



Anatomy of a teacher–student feedback encounter[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- The teacher largely uses questions to promote her own agenda in the talk.
- The teacher works to optimize the student's contributions.
- Teacher orients toward negative assessments as socially problematic activities.
- The student largely orients to the teacher's feedback with resistance.
- Guidance for giving feedback is ignorant on key findings in CA.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the anatomy of a teacher–student feedback encounter by qualitatively analysing live recordings of feedback between a teacher and her student in upper secondary school in Norway. By conducting a conversation analysis, this research identifies the overall organisation of the encounter. The results reveal that, first, the teacher used questions to establish a basis to promote her own agenda and worked to optimise students' contributions by providing positive feedback and minimising critiques and disagreement and second, the student approached the teacher's feedback with resistance. The study concludes with pedagogical implications for practice.

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1. Introduction

Giving feedback is a core activity in all types of professional settings and generally, involves providing information about a person's task with an aim to improve performance. This study focuses on feedback in a teacher–student encounter. Policy documents, pedagogical theory and textbooks specify various instructions for teachers to provide feedback to their students (Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Black & Wiliam, 2009; Fjørtoft & Sandvik, 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). However, while these sources provide theoretical instructions and practical guidance, they are not supported by feedback practices identified and analysed during real-time encounters. More specifically, the questions of what feedback looks like in empirical reality and how this reality conforms to

pedagogical theory remain unanswered in the literature. Thus, in an attempt to address these questions, this study identifies the overall structural organisation of a teacher–student feedback encounter in upper secondary school and examines the actions involved in each phase at the micro level.

Feedback in teacher–student supervision encounters is a routine activity in which a teacher or supervisor provides structured comments on a student's performance in, for example, a written (c.f. Vehviläinen, 2009, p. 187) or oral presentation. Within educational science and pedagogy, feedback is conceptualised as information provided by a teacher to 'reduce the gap between a student's actual level of performance and what is intended to be performed, or the "reference level" of performance' (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 82; Sadler, 1989, p. 120). In recent years, research interest in formative assessments in educational contexts has significantly increased. In Norway, for instance, this interest emerged with a shift from 'content-oriented' to 'learning outcome oriented' curricula in 2006 (Fjørtoft & Sandvik, 2016, p. 13). With the broad consensus that teacher feedback has the most powerful influence on student learning (Andrade & Cizek, 2010; Black &

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Wiliam, 2009; Gamlem & Munthe, 2014; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Sadler, 1989), the concepts of formative and summative assessments are being foregrounded (Black & Wiliam, 2009). The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training elaborates on national standards and formal guidelines for supervision and assessment and that students in Norway's primary and secondary public schools have the legal right to be formatively and summatively assessed. Teachers are obliged to inform their students about instructional aims and assessment criteria and provide appropriate (formative) feedback related to students' competence during learning processes (Ministry of Education and Research, 2006). In theory, formative assessments include a range of activities that can be conceptualised in terms of five key strategies: (i) clarify and share learning intentions and criteria for success, (ii) engineer effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks that elicit evidence of students' understanding, (iii) provide feedback that helps learners progress, (iv) facilitate students to become instructional resources for each other, and (v) enable student ownership of their own learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 8). These five strategies can be achieved in different ways. For example, teachers can implement strategy (ii) through classroom questioning, strategy (iii) by providing written and oral comments on students' work and strategies (iv) and (v) using peer- and self-assessments. This study focuses on strategy (iii): *provide feedback that helps learners progress*—which also implicitly affects strategies (iv) and (v).

