further investigate student use of feedback from previous tasks.

As shown in Table 4, the strongest responses to the statements in the positive were for the statements:

- I pay close attention to the comments I get (100% of students responded agree or strongly agree)
- I am the type of person who is open to feedback (98% of students responded agree or strongly agree).

Answer Options n=95	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating Average
I pay close attention to the comments I get	0%	0%	43%	57%	3.57
I am the type of person who is open to feedback	0%	2%	46%	52%	3.50
I seek to address weaknesses identified by feedback	1%	8%	57%	34%	3.23
I use feedback to inform future learning and goal setting	0%	11%	56%	33%	3.23
I talk to other students about feedback	1%	16%	52%	30%	3.12
I read and use final task feedback for assessment in other courses	2%	23%	45%	30%	3.02
I would summarise feedback and use it for goal setting if encouraged to in my courses	2%	17%	61%	20%	2.99
I read and use the feedback from early assessment for later in the course	4%	18%	53%	25%	2.98

I seek assistance or further advice from staff	7%	28%	50%	15%	2.72
I would like to use e-learning platforms such as mahara for summarising feedback and goal setting	19%	37%	36%	7%	2.32
I rarely review previous feedback	17%	52%	23%	8%	2.23
I find it difficult to deal with negative or critical feedback	17%	60%	20%	4%	2.12
I don't remember to use feedback for improvement	42%	43%	13%	2%	1.75
I do not use final task feedback	46%	41%	10%	3%	1.69

Table 4: How students report that they use assessment feedback

Greater diversity in responses is evident with statements that tease out the different ways that students process and use feedback to inform learning, both within a specific course and through using feedback from one course to inform their work in subsequent courses. The level of agreement with statements drops off in relation to the degree of subsequent action required on behalf of the student:

- I seek to address weaknesses identified by feedback (91% of students responded agree or strongly agree)
- I use feedback to inform future learning and goal setting (89% agreement)
- I talk to other students about feedback (83% agreement)
- I read and use the feedback from early assessment for later in the course (78% agreement)
- I read and use final task feedback for assessment in other courses (75 % agreement)

The lowest levels of agreement to statements were for those written in the reverse presenting negative characteristics and student use of feedback. While the majority of students disagreed with these statements, the statement that had the strongest agreement was this one:

- I rarely review previous feedback (31% of students responded agree or strongly agree and 69% responded disagree or strongly disagree.

It is probably reasonable to believe that of their own volition some students do not necessarily go back to revisit previous feedback once that course has been completed.

It is important to note that the students who participated in this study were relatively successful students in that no students who 'failed' that term's courses completed the survey.

	Response Percent n=76
Average level of achievement	
High Distinction	23.7%
Distinction	40.8%
Credit	21.0%
Pass	9.2%
Fail	0.0%
Other	5.3%

Table 5: Students' average level of achievement

In the open-ended question data students indicated that they recognised the value of feedback and they understood that feedback on summative assessment items was to be used to feed forward into subsequent assignments and courses (10 responses). The data also showed that when these students receive feedback they read through it multiple times and the survey provided evidence that over 55% of students who responded to that question claimed to

spend between 15-30 or 30-60 minutes reading feedback on summative assessment items. The interviews and open-ended survey questions revealed that many students saw feedback as something to interact with and activate (13 responses) and identified ways they processed feedback, making sure they understood it and what it applied to.

Of the 6 focus group interview participants, (coincidentally 5 routinely achieved distinctions across their degree) it became clear that these students had good assessment 'smarts' and literacies and had developed strategies for interacting with feedback in productive ways. In particular, they were able to articulate strategies for using feedback, reviewing past work, clustering similar assignments and filtering feedback for strategic action. They talked about strategies such as printing off assignments, creating folders for their assignments and re-reading feedback months and years later. Significantly, these students indicated a strong sense of agency and being proactive in terms of seeking clarifications or approaching lecturers. One student describes her processes thus: "I lock in the feedback, I tend to remember feedback (from) when I first started. I want to try and write better so every time I write an assignment I can read (*lecturer's name*) feedback". This student can be heard talking about 'remembering' feedback, revisiting it and at times 'ventriloquating' the lecturer's voice in their head when they were doing other tasks, an experience shared by other students. This ventriloquating the voice of the outside critic is an interesting one and important for internalisation processes as discussed by Wertsch (1991). These collections of review and revisiting assessment practices can be termed 'iterative processing' and it would appear that these types of assessment literacies are practiced by successful and high achieving students in this study.

