

**0401**

## **Why do children accept or reject feedback?**

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### **Background**

This paper reports on progress to date of a study into reception of feedback. The problem lies in the field of assessment, and specifically relates to feedback within formative assessment principles. The study arises from the findings of my earlier study, reported at BERA 2006 and builds on these. The earlier study found that the views of children regarding their perceptions of feedback as a means of improving their work, are valid and insightful sources of data. An additional finding was that although children agree as to the factors involved in 'good' feedback, they vary considerably as to the types of feedback that include those factors for individuals. The aim of this study is to go back into the field to study some individuals who are not progressing as expected to see if response to feedback is a factor in their lack of progress. The thesis is that there is a mechanism or mechanisms relating to individual response to feedback that can be detected or understood - there is a knowable 'truth' involved, relating to that student, in that context. It is further expected that identifying this mechanism will lead to insights into the learning process that can then be used to improve learning outcomes for children.

### **Research Questions**

Research question: What affects the reception and subsequent use of feedback by children?

### **Methods**

Sadler (1989) states "Formative assessment is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses ... can be used to shape and improve the student's competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning". Today, formative assessment is increasingly seen as being positioned in constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, and therefore incorporates a strong element of student participation in the learning process (Absolum, 2006) A key concept for this study is that of student voice. It is important to hear from the students themselves their perceptions and understandings related to their interpretation of feedback.

The study is being carried out in phases, each requiring different research methods and these may come from different aspects of qualitative research or may lie outside this approach altogether. However, all selected methods fall within the general area of phenomenographical / interpretive research.

Phase 1 :involved developing an understanding of the aims and methods of the study with a primary classroom teacher. It was necessary to explore concepts relating to learning, teaching, feedback and assessment in order to develop a shared understanding of what is to be explored. Meetings for this purpose took place in the second half of 2009.

Phase 2 :will begin at the start of the 2010 school year with a period of general observations, a survey of the class to identify the current responses to feedback being used in the class, and selection of participants from students identified as not performing to the levels expected of them. During Phase 2, data will be gathered by means of observations carried out each school week for two or more hours at a time, at different times of the day and on different days of the week. These will be interspersed with a series of unstructured interviews with groups and individuals in order to clarify aspects of classroom practice from the students' perspectives. Phase 2 will conclude sometime during March - April 2010.

Phase 3 : a case study of the selected participants, which will be concluded by the end of the 2010 school year. During Phase 3, observations of the participants together with open-ended interviews will

be the main methods used. Interviews and observations will be carried out over time, in an attempt to track the thinking of each individual child.

Phase 4 : phenomenographic analysis of the data.

### **Frame**

The literature review identified constructivism as the underlying conceptual theory of the study. Constructivist approaches focus on identifying and constructing meaning, and therefore related qualitative theories and methodologies are most likely to give insights into the problem. Since the problem being explored in this study is heavily contextualised within a classroom, and the study seeks to understand the experiences of students in relation to feedback, the preferred theoretical alignment was to interpretive research (Willis, 2007). The theory of phenomenology is suited to this problem, although the reasons for use or non-use of feedback are more likely to be revealed through micro-investigation of a limited number of cases, than through an investigation of the incidence of the phenomenon. Phenomenology is related to research through phenomenography, which allows us to 'say something about how student learning takes place by looking at the interaction between student conceptions of learning....and the way it is being taught and assessed' ((Wisker, 2001) p.161). Phenomenography encompasses all aspects of the study and allows in-depth exploration of the problem.

### **Research findings**

Research that focuses on the ways in which feedback operates (for example, the timing, amount, mode and audience of feedback) has been explored and is now available to be transferred from theory to practice (Brookhart, 2009), but the effects of feedback on the performance of individual children, as directly reported by that individual, have received little attention. The study reported in this paper aims to clarify what 'happens' to the feedback received by students, and why they do or don't use it, in order to develop further understanding of the process by which feedback can be given and received in ways that improve learning outcomes. The mechanism of how and why feedback is acted on, from the viewpoint of the student, is examined because understanding this is necessary if teachers (and learners) are to use feedback constructively to improve learning.

### **References**

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