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Emotions Experienced by Instructors Delivering Written Feedback and Dialogic Feed-Forward

ABSTRACT

Understanding the emotions experienced by higher education instructors related to assessment feedback, how instructors understand student emotions, and how instructors might manage these emotions positively, can help to secure the educational benefits of feedback. In this research, we aimed to explore the emotional responses that instructors experienced through the giving and receiving of assessment feedback. We undertook qualitative data collection, carrying out individual semi-structured interviews with instructors from three universities who had administered a dialogic feed-forward intervention on one of their teaching units. The full interview transcripts were analysed inductively using thematic analysis. Five main themes emerged from the interview data: 1. Summative written feedback aroused largely negative emotions in instructors because they felt distanced from their students; 2. Instructors experienced a broad range of emotions related to dialogic feed-forward encounters, emerging from their proximity to students; 3. Dialogic feed-forward, as an affective encounter, was emotionally challenging for instructors; 4. Dialogic feed-forward built strong learning relationships between students and instructors, strengthening students' sense of belonging; 5. Dialogic feed-forward was transformational for instructors as educators. We consider the implications of our findings for instructors and wider assessment and feedback practices, including emotional labour, promotional reward, and instructor professional development.

KEYWORDS

assessment feedback, dialogic feed-forward, emotions, feedback literacy, emotional labour

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE CONTEXT

Assessment and feedback are fundamental yet challenging tasks for higher education instructors, ideally facilitating student learning (Hattie and Timperley 2007) and operationalising academic standards (Bloxham and Boyd 2012). Instructors thereby have a dual responsibility: acting formatively as a teacher and mentor whilst fulfilling a summative role of judging achievement and awarding grades (Myyry et al. 2020). This tension can be problematic for students and instructors, provoking a range of positive and negative emotions in both groups.

Educational researchers are increasingly recognising that emotions are linked integrally to cognition and behaviour in learning (Pekrun 2019; Pekrun and Linnenbrink-Garcia 2014). Emotions

are important in socio-cultural terms, existing not only within individuals but between them as they relate to and interact with one another and respond to events in their environment (Keltner and Lerner 2010). This way of thinking leads to consideration of relational interactions between academic staff and students. Importantly, the more instructors become aware of their emotions in learning relationships, for example when they are assessing and providing feedback to students, the more they are able to use their emotions in connection with their thought processes to make decisions and take the actions most appropriate to a given situation (Gardner 1983).

Equally, how instructors connect with students, for example during feedback dialogue, will impact how they treat their students. As instructors, we might consciously provide emotional support in the assessment process, assisting our students by helping them alleviate frustration and self-doubt (Pitt and Norton 2017). By contrast, if we ignore our emotions and those of our students during assessment and feedback, we can communicate to students that we do not care about them and this might encourage them to reduce their efforts with an assessment task, preventing the educational benefit of feedback from being fully realised (Winstone et al. 2017).

Although Zhao et al. (2022) recently discovered that academic instructors can avoid assessment dialogue with students due to fear of conflict, conceptualisations of feedback in the research literature are increasingly anchored in relational approaches emerging from the socio-constructivist paradigm (Carless et al. 2011), where students engage in conversation with the instructor and/or their peers to co-create meaning (Nicol 2010). Assessment dialogue between instructor and student can promote not only cognitive sense-making in students (Carless and Boud 2018), but the foregrounding of emotions through encounter, discussion, and normalisation (Hill et al. 2021a; Ryan and Henderson 2018). There is now much empirical research demonstrating that positive emotions can enhance students' motivation, aid their self-regulation and self-efficacy, and help them implement flexible learning strategies (Hill and West 2020; Hill et al. 2021b; Pekrun et al. 2011; Rowe, Fitness, and Wood 2014). Positive emotions can be brought about through instructor-student feedback dialogue characterised by trust and care, where instructors explicitly recognize the efforts and achievement of students, foster their feelings of respect, and enable them to develop more positive learner identities (Hill et al. 2021a, c).

Despite the greater appreciation of the affective domain in higher education, studies focusing on instructors' emotions associated with assessment and feedback have remained scarce and under-researched (Myyry et al. 2020; Zhao et al. 2022), leaving an important research gap. In her opinion piece, Spaeth (2018) identifies feedback as emotional labour performed by instructors as they balance the need to demonstrate care for their students with a lack of time emerging from increased quality control. She notes, in particular, that consciously giving feedback to promote positive emotions in students, helping them to improve their learning, requires significant emotional work from the instructor.

One study that examined instructors' emotions related to assessment (Myyry et al. 2020) discovered a higher number of expressions of negative emotions (frustration, anxiety, shame, and boredom), compared with positive emotions (joy, compassion, hope, and pride). More than half of the instructors experienced anxiety related to assessment, often linked to the act of communicating negative feedback and poor grades to students. Some academics were frustrated by students lacking the motivation to seek and act on feedback. A frequent positive emotion expressed by instructors was enjoyment, related particularly to using novel assessment methods and witnessing student success, but it was also related to students' responding well to formative feedback.

