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CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK: A PATHWAY FOR FACILITATING TEACHING SKILLS   AMONG STUDENT TEACHERS

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Abstract :
    As facilitators of learning, teachers engage in various activities like creating a supportive and caring atmosphere for learning, helping students clarify and reflect upon their own ideas, giving feedback and motivating and stimulating students to learn. Constructive feedback is letting people know in a helpful way how their performance is being perceived. Such feedback can help students learn more efficiently; and **if used correctly, feedback can function as a very powerful tool to motivate students to learn**. The present research paper focuses on the analysis and interpretation of written feedback given by the teacher educators for practice teaching sessions of student teachers.

KEY WORDS: constructive feedback, teaching practice, motivation, zone of proximal   development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:
    "**Yes, you can still do better. Next time you should concentrate on....**" are the words written **Inside the Black Box** of feedback sheet. Written feedback **Inside the Black Box'** proved to be a touchstone for a student-teacher to explore her capabilities for teaching skills. The essence of this real incident marks the importance of written feedback given to student-teachers for teaching practice sessions.

Praise goes long way toward encouraging student-teachers perform well in Teaching Practice. The probability that student-teachers will sharpen their teaching skills has increased because of such words/ comments in written feedback. But at the same time, thinking in terms of constructive feedback may help to avoid the pitfalls of empty praise.

    Teaching practice is a crucial aspect of teacher-education institutions. Teaching practicum provides the 'neophytes' some type of pre-service training which serves as an opportunity to experience the realities of teaching and performance of professional activities. It is the only opportunity for students to test theories learnt and ideas developed in the classroom in real school situations.

    Written Feedback to student-teachers for teaching practice can be given the analogy of 'ship on the horizon' given by Steve Roberts. Someone standing on a cliff top (teacher educator with many years of teaching experience) might well see a ship on the horizon that is invisible to those standing on the

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beach(student-teachers).Should the person standing on the cliff top try to make the people on the beach (student-teachers) to see what he could see or should he try to find their line of sight and work within that? How could he best draw their attention to the ship on the horizon so they could see it for themselves?

Feedback to the student-teachers is an integral part of the whole process helping them to see the ship on the horizon helping them into and beyond their **Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP).**

1.1 Rationale:

Research tells us that "Constructive feedback from teachers, including deserved praise and specific suggestions, helps students learn as well as develop positive self-esteem" (What works: Research about Teaching and Learning 1987) Useful feedback whether positive or negative is prompt, germane and includes specific observations and recommendations.

Written feedback given to trainees on teachers training courses typically includes an overall evaluative comment along with points to work on in the future. The feedback sections are usually on the back of a pro forma document provided by the institution hosting the course. Providing the right kind of feedback to student-teachers during their practice teaching sessions contributes significantly to behaviour modification of student-teachers.

This paper presents a more detailed analysis of written feedback given to student-teachers for their Teaching Practice Sessions. Some key qualities of this feedback and some examples of inappropriate use are identified, providing insights into possible change in the nature of and approach to written feedback students.

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the present study are as under:
1.   To identify comments that is motivational (Praise & encouragement) for trainees.
2.   To identify comments that demotivates trainees.
3.   To identify negative forms and critical judgments that focus on the trainee rather than trainee's work.
4.   To analyse the depth of feedback given.
5.   To analyse the type of feedback/comments given to trainees.
6.   To describe current practices of giving feedback to trainess.
7.   To evaluate the quality of teacher feedback to trainees.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1.   What are teachers-educators observations of student-teacher's performance during teaching practicum?
2.   What is the nature of language used for written feedback?
3.   What different aspects of teaching practicum are evaluated in feedback?
4.   What different aspects of teaching practicum are neglected in feedback?
5.   What are the perceptions of teacher educators while writing feedback?
6.   Do written feedback given in classrooms match the findings of Tunstall and Gipps' fit into their typology?

1.4 METHOD OF THE STUDY:

For analysing the nature and type of written feedback to student teachers, 50 lesson transcripts with teacher-educators comments were selected. Tunstall and Gipps (1996) who have carried out research on feedback, provide a model for the present study. This particular model was chosen because this framework help define quality feedback with categories that showed a clear progression. The typology distinguished between eight types of feedback:

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A1: Rewarding - rewards/reinforcement

This is evaluative feedback at its most positive. Examples include smiley faces, stickers, stars, treats and work seen by the principal.

B1: Approving - verbal and non-verbal

This type of feedback is evaluative and positive and described as a "warm expression of teacher approval of the child's work" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.396). Examples include a touch, a positive facial expression, use of ticks, and general praise such as very good, well-done and good girl.

C1: Specifying attainment - specific praise, use of criteria

This is described as descriptive and identifies "specific aspects of successful attainment" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.398). This supports student achievement through specific praise. An example of this is "This is very well done because you have...."

D1: Construction achievement – teacher and student learn together

The description is embedded in conversation and dialogue with the student reflecting "work in progress" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.399). With this type of feedback, the teacher facilitates the learning process. The child is drawn into explaining or demonstrating achievement using their own work.

A2: Punishing – negative comments, punishments

This is evaluative feedback at its most negative. This signifies complete disapproval. Examples include removal from the classroom, deprivation, destruction of work and removal from a group.

B2: Disapproving – negative non-verbal and verbal feedback

This type of feedback is evaluative and related to general feelings of disapproval. Examples include "I'm very disappointed in you today" or "You could do a lot better."

