

# Chapter 14

## Are You Feeding Back or Is It Taking Students Forward? Changing the Traditional Narrative to Ensure a Dialogic Approach in Formative Assessment

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The idea of feedback in education is accepted as vital in students' learning experience as a key to their success. Moreover, there is a growing recognition that for formative assessment practices to be most effective; data produced should be of a type that can help students improve their learning, and so should be dialogic, and feed forward rather than back. That is, students should have the opportunity to be engaged in critical reflection and dialogue about their performance in relation to such data. This chapter, therefore, presents a framework that positions dialogue at the core of formative assessment practices. It aligns this with Boud and Molloy's "Feedback Mark 2" model and Henderson et al.'s 12 conditions of success within the broader field of formative assessment to present a case for a more fine-grained examination of the concepts involved and the need for a change in mindset. The chapter argues that dialogue is the conduit through which nuanced moments and "feed markers" provide indicators of learning progression, and that how this impacts on the design of formative assessment tasks requires greater scrutiny. It concludes that the nuanced humanistic behaviors of the dialogic experience need further definition and exploration within the feedback space, and that the established narrative around the use of "feedback" needs to change to accommodate the social constructivist view of learning if practices are to be enhanced.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is situated within a *milieu* of feedback literature, as coined by Boud and Molloy (2013), which could be described as a mirroring the milieu of feedback actions themselves. Feedback, by its nature sits within the teaching and learning process, and involves both the teacher and the student, besides some form of clear, consistent communication (Nixon, Brooman, Murphy, Fearon, & Education, 2017). This communication between teachers and students about their learning progress is a vehicle for the provision of formative assessment information to assist students to improve. Traditionally, referred to as ‘feedback’, as ‘assessment data’, it is well recognized as that pedagogical feature that has the potential to have the most significant impact on students’ learning (Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It is also seen as able to strengthen student evaluative judgement (Henderson, Boud, Molloy, Dawson, Phillips, Ryan, & Mahoney (2018), emerging from the work of Black and Wiliam (1998), Wiliam (2011) and Wiliam and Thompson (2017). Recent studies of the implementation of feedback in the higher education sector, and particularly in initial teacher education, are evident in the work of Carless (2019), Conrad and Dabbagh (2015), and Denton and McIlroy (2017) These researchers moved from investigations of perceptions of the feedback process through to how it can be conceptualization as dialogue (Merry, Price, Carless, & Taras, 2013). Building on the focus on dialogue, Carless (2019) proposes that feedback may involve both short and long feedback loops that are difficult to decipher, thus highlighting the complexity involved. In response, the authors of this chapter argue that a deep analysis of the humanistic operationalization of feedback dialogue and feedback loops is necessary to help address the issues and better define the practices involved. This would require a deep analysis of the humanistic actions and behaviors that emerge from the dialogue and learning loops theorized by Carless et al. (2013). By positioning these humanistic components as documented in the literature in the field of dialogic practice within the feedback practices of higher education programs, the authors seek to answer the questions: “How can higher education institutions best support the student learning experience in their promotion of dialogically rich formative assessment practices?”; “Can we quantify or surface the humanistic element given the complexities and diversification of the individuals involved?” and “Which dialogic feedback behaviors can improve graduate employability, student experience and sustainability in the profession?

Part of a teaching-learning process is the provision of feedback and this chapter proposes a view of these processes in higher education that is characterized by parity between the student and academic perspectives. The following section presents the theoretical perspective of the authors and is followed by a section that presents a theorized framework of five key elements that may influence the resultant enacted curriculum (Remillard, 2018). The authors describe this framework within the higher education space and then align it with the eight characteristics of Feedback Mark 2 (FM2) (Boud & Molloy, 2013) and the twelve conditions of successful feedback reported by Henderson et al. (2018).

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter views the milieu of literature and research on feedback through a constructivist, pragmatic and connectivist view of learning activity. This section presents the underlying theoretical position as pragmatism. Social constructivism posits that learning is a cognitive activity that is socially situated (Barak, 2016). Constructivism builds on the premise that learning relies on ‘significant relationships

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