Research directed more squarely at the emotions experienced by instructors when providing feedback has been undertaken by Stough and Emmer (1998) in the United States. They identified a variety of negative emotions experienced by graduate instructors who were delivering test-feedback classes to educational psychology undergraduates. The emotions described by these instructors included fear of conflict with students, anger at the students' response to feedback, and guilt when the instructors themselves felt they had been inappropriately emotional. One coping strategy adopted by the instructors was intensive preparation to offer detailed and precise feedback, but this required a great deal of time for teacher transmission at the expense of student input. The instructors also purposely masked any negative emotions aroused by oppositional students. In a later study, Hartney (2007) assessed strategies for managing lecturer stress in feedback tutorials. She found that offering brief and balanced critique, focusing on the development of future work via a clear action plan, and using simple, moderated, de-personalised feedback language helped to minimise lecturer stress.

When instructor feedback is critical of work, students can blame the instructor giving the feedback, leading to negative emotions being directed at the instructor. By contrast, students tend to internalise praise, taking personal responsibility for success, and feeling more positive with themselves (Smith and King 2004). Student responses to feedback are also related to their self-esteem (Young 2000). Students with high self-esteem, despite believing feedback can be acted upon, consider it to be the fault of the assessor if they do not get the mark they expect. They tend to feel angry and direct emotion at the instructor rather than at themselves. Students with low self-esteem tend to feel upset and consider giving up rather than challenging the instructor (Young 2000). It is clear that instructors have very different, but no less challenging, situations to deal with across a diversity of learners. Understanding the emotions experienced by instructors related to feedback, how instructors understand student emotions, and how instructors might manage these emotions positively can help to secure the educational benefit of feedback (Winstone et al. 2017).

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper reports the third and final set of findings from a more extensive research project examining assessment feedback. Our first paper (Hill et al. 2021b) examined the emotional responses of undergraduate students to written assessment feedback, whilst our second paper (Hill et al. 2021c) assessed whether relational, and particularly dialogic, feed-forward could mediate the emotions felt by these students associated with feedback, prompting their learning attitudes and behaviours to change positively. In this paper, we explore the emotional responses that the instructors experienced through the giving and receiving of assessment feedback. Moreover, we examine whether the instructors attempted to manage their dialogic feed-forward encounters to help shape the emotions experienced by themselves and their students and whether they believed this impacted on course dynamics. By instructor we mean the academic staff member responsible for coordinating and teaching students in a particular unit. We define dialogic feed-forward as an interactive exchange about the quality of student work. Dialogic feed-forward is the creation of meaning and understanding about work in progress via face-to-face conversation between instructor and student, prompting students to develop assignments iteratively (Reimann, Sadler, and Sambell 2019). We conclude by considering the implications of our findings for instructors and wider assessment and feedback practices.

Our research questions are:

1. What emotions do instructors experience related to giving summative written feedback and dialogic feed-forward?
2. Do instructors consider the emotional responses of students as they give summative written feedback and undertake dialogic feed-forward?
3. Do instructors manage their dialogic feed-forward encounters to reflexively shape the emotions experienced by themselves and their learners?
4. Do instructors believe that the dialogic feed-forward encounters alter instructor-student relationships on the course?

METHODS

We undertook qualitative data collection with instructors from three universities who had administered a dialogic feed-forward intervention on one of their teaching units over the 2019–20 academic year. As part of a collaborative international writing group, these instructors were based in three different countries and each adopted their intervention at a different level of undergraduate study (Table 1). We focused specifically on written assessment formats and instructor emotional responses to the introduction of a novel form of dialogic feed-forward and compared this form with written summative feedback commonly provided for such assignments. The instructors were experienced university teachers and they comprised three members of our research team.

Table 1. Context for the instructors sampled in our research

University	Level of study	Unit (and number of students)	Dialogic feedforward assessment element
Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, USA	Year 1	Health sciences (n=39)	Personal development plan
University of the West of England, UK	Year 2	Geography (n=30)	Research essay
MacEwan University, Canada	Year 4	Nursing (n=28)	Scholarly paper

Feed-forward instructors and approaches

First-year health sciences

At the time of the research, this instructor had 10 years' experience in teaching, assessment, and feedback at the collegiate level, with previous experience in secondary settings. This was the first time the instructor had undertaken dialogic feed-forward and she engaged with it because she had not previously considered the emotional impact of feedback on her students or herself. She linked her motivation to implement dialogic feed-forward with her reason for teaching: supporting students and helping them acquire the skills needed to be successful in their chosen field by "connecting" with them authentically.

For the assessment, students submitted an electronic personal development plan in two stages: a preliminary portfolio to demonstrate appropriate structure and scope and a final submission including specific artefacts. To receive personal feedback on the assignment between the two stages, students were

informed that they could attend a 15-minute, face-to-face meeting with the instructor, as opposed to only seeing points on the rubric. The students had seen their grade prior to the meeting, but without any feedback. The meetings began with the instructor asking students why they thought they had earned this grade, referencing the initial assessment rubric. Students were asked how they might change their approach for final submission and were then guided to develop a plan of action for developing their portfolios. The students selected when to meet with the instructor, and after this, they revised their portfolios before submission for summative grading. The meetings took place during the working day over a three-week period. The instructor typically facilitated two or more meetings on three or four days each week.

