Research Note

Student-Teachers' Perceptions of Spoken and Written Feedback and Its Usefulness While on Their First Teaching Practice

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INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the School of Primary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education introduced a new model of delivering one of its courses. The model encompassed within it a system whereby Year 1 student-teachers received spoken and written feedback on their professional practice performance on four different occasions, but with the same lecturer giving feedback each time. This study had several aims in regard to this system of feedback. One was to find out from the Year 1 students what they perceived feedback to be, what sort of feedback they expected to receive from their lecturer during their professional practice, and what type of feedback (written or spoken) from their lecturer they considered most useful in influencing positive changes to their teaching practice. Another aim was to gain some insight on the merit of having just one lecturer provide a student with feedback throughout their professional practice. This practice differed from previous years when a student could have one lecturer visit them on teaching practice, but be given feedback by another at mid-placement (about the assignments) and at the post-practice individual debrief. A third aim was to provide the students' lecturers with information that would inform their giving of feedback to first-year students during and after their first teaching practice.

LITERATURE

The research on quality feedback has identified several key practices that enhance student learning. These are:
Feedback is most effective when it focuses on the tasks and the associated learning, confirms for learners that they are on the right track, includes suggestions that scaffold students to move on, is frequent and given when there is opportunity for the learner to take action, and is in the context of a dialogue about the learning (Black & William, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2004; Brawdy & Byra, 1995; Seidentop, 1981).

Feedback is also enhanced when supervisors ask student-teachers questions that prompt them to reflect on their learning. Questions such as ... “Did you meet your objectives and goals?”; “Were your students on task?”; “What would you change next time?”... have been shown to be effective (Graham, 1996, p. 38).

Feedback must let learners identify gaps between current and desired performance and take some action that will close the gap. Constructing a way forward for learners necessitates feedback that they can readily access and understand and that has catalytic and coaching elements that work to inspire confidence and hope (Sadler, 1998).

Co-operating teachers should give both spoken and written feedback to the student-teacher that covers both the positive and the negative. The co-operating teacher should tell students individually what they have or have not done and offer a list of ways to change their behaviour and practices. Keeping accurate written records of good and bad incidents, and giving copies of written feedback to each student are encouraged practices (Bakhtie, 1998; Black, Harrison, Lee, & Marshall, 2002).

Feedback focusing on students’ own reflective writing processes with high challenge conditions—and the supervisor giving guidelines and a suggested framework for moving into higher levels of cognitive activity, as opposed to low challenge conditions that do not—is more effective in influencing students’ teaching behaviours. Students report the value of this type of feedback in developing their journal writing skills, in particular, that which encouraged them to think in more depth about what they had written, to look at issues or incidents in a different way, and to think about aspects of their learning experiences they had not previously considered (Bain, Mills, Ballantyne, & Packer, 2002; Paterson, 1995).

From the literature reviewed, there is some guidance on feedback for pre-service teachers but little on how student-teachers’ professional practice is influenced by the spoken and/or written feedback they get from their lecturers/supervisors/co-teachers. This study aimed to cast a little more light on this matter and to get a further perspective from the students themselves about what form of feedback they found most useful in directing the quality of their teaching practice.
METHOD

The sample population for this study came from the first semester 2004 cohort of first-year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning degree in the School of Primary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education. Sixty-eight students from two of the six on-campus Professional Studies and Professional Practice Course groups were invited to participate. These students were drawn from a total of 200 students in the 2004 100-level cohort. The two groups (labelled A and B for the purposes of the study) were chosen because their lecturers had expressed strong interest in the project and its possible outcomes. They agreed to assist in the data collection by: encouraging their students to participate; reminding them along the way, both in class and online, to fill out questionnaires; collecting demographic and consent forms at the start of the study; and collecting completed questionnaires at the end.

The researcher attended the students’ first Professional Studies class, where she spoke in general terms about the study and invited the students to participate, gave them the consent and demographic forms, asked them to complete these and then hand them to their lecturer at the end of class if they wished to participate. The demographic form asked students to state their gender, age, and ethnicity. This information was gathered with the aim of determining trends in relation to a questionnaire that the participating students were asked to answer during their professional practice. Students were asked to put their names on the demographic forms so that this information could be matched with the named questionnaire responses. However, effort was made to ensure anonymity during analysis of the data, by the researcher assigning each person a code number and then referring to this in the analysis.

The three final questions of the demographic form asked students to write down a brief description of what they considered feedback to be. The answers given were each coded according to categories and then collated in order of frequency.

The students were asked to fill out the teaching practice questionnaire on four separate occasions during their first professional practice block for the year:

1. After they had been observed by their lecturer on professional practice and discussed the lesson discussion with the lecturer (Session 1).

2. After they had participated in their mid-placement meeting with their lecturer (Session 2). At this session, the lecturer met with the entire group of students for whom she was responsible. The session involved the group discussing the experiences to date and the lecturer answering student queries and going over teaching practice requirements.

