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Review article

Creating space for students' concerns: Embodied feedback practices in hairdressing education

Anna Öhman*, Marie Tanner

Karlstad University, Department of Educational Studies, 651 88 Karlstad, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore feedback practices in situated activities and how such actions of assessment emerge from embodied participation in classroom interactions between teachers and students. Using video recordings of teacher and student interactions in hairdressing education, we investigate through conversation analysis how feedback practices such as making loops are initiated and enabled between the participants in situated activities. Feedback in the practice of loops is contingent upon an embodied moment-to-moment monitoring and collaboration between the teacher and student, and is initiated with a concern from the student that is responded to by the teacher, enabling feedback to become a common exploration of professional knowledge. Overall, the findings show how feedback is mutually produced, making visible that salient aspects of the education are emanating from the student's own concern.

1. Introduction

This study contributes to the growing attention paid to assessment and feedback in vocational education, by giving empirically based analyses of feedback practices from a context in which assessments and feedback are at the very core of the professional becoming. As part of educational interaction, feedback is produced by orienting to the institutional purposes of the activity in which the participants engage in assessments of present results as well as future possibilities of improvements (e.g., [Ekström, 2013](#); [Gamlem & Munthe, 2014](#); [Wiliam & Leahy, 2007](#)). Feedback is here seen as a consequence of assessment and a next step in instruction ([Taras, 2013](#)), that is related to both formative and summative functions concerning the process of learning in connection with a specific purpose. Feedback constitutes a complex process with multiple purposes such as getting specific information on how to progress during assignments or after assessments, as well as experiences of how to evaluate a work and help to see patterns across coursework. In this interaction, assessments of procedure and quality are embedded in the contingency of the work process, leading to feedback practices that are situated within the professional activity to be learned. By examining a setting of experiential learning within a context of vocational education such as hairdressing, we get a picture of how feedback as endogenous actions is much more complex than merely a verbal delivery of information.

In this article we take an interest in feedback as an embodied collaborative achievement, organized moment by moment in the contingency of the interaction. We specifically investigate occasions in feedback where a student is given or takes the opportunity to express a concern related to the learning activity at hand. These occasions, frequent in vocational education, are here seen as loops in the feedback cycle, and we analyze how these loops are initiated and enabled by the participants themselves. In previous research on assessment, teachers' feedback practices have been conceptualized as cycles and loops without identifying any difference between the two other than dimensional (e.g., [Cathcart, Greer, & Neale, 2013](#); [Wiliam & Leahy, 2007](#)). While these works show an investigation of

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anna.ohman@kau.se (A. Öhman), marie.tanner@kau.se (M. Tanner).

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feedback practices in general, the loop and more specifically its initiation has not been specifically explored. By focusing on the initiation of a feedback loop, our study develops empirical findings from previous studies in vocational education showing how students in these contexts often take the initiative in raising questions in teacher-student interaction (Filliettaz, 2011; Lindwall & Lymer, 2014). Our study develops prior research in which the construction of entire loops has been studied and described (Author, 2015).

In line with a social-constructionist view of feedback as socially accomplished and current thinking of feedback as dialogic and interactive (Taras, 2013), this article explores feedback as embodied and materialized practices. We have chosen the case of hairdressing education as an example of vocational education that provides valuable data to explore embodied feedback practices, as the experiential learning environment in which the participants' bodies, the work materials as well as the artifacts are at the very core of the educational context. In dyads, participants often adapt to the behaviors of their co-participant (Stevanovic & Monzoni, 2016), and the embodied displays of learning and instruction in hairdressing education are therefore valuable examples for the understanding of how feedback is managed. Manipulating the work in progress is furthermore typical in much of vocational education which makes the studied context exemplary of how spoken utterances are intertwined and coordinated with embodied actions in the material environment, providing a publicly available understanding of the feedback practices. Furthermore the hairdressing case provides examples of feedback practices with a general value for education at large, as it shows classrooms with "space for the spontaneous social interaction necessary for learning" (Ashan & Smith, 2016, p. 129).