Second-year geography

This instructor had introduced dialogic feed-forward into her unit in the academic year 2015–16 in an effort to improve performance outcomes for her students. At the time of the research, she had been teaching in higher education for 24 years and held the title of associate professor in teaching and learning. She was, and remains, a UK National Teaching Fellow.

The students in the unit selected an essay to write from a series of titles and they wrote a draft answer, which they were encouraged to discuss in an individual face-to-face meeting with the instructor. The meetings, which lasted around 30 minutes, began by asking students to summarise the strengths and weaknesses of their draft and to grade their work against the assessment rubric. The students received no grade or feedback prior to the meeting. Discussion during the meetings centred on how to discern key aspects of the question and how to apply appropriate knowledge and skills to generate a more effective answer. Students were encouraged to ask questions, and each meeting ended with the co-creation of an action plan for improvement. The students chose when to undertake the meeting with the instructor, and they were subsequently able to revise their drafts before submission for summative grading. The meetings took place during the working day, typically over a period of three to four weeks. Some days had only one or two meetings scheduled, but on a busy day, the instructor facilitated up to six meetings.

Fourth-year nursing

This instructor had over 12 years' experience teaching undergraduate students in lecture, seminar, laboratory, and clinical settings at the time of the research. Dialogic feed-forward had been a consistent part of her practice in laboratory and clinical teaching, but was not frequently used in lecture components of her practice. This instructor was keen to encourage all her students to seek dialogic feed-forward on work in progress, recognising how it had improved understanding for the self-selecting students who had sought it previously.

The students in this unit wrote a scholarly paper that was marked following a grading rubric. Students received their paper with narrative comments and their grading rubric with comments and a mark. They were then invited to meet with the instructor for 20–30 minutes to discuss their paper concepts, the feedback, and areas for future writing growth. The meetings were scheduled over three weeks between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Most days had three to four meetings spread over the morning and afternoon with breaks in between. Meetings began with the instructor asking the student to express what their learning was within the paper and from the feedback provided. Students primarily spoke about the concepts and content of their paper and generally showed interest in what

surprised or informed them in writing the paper. The instructor then transitioned the dialogue to the marking rubric and narrative feedback, providing a summary of the strengths in student writing and areas the student could continue to enhance. Overall, students left the meeting with ideas for future writing and ways to enact the feedback.

Nature of the instructor-student dialogue

Based on research into dialogic feed-forward, the instructors were careful to set the scene for honest feedback interactions in the meetings, setting expectations for conversations focused on learning. They were purposely friendly and open, demonstrating a receptive and respectful attitude to work of all standards. They used questioning and thinking time, taking turns with the students to speak. The dialogue incorporated a mix of query and advice, praise and critique, and related to cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects of learning. Such an active process enabled students to elaborate on their thinking and promoted critical engagement. It prompted students towards personal meaning-making, enabling them to understand their orientation to their work more fully.

Data collection

Our intent was to learn in-depth about the lived emotional experiences of the instructors in giving assessment feedback (Eysenck 1976). We undertook individual semi-structured interviews after delivery of the taught units. The reflections of the three instructors were informed by reflective diaries they had written during the delivery of the dialogic feed-forward interventions (as noted, for one or more years). The diaries specifically detailed the emotions the instructors had encountered with respect to dialogic feed-forward. Instructors wrote freely in a Word document whenever they felt they needed to. All three instructors read through their diaries ahead of their individual semi-structured interviews to refresh themselves about their experiences of delivering their dialogic intervention.

The individual semi-structured interviews were conducted online during June 2021 by a single member of the research team. In order to reduce bias and any possible familiarity of the feedback approaches conditioning participant responses, the interviews were conducted by a member of the research team who had not undertaken a dialogic intervention with their students. Each instructor was asked questions about the emotions they had encountered, with respect to summative written feedback generally and to the dialogic feed-forward intervention they had administered over the duration of their unit (Appendix 1). A pre-interview discussion took place between the three research team members who had not taken part in a dialogic intervention to ensure clarity and validity of the interview questions. The questions (which were not changed) allowed the instructors to reflect in a structured way on their personal experiences, emotions, and the impact of participating in traditional and dialogic approaches to feedback. The instructors were also asked about what they observed with respect to student emotions, as they engaged with the tutor commentary, and how they responded to and tried to manage these emotions. The interviews lasted for at least 60 minutes each and this secured rich, detailed narratives. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, amounting to just under 26,000 words in total.

