

Promoting Visibility of Feedback Practices on EAP Programmes

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Dr Sandra Leigh - sandra.leigh@nottingham.ac.uk

Assistant Professor

Centre for English Language Education, University of Nottingham (UoN)

School of Education, Yang Fujia Building (Room A20)

Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Road

NG8 1BB

Introduction

Feedback as a teaching and learning activity has the potential to transform the experiences of tutors and students. This transformation potential is particularly important to EAP Preessional students who need clear guidance to successfully transition to their new academic contexts. Unsurprisingly, some EAP students have linked receiving feedback to their academic progression (Weekly et al, 2022), and some studies have shown that the EAP students who received comprehensive written corrective feedback significantly improved accuracy and fluency (Zhang & Cheng, 2021). This blog post considers different ways to optimise the experiences of EAP students by making feedback more transparent.

Reasons for Promoting Visibility

Feedback practices need to be made more visible and explicitly documented in EAP curricula. A primary reason for this is to ensure that programmes are consciously designed with continuous feedback in mind. This helps to guarantee that feedback is conceptualised as an ongoing process throughout the teaching cycle and opportunities for feedback are identified. More importantly, when students are notified at the start of their EAP programmes what the feedback process of each module is and how the process is designed to work, they are better informed and consequently, in a stronger position to engage with the process.

A second reason for making feedback more visible is that it allows for appropriate contextualisation of practices for the particular EAP programme. In the process of considering what needs to be made clear to students, practitioners are likely to reflect on their teaching contexts and identify which practices are most suitable for a particular cohort's needs and abilities. This reflection is important as effective feedback practices are not always transferrable due to variables in different teaching contexts (Henderson et al, 2019). Some of the literature on feedback practices pertains to students already on their PG and UG programmes (*ibid*), which may not always be applicable to Preessional students.

Similarly, it is sometimes unclear whether research participants are home or international students (Winstone et al, 2019). This is not to indicate that feedback practices of EAP programmes should be unique, but contextual variabilities dictate adjusting good practices to allow for transferability.

Explicit documentation of feedback practices in the curriculum has the additional advantage of needing to clarify expectations and participants' roles in the process. The result of this is the illumination of feedback as a dynamic two-way process, rather than a passive receptive process for students, and students can be guided to take a more active role in feedback. Additional benefits of clarifying participant roles are including students in the process and encouraging EAP practitioners to reflect on their own feedback beliefs and feedback literacy. Tutor feedback literacy has recently been highlighted as an important part of the feedback process (Boud & Dawson, 2021) especially since tutor beliefs and practices can diverge (Orrell, 2006).

Tips for Improving Visibility

There are practical ways to improve the visibility of feedback practices. The key recommendation is to document feedback practices in EAP curricula. This ensures that feedback is clearly planned so students are not confused by different tutor feedback behaviours or miss less obvious feedback opportunities.

Another practical way to enhance visibility is having a feedback overview session at the start of the programmes. Students are often informed at the start of their modules about assessment tasks and provided with the details of these tasks. Similarly, providing an overview of how feedback is given on their respective modules/programmes as well as what students are expected to do as part of the process places students in a better position to exploit feedback opportunities. It is also worth emphasising the active role of students in the feedback process even before the start of the course. There is a tendency to highlight the assessments tasks but not the accompanying feedback activities. If the feedback

practices linked to assessment activities were also brought into focus, it would help to move feedback from the hidden curriculum realm into a more visible position; this visibility could reinforce student uptake.

It is recommended that feedback exchanges throughout the teaching cycle supplement the feedback overview session. These could be in the form of feedback literacy workshops for students and tutors, where students can bring their most recent feedback and explore ways to act upon the feedback with the help of peers and tutors. Such workshops could support feedback uptake as students learn that feedback needs to be acted upon. For EAP practitioners, CPD sessions on feedback literacy provide a valuable opportunity for continuous reflection on practice and a platform for sharing good feedback practices. Such sessions would also expose any outdated or ineffective feedback practices.

A final suggestion is to explicitly link learning activities and tasks to feedback. Interim formative submissions and tutorials are traditional feedback platforms used to comment on students' progression. However, sometimes these activities are engaged in without mutual understanding of the roles. Tutors mark interim submissions expecting students to read, understand, and follow advice. Students often submit interim submissions and expect feedback without identifying their own concerns or areas for clarifications. To maximise such platforms, tutors can clarify what they will be feeding back on. Equally, for interim submissions, students can be encouraged to comment on how challenging they found a particular submission, and what feedback they would like to receive. This offers an opportunity to reflect on their work prior to tutor feedback and develop the capacity for self-evaluation (Henderson et al, 2019). Moreover, written feedback on interim drafts should be followed by further verbal interactive feedback. At the Centre for English Language Education, Nottingham, it has been found that having 1-1 tutorials after the provision of written feedback on interim submissions is particularly useful for both students and tutors.

This post has highlighted the importance of feedback for EAP students and recommended ways to optimise the successful transition of these students through more visible feedback practices and opportunities within the EAP curricula.

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