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An Interview with Jennifer Jordan and Amy Broemmel- Mastering the Art of Feedback for Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Feedback is one of the most critical, crucial aspects of instruction and pedagogy, yet is often overlooked. There are many different types and forms of feedback and many different scenarios in which it can be provided. In this interview, two clinical teachers provide an overview of the realm of feedback, discuss ways in which it can be provided and review its use in the domain of pre-service teachers and teacher training.

Keywords: Critical media literacy, youth culture, school-university partnerships, reality television

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Amy Broemmel started her career as a 2nd grade teacher in a small town in northern Illinois before making a much earlier than expected transition to higher education. After teaching at Eastern Illinois University and the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, she was hired at the University of Tennessee where she is currently an Associate Professor of Elementary and Literacy Education. Her research focuses primarily on teacher development, but she also collaborates with a science education colleague to use picture books to build science content knowledge with elementary students. Her work has appeared in the American Educational Research Journal, The Reading Teacher, and Action in Teacher Education. She has also co-authored a book, Learning to be Teacher Leaders: A Framework for Assessment, Planning, and Instruction with Dr. Jennifer Jordan.

Jennifer Jordan is a Clinical Associate Professor of elementary education and literacy at the University of Tennessee. She received her BA in sociology with a minor in elementary education from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1998 and earned her MS in elementary education in 1999. After graduation she taught for 9 years in the Hamilton County and Knox County school systems teaching first and fourth grades. Her research focuses on the professional development of pre-service elementary teachers and in-service literacy teachers. Currently, she supervises elementary education teaching interns and teaches reading courses.

1) Feedback for pre-service teachers- how important is it?

It's critical. In general, feedback is an important part of learning; everyone needs someone to objectively provide perspective in order to help us grow. But this can't happen immediately. We find many of our students haven't received much detailed feedback, and have rarely been expected to act on the feedback, so we work hard to scaffold preservice teachers into understanding the process.

2) Corrective feedback- how should it be provided?

Carefully. Honestly, we don't use the term "corrective" when we talk about feedback. Feedback is feedback, positive, negative or anything in between. We frame it as an opportunity to continue to grow and build on the strengths they have. Regardless, for any kind of feedback to be taken seriously, there needs to be some sort of trusting professional relationship based in mutual respect, despite the obvious power imbalance between instructors and students. We work hard to model discussions in which students voice differing interpretations are encouraged in a way that values all voices.

3) What does the research have to say about feedback?

Dean, et al. (2012) says the goal of feedback is "...to give students information about their performance relative to a particular learning objective so they can improve performance and understand themselves better as learners" (p.11). We think Wiggins & McTeague (2005) provide a good definition when they say, "Feedback is concrete, specific, and useful; it provides actionable information" (p. 14).



Marzano (2001) analyzed research studies examining the effect of feedback and found an average effect size of 80.2 (range: .26-1.35) with .4 and above considered significant. Studies with larger effect sizes included feedback that was corrective, timely, criterion-referenced, and allow students the opportunity to give their own feedback.

4) Can you provide a few books that can assist in providing feedback?

Research, bridge, and practitioner. We reference several books when thinking about feedback. Texts about the research behind the importance of feedback inform our own thinking but are generally not the texts we ask our teacher candidates to read:

- The Handbook for the New Art and Science of Teaching by Marzano
- Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement by Dean, Hubbell, Pitler and Stone

The next group of texts bridge theory and practice and are texts that influence both our understanding of feedback, as well as, out students' understanding:

- Visible Learning Series by Fisher and Frey
- The Handbook for the New Art and Science of Teaching by Marzano

The final group of texts we have our teacher candidates read at the beginning stage of their learning to build a concrete (practitioner-based) foundation.

- The Hinge That Joins Teaching and Learning by Pollock
- Learning to be Teacher Leaders: A Framework for Assessment, Planning, and Instruction by Broemmel, Jordan, and Whitsett

5) Some people see feedback as criticism and seem to be emotionally sensitive- how can you address this?

Intentionally. We know feedback can be interpreted as criticism--that's a completely normal reaction. As such, we do not direct feedback at the preservice teacher as a person; it is directed at the teaching behaviors in any given instance. We intentionally base our feedback on verifiable observation in relation to teaching standards. Going back to those two are key when there are differing interpretations, which can help remove perceived subjectivity.

6) Understanding feedback- what foundational stuff has to be communicated to pre-service teachers- and to students?

Vulnerability. We acknowledge that teaching is a vulnerable profession in that there are many critics--both those with direct influence on evaluations and those without. We model our own vulnerability by inviting feedback from our students from the beginning. And, we establish early on that the feedback should be directed at observable teaching behaviors in relation to teaching expectations. We model using the appropriate language, like critical reflection, so that they can try it on and use it in the safe environment of our classroom.

It makes an easy transition when we begin giving them feedback on their teaching, and facilitates the gradual release of responsibility model. Ultimately, we want them to come to us with feedback about their



lessons--and it usually happens! Their own reflection leads them to convey most if not all of the points of feedback before we even have a chance.

7) Concrete- specific and useful seem to be watchwords regarding feedback- can you elaborate?

It is actionable. Those three words are based on Wiggins and McTeague's definition of effective feedback. When we write "72%" at the top of a student's paper or circle a "2/3" and write ".667" next to it while taking off a half a point, we are maybe being specific, but the feedback is neither concrete nor useful.