Ethical approval was obtained from all six institutions prior to commencement of data collection. The three instructors who were interviewed were provided with a participant information sheet and they signed an informed consent form prior to taking part in the semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis and limitations

The three non-intervention researchers undertook a pre-analysis planning meeting and subsequently coded phrases manually in all three transcripts as the unit of analysis. The full interview transcripts were analysed inductively using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013). Identification of themes was influenced by the research questions and concepts known to the researchers from the literature. A number of latent themes were identified and agreed upon. After additional reading, core themes were identified, discussed, and synthesised into final themes post-coding. The analysis process was supported by memoing (Miles and Huberman 1994), with the researchers noting their thoughts about codes and their relationships as they were drawn from the data. The codes and memos were shared initially by the analysing researchers and then subsequently shared and discussed across the whole research team to strengthen analytical reliability.

Our small sample of three instructors was convenience-based, emerging from participants in the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL) International Collaborative Writing Group initiative taking place in Atlanta, USA in October 2019. We worked actively to remove subjective bias from our analyses, introduced through having three co-authors undertake the dialogic interventions and then be interviewed as respondents. As our methods identify, we adopted the use of rich description and iterative crystallisation of key themes across all data sources by researchers who had not undertaken dialogic intervention with their students. We also undertook summative reflection across team members to assure data sincerity and credibility (following Tracy 2010). Our three instructors were all experienced female academics with an interest in assessment and feedback. Further research with a larger and more diverse sample of instructors might provide a greater differentiation of results.

FINDINGS

Five main themes emerged from the interview data that are of relevance to the research questions.

1. Summative written feedback aroused largely negative emotions in instructors because they felt distanced from their students

All three instructors spoke about experiencing a range of negative emotions relating to the delivery of summative written feedback. Instructor A noted an overriding sense of dissatisfaction:

> My biggest feeling was frustration because I was writing so much . . . thinking "this is so good for the students, I've taken such care." Then I would think "but I'm not going to know what happens." It's like a fracture exists between me giving it [feedback] and the students receiving it.

This instructor noted later in the interview that the emotions she felt when crafting written feedback were "superficial" as if she was "going through the motions." She talked about feeling "far removed" from the student through writing and said:

> You've got to have a kind of relationship and an emotional investment to make you feel happy or sad or angry, and you never really got there when you were marking work that was anonymous . . . there was no sense of development.

The frustration of this instructor was coupled with feelings of disappointment and sadness that her written feedback was not going to lead to learning as far as she was able to discern: "I just felt that I wasn't going to achieve anything . . . It felt like a waste of my time and a waste of learning."

Instructor B commented that she had not given much thought to the emotions she had experienced when giving written feedback. As with all the instructors, she self-avowed to consider, within clear boundaries, the impact of her comments on the emotions of the students, particularly with those at the pass/fail boundary or who might be performing below their desired benchmark. She mentioned anxiety associated with not wanting to "hurt the feelings" of her students with her written comments, and being careful to clarify that feed-forward was a process of helping students to improve for the future via constructive critique: "My goal was never to, you know, crush a student. What I really was trying to do was provide them constructive feedback that they could use."

Instructors B and C also identified a disconnect related to written feedback in terms of not knowing how students were receiving their commentary: "With written feedback, I just give it to the students. If I make them happy, sad, angry, hurt, I never see it, so it never has any impact on me" (instructor B); "Written feedback is an area that you don't know how students will react. You don't know how they'll take how you've written things . . . there's always that wondering about 'did they get what they needed from the feedback'" (instructor C).

Instructor C talked at length about the worry and self-doubt that accompanied her writing feedback for students who had not done well on assignments:

> I worry about how they're going to take the feedback. I worry that I'm going to upset them . . . I'll sometimes doubt myself and then I'll have to come back to it to make sure that I'm not just in a cranky mood and that I've given appropriate amounts of feedback.

She commented that she would revisit lower scoring papers and re-read her feedback to ensure that it contained "enough positive reinforcement" so that her concern about its reception by the students might be reduced.

All three instructors remarked over the course of their interviews about the general absence of students taking up offers to talk with them about their written feedback, despite clear encouragement to do so. One noted, for example: "I've always told them that I'm happy to have them come in and discuss it with me after they've read the paper and the feedback, but they don't tend to do that" (instructor C).

According to the instructors, written feedback marked the end-point of any assessment communication, rather than forming an entry point to conversation about future development. As such, Instructor A went as far as noting she had to consciously avoid the 'anticipatory hostility' she had witnessed with some of her colleagues, where they were writing feedback with feelings of resentment towards the students as they expected a lack of proactive feedback recipience.

2. Instructors experienced a broad range of emotions related to dialogic feed-forward emerging from their proximity to students

The feed-forward meetings were emotionally charged for the instructors. Initially, they were either excited to talk with students who had submitted good work, or they were anxious about the discomfort of talking with students who they thought might be disappointed in the grade and formative comments. Instructors A and C commented respectively:

> My feelings going into a meeting would vary depending on how I thought the student was going to react to the mark. If I thought "this is one where it's really good, I've got lots of positive things to say," I'd look forward to that meeting, it was exciting . . . If I felt "this is poor and I'm going to have to tell this student they're just failing or just passing," I automatically worried. (instructor A)

> I'm always a little nervous before a meeting because there's always that unknown "how are the students going to react?" I'm always a little bit on edge that I'm going to get that one student who's really upset with me and they want to make me feel uncomfortable because I didn't give them the mark they wanted. (instructor C)

The meetings represent a moment of judgement, about student work but also about the instructor as a marker and a person, and this is taken personally by students and academic staff.

