Research Briefing Nº 58

Teacher feedback in primary classrooms: the pupil perspective

This research explored how pupils responded to the teacher's feedback in the primary classroom.

Key words: feedback; autonomy; learning; primary classroom

Key findings

Findings are of particular interest to teachers, headteachers and policy makers.

- The children claimed that learning was frustrated by overly directive feedback:

  - they said their learning benefited when the teacher's feedback included substantial but not burdensome detail;
  - the children felt their learning was supported by feedback reminder cues; and
  - they noticed that negative and positive feedback provoked emotions which could interfere with or support learning.

> **Assessment for Learning:**
> Assessment is mostly used in the sense of 'inquiry' rather than 'measurement'. The teacher tries to turn each assessment into a learning event itself, and involves the pupils in deciding on the design and criteria of each task.

- The data suggested that the teacher gave less autonomy-promoting feedback than feedback which did not seem likely to promote autonomy.

- The data suggested the teacher gave least autonomy-promoting feedback to children who attained least well against National Curriculum levels.

- Nonetheless, the research exemplified a range of skilfully provided autonomy-promoting feedback.

What we did

This research took place between 2009 and 2011. It evolved out of my interest (the Principal Investigator, Eleanore Hargreaves) in Assessment for Learning strategies and the essential role of feedback within those.

The research was funded internally at the Institute of Education. It focused on one class of Year 5 children (aged 9-10 years) in a Surrey school in the South of England.

The research entailed a longitudinal study of nine 'profiles'. The nine children were observed and video-filmed in threes, twos or individually during literacy and numeracy lessons across two terms from January to July 2010. The video-recordings were shown later the same day to the children who had been filmed, and were stopped at frequent intervals to allow the participants to comment on specific feedback incidents. Lesson transcripts and interview transcripts were analysed using the codes shown below. Note that 'metasocial' refers to seeing the 'big picture' of society and one's place in it.

Figure: Teacher feedback analysis codes

CODE FOR TEACHER'S FEEDBACK	DESCRIPTION OF CODE
ASSUMED (by the analyst) TO BE NON-AUTONOMY PROMOTING.	**Feedback given to encourage the pupil's:**
Teacher shows approval or disapproval	Continuation or cessation of particular activity
Teacher poses closed questions [+ sometimes disguised as open]	Correct answer
Teacher addresses pupil self	Feelings of shame or pride
Teacher confirms answer is right	Certainty about correctness
Teacher repeats of explains answer [+ elaborates extensively]	Increased understanding
Teacher provides or pre-empts answer	Grasp of the correct answer
Teacher gives instruction as reaction to pupil response or behaviour	Action
ASSUMED TO BE AUTONOMY PROMOTING.	**Feedback given to encourage the children's:**
Teacher encourages children to develop views that stand out from the general view	Independence
Teacher encourages unsolicited engagement by the children in their learning	Proactivity [+ using humour]
Teacher encourages metasocial inquiry by the children into rules about life and/or assessment	Metasocial critical inquiry into life [+ assessment]
Teacher encourages metasocial inquiry by the children into social relationships, including learning-collaboration	Metasocial critical inquiry into relationships
Teacher encourages critical inquiry by the children into learning processes	Critical inquiry into learning processes

How we did it

The key advantages of using interviews following observation was that they helped reveal the meanings children attributed to the teacher's feedback, and their understandings of this phenomenon. Video-footage of the feedback they had experienced helped them to remember the feedback episode and to describe the meanings and understandings they attached to it. Because of the authentic nature of the video-taped situation and because of the longitudinal aspect of the research design, this method led to complex data which yielded insights not only into children's responses to a range of feedback over several months but also the contexts within which the feedback was used. A total of 16.5 hours of video-based interviews were conducted in this way. In addition, a total of nine hours of individual interviews were held with the profile children about their experiences at school generally and a total of six hours of small group interviews were carried out with the whole class.

Further information

Publications in academic journals:

Hargreaves, E. (2013). 'Inquiring into children's experiences of teacher feedback: reconceptualising Assessment for Learning'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39, 2, 229-246.

Hargreaves, E. (2012). 'Teachers' classroom feedback: still trying to get it right'. *Pedagogies,* 7, 1, 1-15.

Hargreaves, E. (2011). 'Teachers' feedback to pupils: 'Like so many bottles thrown out to sea'?' In Berry and Adamson (Eds.), *Assessment reform in education.* London: Springer, 121-134.

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