In fact, both of these demonstrate a deficit view--as a teacher, your feedback is taking away from the student's performance, but not adding anything helpful to move them forward. When all three are in play, you're providing a way for students to grow.

8) Actionable feedback- what do you mean by this?

It's additive. Actionable feedback spurs the receiver to do something that adds to their repertoire and allows them to try again in a way that might be more successful based on the additional information you have provided. We have found that providing feedback in this way compounds over time. That is, we might not see major changes all at once, but students are internalizing the small pieces in manageable chunks, which crystalize in larger ways over time. Sometimes, even we are surprised when after a few months of feedback, one of our students seemingly all of a sudden pull it all together and we see the results of all the feedback put into action.

9) Does feedback differ for teachers who are going to teach elementary, middle school and high school?

No. Not in process, though certainly the content of the feedback should change based on the teaching standards and observed behaviors.

10) How important is it to link feedback to learning objectives and rubrics?

Important. That is the basis for all that we do with feedback because it takes the emotionality out of the picture. When we give the feedback, we have the rubrics in hand and use the language of the rubrics in our conversation. That allows us to emphasize that we are giving feedback on teaching behaviors--not on the teacher themselves. We find the rubrics for teacher evaluation are a key tool in making this happen.

11) Some people think that rubrics are magic and that pre-service teachers, almost by osmosis- grasp ideas and concepts. Your reflections?

It is intentional. No learning happens by osmosis. We use the language of the rubrics in our teaching and in our feedback. It is intentional and scaffolded and all learners deserve to be taught about what they are expected to learn.



12) Resources and ideas- how important are they in the big scheme of things?

Crucial. We know that we are not always going to be there to guide and support our preservice teachers and that those who give them performative feedback throughout their career may not follow the same kinds of guidelines that we do.

So, in truth, our ultimate goal is to help prepare our students to give themselves the same kind of feedback through their own critical reflection that we give them when we work together. If we are going to get them to that point, we have to help them rely on resources and ideas outside of us; we cannot inadvertently teach them to depend on us for the feedback. So, we consistently refer them to resources that can serve as guides to their thinking and decision making, both now and in the future.

13) How can feedback encourage thinking? Specifically, higher order thinking?

Non-constrained. It's in the way that the feedback is phrased--not only guided, but open ended. For example, we might give feedback that says, "Think about last week's reading by Duke. What would she say about the examples you provided for students to decode in your lesson? How would she encourage you to change that portion of your lesson?" In this way, we are giving a resource and specifying the focus of the students' own reflection, but in a way that encourages them to not only think about but own the decisions they ultimately make going forward. Over time, we find that they internalize this process, and they are often doing the higher order thinking without us prompting them to do so.

14) Written vs verbal feedback- what are the pros, cons and concerns?

It depends. In most cases, both are advisable. Verbal feedback can be more "in the moment," but depending on the state of mind the student brings to the situation, may also be more easily forgotten. Following up with written feedback is always important so that there is a point of shared reference that can serve as a marker for progress, a support for learning, and a record of growth in an area over time.

15) Independent practice- how do you encourage this?

Gradual release of responsibility model. In terms of practicing giving feedback to their students, after we model and provide the preservice teachers with opportunities to practice in class with us, we ask them to collect samples of feedback they see in their classroom. We discuss the pros and cons of those samples, and then ask them to practice giving feedback independently to their students. We require them to bring samples back to class for more discussion. In our experience, this model feels safe, and by the time we ask them to share their own work, they have a deep understanding of the expectations for effective feedback.



16) How important is it for teachers to reflect on what type (quality and quantity) of feedback is provided?

Reflection is always key. We have students analyze feedback and questioning through the lens of assessing or advancing. Assessing feedback is rarely actionable, though assessing questions do give the teacher a sense of where a student is in their understanding at a given point in time.

Advancing feedback is actionable in that it supports students moving forward just as advancing questions spur their thinking to go deeper. We talk about intentionality in balancing the two, although that balance should not be equal. Advancing questions and feedback should be the predominant focus of classroom instruction, and if teachers don't take the time to reflect on how they are using these, the balance can easily get skewed in the wrong direction.

17) Some students need focus- how do you help students focus on one single objective or learning concern?

Focus is good. We actually advocate picking one objective or concern to provide feedback on at any given time. In our teaching observation conferences, we actually choose only one indicator of strength and one indicator for growth for this very purpose. We want them thinking deeply about the one area--not about the seven different indicators we might have chosen. We encourage them to follow the same model in their self-evaluations. In truth, we suspect they end up thinking about many more areas as they determine their one focus. We have seen evidence that they use this same model with their students.

18) Questions and feedback- how are they the same, how are they different?

Questions are a subset of feedback. Feedback can be given in lots of different ways, and questioning is one of those. The questions that we focus on send a message to students about what we value. If we are consistently asking questions with one correct answer we are narrowing their thinking and

19) Do you have a PowerPoint or YouTube presentation on this topic?

<https://blog.goreact.com/2020/02/04/preservice-teachers-feedback-podcast/>

https://www.crowdcast.io/e/feedback-preservice-teachers/register?utm_source=profile&utm_medium=profile_web&utm_campaign=profile