Sitting down and talking with the students clarified for the instructors the strong emotional responses that students experience receiving feedback:

> I realized more than ever just how emotional it was for those students to receive feedback . . . They would go into a meeting usually quite nervous and anxious, and then they either fell short of where they wanted to be, and that would be upsetting for them, or they got the congratulations they expected and that made them confident. (instructor A)

> The number one emotion I saw students express when they came to my office was fear . . . They came in with a very personal attachment to what was going on, and they were anxious and concerned . . . The other emotion I saw was relief . . . and when they left I really saw a lot of students motivated. (instructor B)

As time went by, the instructors put strategies in place as they prepared for the meetings to purposely manage the emotions of their students. Instructor A prepared both the meeting space and the students' expectations of the meeting itself:

> Thinking about the space I was in . . . I was concerned to make it a sort of welcoming, informal, relaxed space and conversation . . . I did much more to prepare students, saying what the meetings were going to be like and beginning by asking them if they were ready for feedback.

Instructor C ensured she did not go into the dialogic meetings one after another and she sometimes met with colleagues in between the meetings:

> I try to make sure that I'm not meeting back-to-back and then I have time to re-look at everything that I need to focus on for their paper. I usually try to re-scan their paper to so it's fresh in my head . . . I can remember one or two times, where I had feedback meetings that I wasn't looking forward to, I went and chatted with a colleague for a few minutes.

Instructors B and C made efforts to objectify their comments by linking them clearly to the work and not the identity of the student: "I would turn to the assignment and ask, 'what's in here that would really make a difference between what you're doing and how you approach it in the future?'" (instructor B); "I try to help them see that it's not a personal thing, it's about what would make the paper better in future" (instructor C).

As their experience grew, the instructors evolved over the course of the dialogic feed-forward process. They left their early nerves behind and became more confident in the meetings: "The more I did it, the more I could make my routines for myself, so the emotions kind of went down, they were less intense" (instructor C).

All instructors noted that dialogue allowed the feelings of students to be expressed and 'defused,' with relative immediacy, during the meetings. They commented, for example: "Once the conversation started, I just felt it worked everything through—it allowed those first feelings to come out . . . the student would often start to mellow and recognize 'right okay, I know what to do'" (instructor A); "Seeing their emotional change as they're sitting in the session with you. They're highly anxious when they come in. And then, when they leave, they're feeling a bit more hopeful" (instructor C).

The emotions of the instructors often mirrored those of the students as they evolved over the course of the dialogic feed-forward meeting:

> If I went in with those nerves of "oh, I've gotta tell the students they're going to fail," I'd always go through the emotions with them, and by the end I'd have the same release – be calmed with them. Invariably we kind of came to the same page. (instructor A)

> Usually, in the first few minutes, the nervousness goes away because I know what their goal is. Then the emotion dissipates and I feel more connected with them. (instructor C)

3. Dialogic feed-forward, as an affective encounter, was emotionally challenging for instructors

Each instructor alluded to the emotional investment involved in delivering dialogic feed-forward, due to it foregrounding the emotions of the participants. In the meetings, instructors faced students' reactions to their comments head on. Instructor A referred to this directly: "I've got to face maybe six students in a day across a range of meetings. And that was quite an emotional burden; it was definitely a different feeling to marking in the written form—more intense for me emotionally." The instructors foregrounded the need to purposely manage their emotions during the meetings. Instructor B, for example, talked repeatedly about offering anxious students reassurance and support. She commented particularly about the energy that was required to deliver a positive message to students who had not performed well:

> For the students who didn't score well . . . if I was energetic and I was excited about it, they tended to pick up on that and to be like "oh okay, what can I do here?" But, if I was having an off day . . . I got defensive and then it would start to kind of impact our discussion.

She noted this process was "emotionally taxing" because she had to be attentive to her own emotions and to those of her students throughout the face-to-face meetings. She went as far as noting that if she became too defensive, the conversation could become adversarial.

All instructors felt the need to hide or regulate negative emotions they might be experiencing, recognising that they could adversely impact the conversation, and the feelings and actions of the students: "If a student had done badly . . . I never wanted to look like I was angry with them . . . I would try to give the impression all the time that this is a good draft" (instructor A); "My body language, my tone of voice, I tried to be careful, consistent and positive with every student" (instructor B); "I try to really buffer my emotions going into the meetings, to make them positive and happy, regardless of my internal feelings" (instructor C). Instructor C talked very eloquently about the emotional input required to run a successful dialogic feed-forward meeting: "You have to be present in the moment, ready to pick up all those cues, ready to really hear what they're saying and what they're looking for. So, you can't be kind of distracted, you have to be focused." It was clear that instructors did not want to make their students more nervous or agitated than they needed to be at the start of a meeting. They wanted them to leave feeling positive and empowered to take action with their future assignments.

