

Chapter 15

Formative Assessment and Feedback with Teacher Immediacy Behaviors in an E-Text-Based Context

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ABSTRACT

Most students favor feedback from an instructor to their assignments, as it informs them of whether or not their finished work is on the right track. However, solely awarding a grade or score to students' assignments, even if with very brief comments, does not enable students to know how to improve their work. This type of assessment tends to gauge students' work for evaluation, making students become competitive with peers for grades or scores (Harlen & Crick, 2003; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Deviating from this orientation, this chapter converges on the importance of constructive and beneficial feedback through the assessment process in an e-text-based context, for the purpose of lifelong learning. The chapter also discusses teacher immediacy cues, which are intended to assist the reader in developing a better understanding of how feedback should be provided to students. To aid the reader to walk along this path, this chapter also provides suggested practical strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Most students favor feedback from an instructor to their assignments that informs them of whether or not their finished work is on the right track, as a student commented, “I like being made sure that I am on the right direction.” However, sometimes, if students receive such feedback, “This is a good point,” they may not be appreciative of the instructor’s effort. One student explained, “I would like to know why this is a good point.” If a grade or score that a student receives denotes less satisfactory work or if a general comment provided by an instructor reads, “This is not up to the expectation” without any or much justification for it, a certain level of frustration may quickly arise. The student would like to know, “Why did my work fail to meet the expectations.” Some students may even feel resentful when an instructor’s comment is judgmental: “This is incorrect.” These types of poor feedback are not conducive to student learning, as there is a lack of specific information as to why the work is insufficiently accomplished and how to reach the criteria or objectives of an assignment. Likewise, a grade or score does not enable students to know how to improve their work either, as it tends to assess students’ work for evaluation, making students become competitive with peers for grades or scores (Harlen & Crick, 2003; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick).

Assessing student’s work is for the purpose of teaching and learning as written assignments or learning activities afford students avenues to develop a coherent understanding of course content. An instructor’s feedback to students’ submitted assignments is instructional coaching through assessment, assisting students in a thoughtful transfer of knowledge and skills to new situations (Chang & Petersen, 2006). Thus, assessment should be part of the instructional process and be treated as formative assessment, but not as summative assessment all the time.

“Formative assessment, effectively implemented, can do as much or more to improve

student achievement than any of the most powerful instructional interventions, intensive reading instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and the like” (Russo & Bensen, 2005, p. 276). The result of formative assessment is usually represented by feedback. In Sadler’s (1989) point of view, effective feedback not only needs to be closely associated to performance standards, but also provides appropriate strategies for students to make improvement. For example, with respect to a misconception expressed by a student, an instructor’s comment that is perceptive while being constructive may be, “Jennie, I understand this point here. However, focusing solely on “fun” activities is inappropriate. Please review Chapter 6 again along with our guidelines for this assignment to enhance your understanding. Then, please write back to me with your renewed understanding of this concept. Please feel free to contact me if an additional explanation is needed. Thank you!” This feedback along with many other comments given to the student’s work is detailed, which conveys teacher immediacy cues, such as calling the student by her first name at the beginning of a comment, acknowledging the understanding of the point made, explaining clearly why rereading is necessary, providing constructive suggestions for subsequent improvement, and showing care about the student learning by letting the student know that the instructor is willing to assist her. This type of formative assessment and feedback not only facilitates this student learning, but also shows the responsibility of the instructor. In addition, with the use of computer-mediated text-based communication system, the instructor’s response can be delivered quickly to the student, which benefits student learning, since timely feedback constructively reinforces acquired concepts (Berge, 1995).

With the reflection and rethinking through the process of revision requested by the instructor, the student’s understanding of the concept improves. The appropriate scaffolding may motivate the student to explore and read more in

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