Qualitative data themes:	Survey comments (n of participants=34)	Focus group comments (n of participants=6)
Numbers below indicate number of times across the discussion that particular comments were made.		
Student role in feedback	**Student actions** Seek clarification (1) Use feedback to improve (4) Recognise value of feedback (3) Use feedback for future courses (4)	**Student actions** Use feedback to improve (2) Recognise value of feedback (2) Use feedback for future courses/keep and look back on old assignments (6) Be reflective on work (lock feedback in head, hear the voice of the lecturer in my head, analyse own learning, use it to improve teaching practice) (5) Use it to boost self-esteem (1) Look at other assignments, pull them apart using criteria (1) Interpret the feedback for herself (2) Students should acquire peer-assessment skills in 3/4 year (2)
	Motivation To be motivated and positive (1)	**Motivation** Produce what the lecturer wants (1) Some students don't use feedback (not like-minded) (1)
Lecturer role in feedback	**To provide particular types of feedback** Should provide positive comment, improvement, positive comment (1) Should provide detailed feedback (1)	**To provide particular types of feedback** Should provide cool and warm feedback (2) Should provide detailed feedback (2)
	How lecturers should act Read through entire assignment thoroughly (1) Practise what they preach about feedback –	**How lecturers should act** Academic trust is important (6) (lecturers should be right, know what they're doing, know what they're speaking about, act

modelling good feedback, giving criticism (2)	professionally towards marking, showing mutual respect)
Must know the requirements of the task (1)	Should provide timely feedback (3)
	Should make an effort (1)
	Should be credible (1)
	Should be active in formal and informal feedback (eg blogs)
Should be available to talk 1 on 1	Should explicitly teach the purpose of feedback and what should be done (1)
	Should explicitly talk about criteria (3)
	Should be available to talk 1 on 1 (4)
	Should be very active across the whole course – providing formal/informal feedback (2)
Feedback source	**Feedback source**
Should be the person running course/tutor (1)	Should be the person running course/tutor – do their job (3)
Most experienced lecturers are best (1)	Does not matter who marks as long as they give good feedback (2)

Table 6: Open-ended survey questions and focus groups-student and lecturer roles

Lecturer Role, Professional Expectations and Academic Trust

The open-ended question and focus group interview data further elaborated on clear student expectations about lecturers' roles and related assessment practices and rules (see Table 6). In looking to make the links between their assessment experiences and their professional practice as pre-service teachers, students were appreciative of lecturers who 'practice what they preach' in demonstrating exemplary assessment and feedback practices. In all, 20 responses from 16 students were coded to such practices. The following student identifies the importance of qualitative aspects they value in lecturer feedback:

Student A: I think it's less than half (assignments that get a lot of feedback)... And what it comes down to for me is that we are taught to value our students as individuals. ... And to get an assignment back that we have spent hours and hours and tried to perfect as much as we could and only have a few comments? Not only can we not learn from it but it's sort of that feeling of [not] being valued even though I know they have a lot to mark but I mean that's their job. And look, it is very time consuming to mark but it does come down to that.

This student comment signals the value given by students to lecturer acknowledgement of their work through the feedback process and further expectations about what the lecturer's 'job' entails. Students in the interviews further elaborated upon their belief that in taking on the assessment role, lecturers and markers were entering into a contract with students. It then became apparent that there are both explicit and tacit rules at play about what this contract entails. Therefore, if students had completed assignments (especially large assignments) and submitted them on time, they believed the lecturer or marker should therefore show mutual respect by providing 'adequate' feedback in a timely manner. This was seen as a mark of academic respect and the fulfilment of the contract.

The data also showed that some students were making connections between the feedback processes they engage in and the roles that they ultimately must play as teachers in the classroom:

Student C: When we did that ESS (assessment course) I had all my assignments and looked at all the feedback and looked at

> the type of feedback I'd been getting. … I really need to look at everything I had got and say this is how the pros do it. So can I do something similar?

The student here talks about activities they have undertaken that develop some of the skills they need to engage in themselves as professionals. The student looks at lecturers' feedback as a model for his own feedback practices. He also reflects on his processing of feedback with the expert model of the lecturers' feedback as a framework to guide his practice. These and other comments indicate some students clearly making connections between how they are processing feedback and their own practices as future teachers.

On a number of occasions in the focus group interviews students used the term 'academic trust' (6 responses from across the focus group participants). This term is not necessarily important in terms of the number of respondents who used it, but it is conceptually important as it arose spontaneously within the focus group discussions and encapsulates many of the features and relational aspects of the lecturer/student professional contract. Students talked about the importance of having respect and building a sense of 'academic trust' with their lecturer/tutor as underpinning their regard for feedback. One student even described academic trust as 'over-riding anything'. This trust was predicated upon actions by the lecturer including: being accurate and knowing what they're talking about in feedback and acting professionally towards marking and showing mutual respect (5 responses). In some cases when students discussed academic trust it was in relation to positive relationships they had with particular lecturers, as can be seen in the following interview extract:

Student C: I have a fairly high level of academic trust with this lecturer. There really are no stupid questions with her … I am very receptive to anything she says, basically.

Researcher: So is it what she has actually written or is it this underlying relationship with her? …

Student C: I wish I could remember something specific. How she really nicely said it was dumb.

Laughter

Researcher: Does who it comes from and your relationship with them matter?

Student B: Definitely.

This interchange outlines the importance of a relationship with a particular lecture describing the academic trust they have with her and commend the tone of the feedback she provides. While the quality of the feedback contributed to the sense of academic trust, the student reported they are willing to accept the critical nature of feedback given that the lecturer operates by the tacit rules of communicating, using a tone considered to be supportive and tactful. The relationship with this particular academic mediates their reading of the feedback.