4. Dialogic feed-forward built strong learning relationships between students and instructors, strengthening students' sense of belonging

The instructors talked about how the dialogic feed-forward meetings developed open and strong relationships between themselves and their students, both within the meetings and afterwards:

> It became a safe, honest space for students . . . they could say what they wanted to say, what their worries were . . . you could see students willing to share with you their fears, happiness, anxieties all the way through the meetings. (instructor A)

> When they came in, and they had this conversation with me, there was this connection and, all of a sudden, they were like "Oh she's not this mean person who's out to destroy me" . . . What I started to see was a difference in the classroom with the way the students interacted with me. We started to have more of a community and they were much more comfortable with me, and they didn't hesitate to stop after class and ask me for additional feedback. (instructor B)

All instructors talked about the receptive and honest dialogic meetings building bonds between themselves and their students through establishing a sense of care. For example:

> Once you've had those conversations, when we then went back into class, I felt the distance had grown less . . . A lot of students said they felt much more cared about. I felt students after the meetings were just much more willing to ask questions and to speak more freely. (instructor A)

> Dialogic feedback really starts a transparent relationship . . . they know that I actually care about their learning and I care about what they're doing . . . They'll connect with me at other times as they're working on other assignments . . . and I find they participate more in class. (instructor C)

Instructor A offered a particular example of a deepened relationship with a student. The student admitted to having plagiarised much of his essay draft when the instructor noted the similarities between his draft and one submitted for summative grading the year before in the face-to-face meeting. The student opened up about and evidenced mental health difficulties and, because of this, he was given more time to submit a new essay. The instructor commented:

> At the end of the meeting he said "I cannot thank you enough for what you've just done . . . I can't tell you what that meant to me—you didn't judge me, you listened. I knew it was wrong and you listened to my story."

The bond created during the meeting continued over the student's final year. The instructor noted that the student kept visiting her to let her know how well he was doing, sharing his pride in his work, and telling her that her belief in him had made the difference in his learning journey.

There was a sense that the power differential between instructors and students had narrowed somewhat and there was a greater sense of "togetherness." This prompted students to behave differently with their learning, seeking further feedback from instructors:

> There was a sense of wanting to get it right, not just for themselves now, but for me, because they recognized that investment as well. (instructor A)

> Any time you have that relationship, where the students actually feel like you're invested in them, the dynamics change . . . I found that it really changed the way they related to the course and the way they related to me. (instructor C)

The meetings and the emotions invested in them by the instructors was also recognised by the students:

> The students said they loved the way they could talk about where they had come from, where they were going to, that I knew who they were, that I knew that their work was developing. They seemed more satisfied with the whole experience of feedback because they recognized that investment from me. (instructor A)

Because it is an inclusive, self-paced approach, the dialogic feed-forward process reduced students' imposter syndrome "helping to solidify the fact that they do belong here" (instructor B). All the instructors commented about the meetings developing a greater sense of belonging in the students. Instructor C, for example, said: "The dialogic feed-forward was an excellent mechanism to really create that sense of belonging with our students—to let them know that they have somebody to reach out to if they need it."

5. Dialogic feed-forward was transformational for instructors

Each instructor was asked at the close of their interview if they had any further comments about their dialogic feed-forward intervention. What emerged in the answers was the power of the approach to recalibrate the instructors:

> It completely transformed me as a teacher and I never expected it to do that . . . it just fundamentally alters who you are as an educator . . . I literally saw with new eyes and it was because of the time I spent with the students. (instructor A)

This instructor talked about the "power of the moment" that the meetings offered and how being consciously present with her students made her more understanding towards them. As such, she re-worked her unit to be more meta-cognitive throughout so that her students could share their ongoing experiences of their assessment journey.

Instructor B talked about changing her practice more widely, noting how she transferred her learning from dialogic feed-forward to other forms of assessment. She commented:

> Dialogic feedback just made me a stronger, better teacher because it really helped put into perspective how the students felt when I was interacting with them . . . I pay so much more attention to the feedback that I provide now when I'm grading or giving information back.

Instructor C noted simply: "I really love the dialogic feed-forward. I want to learn more about it and continue to use it in my practice. There's no turning back for me."

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK PRACTICE

Our instructors expressed frustration, sadness, and disappointment related to what they perceived as a "fractured" approach to providing written feedback. They did not know the outcome of their efforts; whether students engaged with their comments or what emotions had been engendered (see also Paris 2022; Zhao et al. 2022). Although the instructors considered the impact of their written comments on the emotions of their students, the realisation of these emotions remained largely hidden and unmanaged as the instructors were unable to experience the effects of their comments or felt powerless to defuse negative emotions through further explanation. The distance involved in written commentary and student reception of it could even lead to a build-up of anticipatory hostility in some instructors towards their students. This sense of alienation is important, as it can increase the power imbalance between instructors and students, breaking down important social relationships for learning (Felten 2017). As such, both institutional policy and individual instructor behaviour should seek to normalise feed-forward as integral to the learning process in higher education. Encountering feed-forward for students needs to feel expected, safe, and non-judgemental. This can be supported by developing an assessment as learning culture in which dialogue takes place on work in progress as part of scheduled teaching or personal tutor time. Instructors might also explain the relevance of seeking feed-forward for their students or role-model how they process and apply feed-forward in their practice, including how they manage their emotional responses.