3. After they had completed their individual debriefs after professional practice (Session 3). This session involved the lecturer individually
meeting with each of her students to discuss the student’s practice and to fill out the summary sheet of their placement, highlighting strengths and areas to work on and setting goals for the next practice.

4. After they had received their marked assignment for this part of their training from their lecturer (Session 4). The assignment required the students to write detailed accounts of a series of observations about aspects of classroom life and a teacher’s role in the school. The lecturer marked the assignment against a set of criteria.

The questionnaire was designed to take about 10 minutes to complete on each occasion, and each time repeated the same questions, but on different coloured paper for ease of matching with each session. A questionnaire was considered the most useful way of collecting data from the students over time, not only because it allowed the same data to be collected each time but also because it allowed the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The questions required the students to:

- Describe the feedback process they experienced with their lecturer during each of the four occasions.

- Indicate with a “yes” or “no” if the feedback contained spoken or written feedback or both, and to note on a Likert scale how useful they found this feedback (range, “very useful” to “not at all useful”).

- Indicate by marking “yes” or “no” if the feedback met their expectations.

- State by marking “yes” or “no” if they would use the feedback to improve their practice and then to indicate why they considered this feedback would allow them to do this/not do this.

- State with a “yes” or “no” if they considered the feedback honest.

- The students were urged to answer the questions with honesty and candour.

For the purpose of analysis, answers on the Likert scale were coded from 1 to 5, and the number of “yes” and “no” responses tallied. The answers given to the open-ended questions were categorised and collated for each occasion and then totalled across the four different feedback occasions. Percentages were then calculated to indicate the frequency of the various categories of response across the four occasions.

Twenty-nine demographic and consent forms were received from Group A and 10 from Group B, making a total of 39 students agreeing to participate in the study.
At the end of the professional practice, nine sets of questionnaires were received from Group A and seven from Group B, making a total of 16 fully completed questionnaires. It was stipulated to the students before the study that only fully completed questionnaires over the four occasions would be accepted.

Of the 16 students who "went the distance", all were female student-teachers; the seven males who gave their consent before the professional practice session did not follow through with the questionnaire. All 16 women were born in New Zealand and all but one identified their cultural group as New Zealand Pakeha/European. This person identified herself as New Zealand Maori. Seven of the 16 fell into the age bracket of 18–20, four in the age bracket 21–25, three in the 26–30 bracket, and two in the 31–35 bracket.

RESULTS

Students' Perceptions of the Term Feedback
Students gave reasonably uniform responses to what they understood feedback to be and what they expected to receive from it (Table 1). Most viewed it as involving critique on and advice and tips about their practice and expected to receive it in written and formal form and for it to comprise comment on what they needed to do to improve their practice.

Table 1. Students’ understanding of the term “feedback” and what they expected to receive from it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question for students</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe what the term ‘feedback’ means to you.</td>
<td>• constructive criticisms and advice/tips (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how well I have done (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• comments about what I have done (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a written report telling me how I am going—both positive and negative (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• gaining knowledge about what has happened or being observed (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In what way are you expecting to be given feedback during this professional practice?</td>
<td>• written and verbal feedback (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• pointers/advice/tips on things to improve on (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• feedback on my own achievements and learning periods (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you expect to gain from the feedback that you receive from your lecturer?</td>
<td>• areas to work on (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what I am doing well (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• insight into teaching practice methods (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The numbers beside each statement indicate the number of students who gave this response.
Type of Feedback Received During Professional Practice and Students' Perceptions of It

Across the four sessions, 85% of the students reported receiving specific spoken feedback on a particular behaviour/practice/comment and all considered it useful to varying degrees (see Figure 1).

![Graph showing the usefulness of feedback](image)

**FIGURE 1 Students' Ratings of Usefulness of Specific Spoken Feedback Received Across the Four Sessions.**

Across the four different occasions, the students identified spoken feedback as being most useful after the observation and during the individual debriefing session.

Seventy percent of the students reported receiving written feedback, with the mid-placement session (Session 2), which involved face-to-face contact with the observing lecturer, expectedly not featuring highly with this form of feedback. As with the written spoken feedback, all students found it useful, with the majority rating it "extremely useful" (Figure 2). Across the four feedback sessions, the students identified written feedback as most useful after the observation (Session 1) and in the individual debriefing session (Session 3).

![Graph showing the usefulness of feedback](image)

**FIGURE 2 Students' Ratings of Usefulness of Written Feedback Received Across the Four Sessions.**
The students indicated that almost all of the feedback they received, both spoken and written, met their expectations (90% of the time) because it gave focus for the future, was clear and specific, answered their questions, was encouraging, positive and informative, and looked at areas in which they could improve. Of the four occasions, the students said that the feedback given met their expectations most strongly after the observation and during the individual debriefing session.

Most of the students (88%) said they would make use of the feedback given because they were able to act upon it, build on it and use the practical ideas contained within it. They also said they could act upon it because it was detailed and specific to areas of their professional practice being focused on at the time, such as planning, questioning, and meeting requirements. Eighty percent of the students said they were most likely to feel they could act on the feedback given after the observation visit and the individual debriefing session. All the students (except for one, in relation to the fourth session) rated the feedback received across all four sessions as honest, suggesting the rapport and communication that passed between students and lecturer during these sessions was thoughtful and sincere.