In this study we present empirical analyses of video data from hairdressing education in which a collection of loops has been identified. The aim is to explore feedback practices in situated activities and how such actions of assessment emerge from embodied participation in classroom interactions between teachers and students. More precisely we want to answer the following question:

How are feedback practices, here seen as making loops, initiated and enabled between the participants in situated activities of hairdressing education?

2. Feedback in interaction

The view of feedback as mutually constructed in interaction is not unknown or new, but how this is done in interaction has been of little focus in research and needs further representation. Studies of embodied inquiries related to assessments have so far taken an interest in teacher-student interactions concerning intentions (Lymer, 2013), corrections (Ekström & Lindwall, 2014), instructions (Lindwall, Lymer, & Greiffenhagen, 2015; Zemel & Koschmann, 2014), and materials (Gåfvels, 2016), to give a few examples. Similar processes of assessment and instruction have also been studied within the context of handicraft in teacher education (Ekström, 2013) as well as dentist education (Lindwall et al., 2015). In these studies, assessments are found to be situated and intrinsic to the ongoing instructive activities. However the conception of feedback differs from ours in that it relies upon a transmissive understanding of feedback as largely provided by the teacher, whereas we understand feedback as continuously negotiated and shared understanding collaboratively accomplished between teacher and student. This re-conceptualization opens up for an understanding of feedback as socially constructed in situ between teacher and student, displayed as interactive exchanges around notions of quality and standards in the discipline. This stance is also in line with research within the broader assessment field that takes a view on feedback practices as interactive and inherent in daily instructional activities (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ruiz-Primo, 2011; Sadler, 1989).

Studies from multimodal perspectives on interaction show how feedback practices are highly embodied, where teachers as well as students use their bodies and artifacts as resources to accomplish assessments and construct meaning in learning and instruction. Affordances for students' engagement and learning have been found to differ in the mathematics classroom (Björklund Boistrup, 2015). Interactionally oriented empirical research in handicraft education has shown that it is often the student who initially notices a problem within the making of objects, in which the material production provides a manifest character of the problem (Ekström, 2012; Ekström & Lindwall, 2014). Other studies find a similar pattern of intrinsic assessments and troubles that students display through their performance as well as studies of instructions in various educational contexts (Lindwall et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies in handicraft teacher education show the need for experiential actions together with situated instructions in response to students' embodied displays and corrective sequences (Lindwall & Ekström, 2012). This complexity is also present in hairdressing education, in which instructions are used as one of several functions within teachers' feedback practices (Author, 2015). In this latter study feedback is seen as mutually constituent and not primarily as given or provided by the teacher as in many other studies (e.g., Ekström, 2013; Lindwall et al., 2015). In sum, these previous studies point at the importance of highlighting the students' participation and role in evolving feedback activities, for example in the initiation of loops studied here.

In previous research on assessment, the loop has been given a theoretical description as constituted by the teacher's instruction and responsive to evidence of students' learning (Sadler, 1989; William & Leahy, 2007). Furthermore, empirical investigation of the way teachers provide feedback with regard to content and quality (Gamlem & Munthe, 2014) shows how teachers' feedback tends to be more focused on encouraging persistence than on learning. There has been an interest in whether the loop is completed, with regard to effectiveness and use of the feedback given (e.g., Donovan, 2014). This can be seen as emanating from a control theory that feedback closes learning gaps (Dann, 2014). However, the loops analyzed in this article frequently center on a difficulty the student publicly displays in relation to the ongoing vocational task. Author (2015) shows how a loop in feedback is a contingent and mutual construction of student and teacher, where loops are shown to be departing from some kind of student concern. This points at the importance of further studying how a loop is initiated in interaction, which the present article sets out to explore. This is of dual importance: Firstly, feedback is regarded as having a central role in respect to both student and teacher, giving the student information about the quality of a piece of work and at the same time enabling the teacher to calibrate further instruction (Hattie & Gan, 2011). Secondly, the initiation of a loop is of importance to gain knowledge about how teacher and student produce their mutual understanding of the ongoing task and how they orient to and access knowing about becoming a professional.

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