Our instructors expressed anxiety over communicating negative feedback to students (agreeing with Myyry et al. 2020; Stough and Emmer 1998). Giving feedback was more emotional for instructors when it was delivered in a face-to-face dialogic manner with students. Through the feed-forward meetings, the instructors actively encountered the emotions their students experienced when receiving feedback. To help their students process and manage these feelings, the instructors purposefully surfaced or suppressed particular feelings of their own and this demanded emotional investment

(supporting the findings of Spaeth 2018; Stough and Emmer 1998; Tuxford and Bradley 2015). Dialogic feed-forward, as a social practice, offers a gateway to authentic conversation and personal realisation about what learning actually feels like, and this is demanding and time-consuming for both instructors and students. As such, managers in higher education need to consider the emotional labour, the "effort, planning and control needed to express . . . desired emotions during interpersonal interactions" (Morris and Feldman 1996, 987), invested in the delivery of feedback/feed-forward. Emotional labour is an important resource for higher education, helping to improve student satisfaction and retention. It should thereby be recognised, valued, and rewarded, rather than viewed as "a marginalised aspect of academics' work" (Tuck 2012, 215).

The need to "care" for students as individuals in a time of work intensification can also be stressful and demanding, causing instructors to feel overburdened with what Koster (2011) terms the "extraordinary emotional labour," expended by instructors as they manage both their emotions and those of their students, over and above "everyday" emotional labour. In this way, feedback interventions that generate increases in workload are problematic given current resource constraints. It is important to note that we are not proposing more instructor time is devoted to providing feedback, rather we suggest focusing efforts on where they will be productive and equitable for students. Pragmatically, instructors might embed dialogic feed-forward at key points in the curriculum, such as the first year of study, they might use tutorial time, or progressively develop peer-to-peer dialogue (see Hill et al. 2021c). Overall, well-structured feedback design, ensuring labour-intensive dialogic feed-forward activities are used strategically and early in curricula and individual teaching units, should lead to more effective student learning.

There is also the possibility of a gendered emotional division of labour involved in dialogic feed-forward (Hochschild 1983), with female instructors engaging with, or being called upon more frequently to engage with, the emotional investment of assessment dialogue more often than their male counterparts. Interestingly, all our instructors delivering dialogic feed-forward were women. It might be valuable to undertake further research with respect to the division of emotional labour in assessment and feedback, and to consider action at the institutional and system-wide level so that emotional labour is not invisible and self-managed within higher education institutions (Constanti and Gibbs 2004). Equally, some of our instructors used their scholarly time to deliver dialogic feed-forward and this might compromise their research time and ultimately their career progression. We suggest that promotion of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) route to progression would be a positive avenue through which to recognize this skill and effort.

The instructors were able to manage the meetings more confidently over time, developing strategies to manage stress (see also Hartney 2007; Stough and Emmer 1998), and becoming more competent with their inter-personal skills. To facilitate effective delivery of dialogic feed-forward from the first meeting onward, instructors need to be provided with tools, resources, and professional development to manage the affective demands. We argue that training should be reflective and participatory, involving development in understanding of power and relationship dynamics between instructor and students and emotional intelligence.

For students, dialogic feed-forward was inclusive, differentiated, and personalised. It helped some to feel noticed and cared for, counteracting confrontational responses, raising confidence, and helping such students to feel they belonged at university through a greater understanding of academic work and meta-cognitive learning (Hill and West 2022). Dialogue not only reduced students'

misconceptions and differing perceptions about assessment and feedback (Carless 2006), it also dissipated negative emotions associated with written instructor commentary in many cases, allowing students to take positive action with work in progress (Hill et al. 2021c). When instructors displayed positive emotions, this developed the relationship between them and their students (Mendzheritskaya and Hansen 2019). Students subsequently tended to use their instructor more as a resource in and beyond the assessment task. This more positive relationship might reduce attrition in student numbers and help progression from one year to the next. Dialogic feed-forward is clearly a student-centred approach, offering meaningful formative activity.

Although more intense for instructors and students, dialogic feed-forward was also more satisfying on both sides. All three instructors found the approach to be positive and revolutionary for their practice and indicated they would continue with it. They noted that the dialogic meetings helped to resolve the disconnect between writing objective commentary and coming to understand the emotional responses of their students to feedback. Surfacing emotions helped the instructors and students to be seen as more approachable and "human" to one another, disrupting the power relationships inherent in the teacher–student contradiction (Freire 1970). The instructors commented that students perceived face-to-face commentary as a sign of caring, helping to develop a more collegial setting within which both they and their students could function more effectively (agreeing with Chalmers, Mowat, and Chapman 2018; Crimmins et al. 2016). This helped nurture the development of stronger educational relationships between the instructors and their students and created a greater sense of belonging to the institution (Crimmins et al. 2016).