The students' answers to the question of what benefits they thought the feedback would have for their professional practice revealed the following responses (ordered from most stated to least stated items). A selection of quotes from the students' written comments is added in to illustrate these points.

- Offer tips for future lessons ("I was able to use the feedback straight away on placement, eg/ my use of voice").

- Provide positive comments about specific practices and behaviours ("Having the aspects of my teaching I wanted observed and critiqued, I was able to work on certain areas to improve my classroom skills").

- Identify areas to work on and improve in ("I can learn from my mistakes").

- Confirm the student was "on the right track" ("[What I was told] will help me become a better teacher and build my confidence").

- Provide focus ("[It] gave me something to work towards").

- Allow students to review and reflect on materials (e.g., readings) related to their professional practice and the requirements for it ("It was great having the written material to refer back to").

- Clarify concerns and questions ("The feedback pointed out aspects I wasn't aware of, so was encouraging in that way").
DISCUSSION

Students’ Perceptions of the Term Feedback
The responses show that the students’ most common perceptions of feedback were that it involved constructive criticism and advice/tips on how to improve. The ways in which the students expected to be given feedback during these occasions were written and spoken feedback, pointers and advice on things to improve, and feedback on their own achievements and personal learning.

The responses are what might be expected from a group of first-year student-teachers experiencing the first professional practice of their training, as they may not have known what to expect from feedback relating specifically to a professional practice and could be commenting on experiences of feedback from their own previous schooling and post-schooling studies. The students’ expectations of feedback align with Babkie (1998), who maintains that both spoken and written feedback need to be given, and that each should cover positives and negatives.

Type of Feedback Received During Professional Practice and Students’ Perceptions of It
These findings show that, of the two forms of feedback offered, specific, spoken feedback was more frequently given and perceived as more useful. This supports the Ministry of Education’s (2004) description of quality feedback as comprising “conversations” that help learners become motivated, assess their own performance, identify how to improve and confirm they are on the right track. They suggest that specific spoken questions should help student-teachers evaluate their own performance and become more reflective (Graham, 1996; Babkie, 1998).

The aspects of the feedback the students received comply with Sadler’s (1998) advice that feedback must be understood by learners, inspire confidence and hope, and enable them to identify gaps between current and desired performance and then take action to close that gap. Siedentop’s (1981) call for specific feedback that contains information relevant to the behaviour and provides information about its technical qualities is also apparent in these results.

The nature of the students’ responses to the benefits of the feedback they were given accords with the Ministry of Education’s (2001) comments that specific, constructive feedback about learning as it is occurring is essential and a model of feedback that emphasises a spirit of collaboration between pre-service teachers and their supervisors and focuses on giving comments specific to behaviours and practices observed is most effective (Bawdry & Byra, 1995).

Written feedback was rated extremely useful by some, supporting the findings of Bain et al. (2002) that written comments that challenge, question and suggest alternative ways of thinking and doing appear to be the type of written feedback most likely to extend students.
Despite the disappointing questionnaire return rate, the students who filled out the four questionnaires received, as a group, feedback from 12 different professional practice lecturers, which gave a breadth of experiences in regard to the feedback received.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study of 16 Year 1 Bachelor of Teaching and Learning students on their first professional practice show that spoken feedback was the most common and frequent form of feedback given and was the form deemed most useful by the students in terms of their professional practice. However, written feedback was also widely received and also seen as useful by the majority of the students.

The feedback, whether spoken or written, that students seemed to value most was that directed at specific teaching behaviours and practices.

The students' responses about the feedback they received from their lecturers indicated that, overall, the feedback showed the elements of good practice identified in the literature by Sadler (1998), Babbie (1998) and Black and Wiliam (1998), in that it was clear, concise, positive, focused and met their expectations of it. The series of questions that Graham (1996) recommends supervisors should ask student teachers could form a framework for the lecturers at the College of Education in their feedback practices.

Students considered the most valuable feedback they received across the four occasions (in terms of meeting expectations and being able to make use of the feedback) were after the observation on professional practice and at the individual debriefing session. This suggests that lecturers at the College of Education may need to give additional thought to how to make the feedback given at the mid-placement session and the marking of the assignment more useful and effective for the students.

A weakness of the study, however, in addition to the small number of students who participated, is that these students had nothing against which to rate the process of feedback during professional practice, as this was their first experience of a teaching practice. This meant that their perceptions of feedback would have depended on the varied personal previous educational contexts within which they had received some form of feedback.

The findings indicate that a mixture of both written and spoken feedback is likely to be most effective for Year 1 student-teachers in relation to their professional practice and that one-to-one specific feedback with the lecturer involved is certainly desirable. The information gained will add to the knowledge base for the evaluation of the courses and the moderation that takes place both internally and externally in the College of Education. It may also encourage the planning group associated with the professional practice courses to continue this model of delivery at Year 1 level and to pursue it into the Year 2 level.
REFERENCES


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