In comparison, students stated that they did not necessarily have the same level of academic trust for feedback received from other lecturers and hence their feedback may be discounted. In particular they mentioned those who do not demonstrate appropriate discipline knowledge or prove supportive encouragement. Students were critical of lecturers who

provide inaccurate feedback (where grades do not match the feedback provided and is considered inconsistent or unfair) or feedback that does not seem to match with advice provided prior to assessment submission. A student who reported such a mismatch reacted as follows:

Researcher: With the feedback on that assignment. Did you think the feedback and the mark matched?

Student C: Yeah, I took it with a grain of salt. I probably didn't respect it as much as I should have.

The student goes on to say that 'No academic trust had been established'. The spontaneous discussion about trust indicates the importance of students having certain expectations about the roles and rules of the academics that they work with which are then validated (or not) through actions and behaviours. These findings can be considered in light of the work by Carless and Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt and Camerer (1998, p. 393-4) who propose that "trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another." Lewicki, McAllister and Bies (1998, p. 435) describe trust as "an individual's belief in, and willingness to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decisions of another".

The notion of academic trust as expressed here is therefore a type of relational mediating state that can be both an enabler and a barrier for the student as subject being able to achieve their goals. In its productive form, it sees the students generate a belief that the lecturer will provide consistent feedback that reflects deep knowledge of the subject matter, understanding of the process of making judgements and crafted in ways that are supportive of the student in their endeavours. The lecturer's actions ideally reflect a positive attitude to the students and to the profession which are born out through relational interactions and material actions and artefacts.

The Second Best Alternative - The Anonymous Marker

The data reveal different rules at play depending on who provides the feedback and raises the question of whether academic trust can be generated in cases when students don't know the lecturer involved. In the focus group interviews, students' descriptions of the role of the lecturer showed that they preferred receiving feedback from those teaching the course, expecting they should do the marking (4 responses). Some students, however, indicated that they could overcome their bias against anonymity and lack of relationship if a contract marker's feedback is of a good quality:

Student A: To me, as long as I can learn from the feedback I don't care who gives it to me.

The mediating impact of relationships is reduced in this situation as no prior relationship exists. While students indicated this was not the preferred situation, in some cases this feedback is viewed more transparently or objectively. When marked by contract markers, students reported that they focussed more on the quality of the comments and the relevance of them to the task and criteria. The preference though was certainly for the marker to be a trusted and known academic.

Discussion and conclusions

This research study affirmed that effective feedback relies on the provision of quality feedback but also student and lecturer roles, rules and relationships, and these mediate the impact of the feedback. As evidenced in other studies of students' perceptions of feedback, pre-service education students value feedback focused on improvement and with an emphasis on constructive criticism which explains knowledge and understandings gaps. The current study provides further evidence that students strongly agree that the most useful feedback and comments are those that tell you what you could do to improve (and even value lecturer feedback that uses that specific phrase in feedback comments), and that explain and correct their mistakes.

In relation to the student's role in using and responding to feedback, students whose grades demonstrated a high level of assessment literacy reported a number of active behaviours activated in the use of feedback: multiple passes of the feedback as they read and re-read comments, identifying the gap by processing the feedback, identifying its key features and interpreting its relevance. This process can best be described as iterative processing. Effective use of feedback involves revisiting and applying feedback in different courses or modules beyond narrow task or course contexts to further inform ongoing learning. Successful students are likely to engage in these iterative feedback processes, visiting and re-visiting, interpreting and employing feedback across multiple courses and contexts. There are lessons to be learned from this finding that may be used in coaching less high achieving students to help view feedback processes reflectively - to consider their role and how they use feedback received, and internalise messages and practices to inform their own role as an assessor and effective education professional.

This current research identified the dual roles that relate to the professional outcomes for subjects in pre-service education contexts - with students as students and students as future teachers. This has implications for the teacher educator/lecturer role as well. Teacher education students interact with and use feedback to inform their professional learning but also see feedback processes as role modelling for their future professional role. They regard their education lecturers as role models who should be modelling high quality assessment and feedback practices. In this particular research study the feedback students valued most highly and internalised was most likely to be from education lecturers they respected and for whom they had a contract of 'academic trust'.

Teacher education lecturers need to be aware of the importance of trust to their students, how this is generated through the process of belief building and action, and that a lack of academic trust can negatively influence upon the impact of feedback. For feedback to promote learning and facilitate improvement, education lecturers need to demonstrate professional and assessment role modelling, paying attention to their practices, relationships and the generation of academic trust. To take this into account requires that all lecturing staff who assess pre-service teachers, including sessional and contract staff, reflect on their own feedback practices. It also requires that they consider the enactment of relationships through feedback and recognise the important role this plays in modelling and developing the assessment literacy of their students. The research has also identified the place of the mediating role played by academic trust and draws attention to the development and realisation of that through feedback processes.

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