The current definitions of formative assessments encompass a range of teaching and learning practices. According to a large-scale state-of-the-field review, the effect of formative assessment is 'over-sold' given the limited existing empirical research (Baird, Hopfenbeck, Newton, Stobart, & Steen-Utheim, 2014, p. 6). Research on feedback during whole-class teaching shows that teachers generally organise classroom discussions that reflect their own agenda and rarely build on students' prior knowledge (Nystrand, 1997). To elaborate, a teacher asks questions with a known answer (I), to which students provide responses (R), and then often proceeds to incorporating an evaluation (E) (Mehan, 1979). Step (E) in the cycle can be considered feedback and represents an opportunity to promote learning (Solem, 2016; Solem & Skovholt, 2017). To provide feedback that supports student learning, teachers are taught to promote 'dialogic' teaching (Alexander, 2004; Nystrand, 1997) and 'explorative' talk (Mercer, 2000), which facilitates learning by activating students' prior knowledge. Video-based analyses of classrooms have shown that quality of teacher feedback is essential for students' learning (Gamlem & Munthe, 2014; Koole & Elbers, 2014). While there is extensive knowledge on feedback in whole-class teaching, less is known about feedback during one-to-one interactions. To this effect, Baird et al. (2014) and Gamlem and Munthe (2014) emphasise the need for a more in-depth examination to enhance understanding of feedback practices in schools and professional practices.

Communication and language research defines feedback as an activity that involves both assessment and advice (c.f. Asmuß, 2008; Vehviläinen, 2009). This branch of research also highlights the possible challenges in providing feedback. Self-praise and negative assessments are dispreferred actions (Pomerantz, 1978, 1984) and providing negative feedback is a potential face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Studies on feedback in academic supervision demonstrate the delicacy required in providing negative feedback on students' work (Svinhufvud & Vehviläinen, 2013; Vehviläinen, 2001, 2009; Waring, 2007, 2012). Advice, in particular, is often resisted and supervisors seem to avoid resistance by using accounts (Vehviläinen, 2001; Waring, 2007),

open questions that invite students to set an agenda (Svinhufvud & Vehviläinen, 2013) and a stepwise entry into advice (Vehviläinen, 2009). Feedback in a comparable setting, for example, job appraisal interviews, is often delayed and supervisors tend to preface their critiques with accounts, thus postponing the criticism (Asmuß, 2008). Moreover, advice giving in general is often resisted (Heritage & Lindström, 1998; Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Vehviläinen, 2001, 2009; Waring, 2005). There are also numerous cases of resistance to advice among students despite the various methods of minimising such behaviour (Vehviläinen, 2009).

Textbooks on supervision offer teachers with teacher–student communication guidelines, particularly on giving feedback 'effectively'. Explicit 'good' practice guidelines instruct teachers on organising a feedback encounter, posing questions and delivering feedback. Among the instructions are posing more open-ended than closed-ended questions and doing so at the opening of the encounter, asking follow-up questions, paraphrasing and mirroring students' contributions, and avoiding 'wh-questions' (Lauvås & Handal, 2014, pp. 253–264). Here, a crucial question is whether actual practice conforms to guidance. To this effect, aspects that need more comprehensive research are feedback methods adopted during teacher–student interactions, feature of linguistic and sequential feedback, and whether and how practices correspond with guidelines prescribed in pedagogical theories. The literature also lacks evidence on feedback in the contexts of schools, delivery of feedback by experienced teachers, types of actions comprising feedback, whether feedback practices align with the theory or guidelines, and means to improve such practices. Thus, the current study aims to shed light on teachers' tacit expertise by investigating what feedback looks like, the manner in which it is delivered and responded to and the pedagogical consequences of different feedback practices in teacher–student interactions. The research questions in this study are as follows:

- (1) What are the central activity phases in teacher–student supervision encounters?
- (2) Within these activity phases, what characterises teachers' feedback practices and recipients' responses?
- (3) What pedagogical implications can be drawn from the results?

This analysis presents a single case study with a small dataset to describe interactional structures and practices involved in feedback encounters and explicate the actions they accomplish. The study contribute with empirical knowledge about feedback methods in educational settings.

2. Data and methodology

This study qualitatively analyses a video-recorded encounter between a teacher and her student in upper secondary school following a presentation session in class. The encounter was conducted in a meeting room, where the teacher and student were seated at a table. The aim of the encounter was to provide feedback on the student's oral presentation using predefined assessment criteria. The student was then expected to improve her presentation on the basis of the feedback and present a full version. All students in the class were subject to the same procedure. The data are collected from a Norwegian school and comprises a total of nine feedback encounters with the same teacher but different students. Each encounter was about 15–20 min and the total recording time is 2.5 h. This study presents extracts from one of the nine video-

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