Dialogic feed-forward can be viewed as a form of relational pedagogy, positioning meaningful instructor-student relationships (authentic, caring, and responsive) as fundamental to effective teaching and learning (Gravett and Winstone 2022). Within this, it might be said that dialogic feed-forward offers a pedagogy of mattering, with instructors paying purposeful attention to the situated particularities of students and their developing subjectivities as learners (Gravett, Taylor, and Fairchild 2021).

CONCLUSION

Given a lack of research in the area, our small-scale, short time frame study provides a unique contribution to current scholarship. Our findings can be used to inform larger studies designed to investigate the emotional responses instructors experience when giving and receiving assessment feedback and how these responses can be managed positively to secure educational benefit. One fruitful area for further inquiry is the place of ongoing dialogue about work in progress in an anonymous marking system. Through assessment dialogue, instructors come to know a student's work before it is submitted for grading. While this forges closer bonds between instructor and student, it might also lead to unconscious bias and inequity in marking. Waiving of anonymity through iterative development of assessed work and associated dialogue needs to be discussed openly with students, with bias guarded against through blind moderation processes.

Our findings indicate that dialogic feed-forward helped to develop instructor and student feedback literacies (Carless and Winstone 2020), particularly surfacing the emotions felt by both parties (Pitt and Norton 2017; Ryan and Henderson 2018). Feedback processes were enhanced when instructors provided relational support through emotional sensitivity, empathy, and trust (Hill et al. 2021c). A supportive environment, with approachable instructors, set the scene for positive student responses to tutor assessment commentary.

The global higher education landscape is changing under pressures of massification, equitable access, technical disruption, and changing funding approaches, bringing increasing accountability and a drive towards graduate employability (Tight 2019). As a consequence, assessment and feedback processes are evolving. There has been a move towards more diverse and inclusive approaches to assessment as learning, encouraging students to co-design authentic assignments, often using digital technologies and working collaboratively (Baughan 2021). These approaches require skills of critical thinking, creativity, reflection, self-evaluation, and self-efficacy, all of which are supported through dialogic interaction between instructor and student.

If instructors are to secure future-facing sustainable assessment and feedback processes, where students develop motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficacy beyond in-task cognition (Carless et al. 2011), emotional investment by instructors and students is required. Instructors will require expertise beyond their discipline, incorporating specific knowledge and skills in pedagogy and assessment, including sensitivity to emotions (DeLuca, LaPointe-McEwan, and Luhanga 2016). Positive instructor emotions can support strong personal relationships across a diverse range of students and play a critical role in their academic journey. But there is a burden placed on instructors in dealing with the emotions arising from assessment feedback. Instructors will need sustained institutional support, recognition, and reward if they, and their students, are to flourish and secure the most positive performance outcomes.

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APPENDIX
Instructor Interview Questions

Define past feedback – confirm that the instructor is considering summative written feedback.

Questions relating to giving feedback in the past (before your dialogic feed-forward intervention)

1. What emotions, if any, have *you* experienced giving written assessment feedback in the past? Can you offer any examples of past feedback situations, highlighting the key positive and negative emotions and why you felt as you did?

2. In the past, did you actively consider the consequences of your written feedback comments on your students' emotions … and/or the impacts of these emotions on their learning attitudes and behaviours?

3. Did you do anything to manage the emotions of your students in relation to them receiving your written feedback in the past?

4. In the past, what kinds of emotional responses did you notice in *your students* as they received / interacted with your written feedback? What were the consequences of these emotions?

Questions relating to your dialogic feed-forward intervention

5. What emotions did *you* experience in relation to giving assessment feedback via dialogue? Why did you experience these emotions – what were the triggers? What strategies, if any, did you use to manage your emotions?

6. Do you think your emotions impacted upon the feed-forward session? Which emotions and in what way (positive or negative)?

7. Was there a difference in your emotional response (type and intensity) compared with when you formerly provided written feedback comments?

8. Did you consider the emotions of your students as you wrote and/or discussed your tutor commentary with them?

9. Did the students' emotions affect the feed-forward session? What were these emotions? What were the emotional triggers and what did you do in response?

Questions relating to completion of your dialogic feed-forward intervention

10. Did your emotions change over time during the course in relation to giving commentary on the assessed work? Please tell us more.

11. Did you see a change over time in the emotions of your students related to feedback? This might be as a meeting/dialogue took place or over the duration of the course. Please tell us a little about this.

12. Did you notice the students' emotions influencing their attitude to the assessed piece of work and/or their learning attitudes/behaviours on the course? Please tell us a little about this.

13. Did the dialogic commentary change your relationships with any of the students – or the classroom dynamics? Please elaborate.

14. Would you say that the emotions the students experienced in response to your feed-forward affected their learning on the course? Can you say a little about this?

15. Do you have any further comments about your dialogic intervention and its influence on your emotions, the emotions of your students, and any subsequent impacts?