

Editorial

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Kia ora koutou katoa. Welcome to the 2024 special issue of *Assessment Matters: Feedback Within the Context of Compulsory Education*.

As currently conceptualised, feedback is the crucial interaction that occurs between teacher and learner(s) during learning and teaching, which will aid the improvement process through the identification of a learning gap and the actions necessary to close that gap. For feedback to fulfil this formative function, that is to reduce the disparity between a student's current understandings and performance and a goal, it must provide answers to the following questions—"Where am I going?" "How am I going?", "Where to next?" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore, the learner must be given a pivotal role in the feedback process. The creation of dialogic opportunities with students is crucial so that misunderstandings, miscues, or unanticipated responses are identified and dealt with. Furthermore, increased participation in substantive conversation is necessary if shared meaning is to be achieved and new learning to occur. To achieve this, teachers must be both willing and able to elicit responses from learners during learning-teaching episodes with the aim of stimulating further learning rather than with the intention of checking what has been learnt. In turn learners must be both willing and able to take an active role in the feedback process. This change in both focus and intention requires teachers and learners to rethink the purpose of feedback and their roles in the feedback process. Significantly, both teachers' and learners' willingness to rethink and take on new roles will be influenced by their beliefs.

Although meta-analyses have demonstrated that feedback is the most powerful single moderator in the enhancement of achievement (Hattie & Jaeger, 1998) it should also be noted that the "mere provision of feedback does not necessarily lead to improvement" (Sadler, 2010, p.536). Indeed, the negative effects of feedback on learning and performance have been well-documented (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). To date, as Ajjawi et al. (2021) have argued, despite its critical importance to learning and achievement, feedback's potential has rarely been realised. In turn they argue that research about feedback has a pivotal role to play in helping move toward a contemporary understanding and enactment of feedback. They advocate for research undertaken in a range of authentic

settings that is able to reveal both the current state of play as well as the kind of changes needed if feedback is to reach its potential in the enhancement of learning.

In recent times the importance of feedback to learning and teaching has resulted in the proliferation and publication of research studies focused on this topic. Notably, the majority of these studies are located within the higher education context (Ajjawi et al., 2021) rather than the compulsory schooling context. The articles in this edition contribute to our knowledge and understanding of what is happening within the feedback domain in the context of compulsory schooling. Given that the research studies reported here are located across the globe they also provide an international perspective.

Set within the context of language learning in Hong Kong the first article in this issue (Lam) focuses on feedback in print and electronic portfolios and in doing so adds to our understanding of the role feedback plays in portfolio assessment and how the feedback process is similar and different in two portfolio mediums. Significantly Lam identifies which portfolio format could facilitate transformative feedback experience throughout portfolio development stages.

In the second article, cognisant that little is known about how teachers plan for, enact, and reflect on differentiated formative feedback dialogues with students individually, in small groups, or as a whole class, Duckor and Holmberg report on an empirical, qualitative case study conducted in the United States. Specifically they report on the use of a newly developed formative feedback framework (Duckor & Holmberg, 2023) to explore how middle-school maths and science teachers engaged in formative feedback dialogues with students in different configurations, modalities (written, spoken, nonverbal feedback) and directionalities (teacher-driven, peer-to-peer driven, and self-driven feedback).

Recognising the significance and impact of teachers' beliefs on practice, Harris and Brown's empirical study explores 18 New Zealand teachers' conceptions of feedback and how they are enacted. Drawing on interview data from primary, intermediate, and secondary school teachers, a phenomenographic analysis of these data was undertaken. Results yielded five hierarchically ordered feedback conceptions associated with three major purposes: satisfying stakeholder expectations; maintaining student

psycho-social wellbeing; and supporting learning growth, with teachers experiencing significant tensions among these three functions.

Utilising data generated from three teachers and 18 students in three senior English language learning classrooms in Indonesia the final article in this volume (Purwandari, Dixon & Hawe) responds to calls for research that investigates the impact of societal rules (Shweder, 1991) or cultural norms that influence how people think and act about feedback and their place within the feedback process. Attention is also drawn to the disparity between teachers' and students' views in regard to the purpose of feedback and the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students within the feedback process.

As the editor of *Assessment Matters* I encourage you to read and share the articles in this issue with colleagues. I hope you enjoy reading the collection as much as I did. As supporters of the journal I'd also encourage you (and your colleagues and students) to submit an article for consideration if you have something that would be of interest and relevance to the journal. Or alternatively if you have a focus for a special issue please contact me to discuss.

Helen Dixon, EdD

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