C2: Specifying improvement – specifying what is wrong

This is descriptive feedback "which teachers use to specify how something which is being learned can be corrected" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.398). It focuses on the mistakes relating more to student achievement than personal attributes.

D2: Constructing the way forward-mutual critical appraisal

This type of feedback focuses on mutual critical appraisal of the student's work. "Constructing the way forward was used by teachers to articulate future possibilities in learning in a way that looked like a partnership with the child" (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.400).Table:1 shows the typology in tabular form.

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Table :1 Tunstall and Gipps (1996) Feedback Typology

Positive feedback		.. .. Achievement feedback	
Evaluative feedback		Descriptive feedback	
A1 Rewarding	**B1** Approving	**C1** Specifying attainment	**D1** Constructing achievement
A2 Punishing	**B2** Disapproving	**C2** Specifying improvement	**D2** Constructing the way forward
Evaluative feedback		Descriptive feedback	
Negative feedback		.. ... Improvement feedback	

1.5 DATA COLLECTION:

The study employed purposive sampling of 50 written feedback sheets on teaching practice of trainees. The written feedback were examined several times in relation to Tunstall and Gipps' (1996) categorization of evaluative and descriptive feedback as well as other emerging themes. Each of the written feedback was coded according to the typology. The written feedback included comments from novice teacher -educators and seasoned teacher-educator.

1.6 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The analysis and interpretation of written feedback according to the typology is given as under

Table:2 Examples of Teacher Evaluative Feedback mapped on to Tunstall and Gipps (1996) Feedback Typology Evaluative Feedback

Positive Feedback		Negative Feedback	
Rewarding:A1	Approving:B1	Punishing:A2	Disapproving:B2
-Well organised way of presentation - good command over content - time management was seen - didn't notice stage fright - smiley face - you could elicit answer in Sanskrit	- well set out -Excellent work -neat & clean - Good/Good work - Well Done - B.B. work was well organised - Reading with proper pauses & intonation -overall good attempt -figure on the B.B was	- Do it again - Don't forget the earlier instructions - write down the plan again	- Write your plan in a neater manner - you haven't put in your best effort - Try again, try a bit harder.

- Questions were grammatically correct - You were quite cheerful while teaching - well-executed lesson - proper context was created for introducing words	quite right - you could proceed according to plan - Reinforcement was properly given - You could provide opportunity to st. for speaking in Eng./ Sanskrit		

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Table:2 shows the range of evaluative feedback strategies that emerged from the analysis.It was consistent with the typology and actual comments have been placed on the framework in Table :2. The table identifies what is the difference between positive (rewarding and approving) and negative (punishing and disapproving) types of feedback. It demonstrates how the written feedback encompass the range of 'rewards and punishments' and approval and disapproval. It shows comments frequently to do with effort (trying hard). Presentation (Well Done) and accuracy (9/10). The examples of evaluative feedback are predominantly positive (rewarding & approving) and in comparison, there were few negative (punishing and disapproving) responses. Evaluative feedback lacks any specific links to either the learning or the task. When the focus moves from the task to the person it moves away from learning & performance.

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Table:3 Examples of Teacher Descriptive Feedback mapped on to Tunstall and Gipps   typology

Specifying feedback		Constructing Feedback	
Specifying attainment:C1	Specifying improvement: C2	Constructing Attainment:D1	Constructing the way forward: D2
- Very neat and meticulous work - Good writing - You managed the group work very well - Use of classroom lg. was proper. -Selected a good story for begining - Confident while teaching	-Correct inaccuracies - Make changes to this diagram - Please leave a line between sums - Practice more for fluency - You need to concentrate on spelling. - You need speak a little bit louder	- You will be able to recite it well you are good at this - That's really good work you were	- Do you want to try something higher or problem solving? - Could you give more detail because I'm not sure.....?

Table:3 demonstrates the differences between specifying feedback which does focus on the task and constructing feedback which gives the specific detail. This type of feedback is no longer simply positive or negative but is concerned with what has been achieved and what needs to be worked on next.

1.7 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:
The major findings of the study are as under.
1. A range of feedback strategies emerged from the analysis that was consistent with the typology to include evaluative & descriptive categories.
2. Evaluative feedback is still a feature where teachers assess quantity, presentation and behaviour rather than the quality of learning. Comments often deal with effort, presentation and accuracy. Even when disapproving feedback is directed at the work there is no information about what is not good.
3. Marks and grades are frequently used as feedback but add no detail about what has been achieved and what needs further attention.
4. Feedback is predominantly and deliberately positive and teachers steer away from negativity. However, there is a definite shift by teachers to move away from giving evaluative feedback towards meaningful focused feedback.
5. Most descriptive feedback examples were to do with 'Specifying attainment' 'specifying improvement' and 'constructing the way forward.' Teachers in this study made less reference to constructing achievement.
6. Whilst initial analysis and findings from the data outline the tendency to provide summative feedback irrespective of the nature of assessment. Here feedback can be characterised by single statements about the quality of the work or part of it.
7. Most feedback is mark-focused not learning-focus, serving primarily to justify grade. There is lack of explanation of what students have done wrong.

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8. The imbalance in feedback type is problematic. As most of the feedback was evaluative, few students received specific, descriptive feedback. This suggests that many valuable learning opportunities are being lost in a desire to be positive.

1.7 IMPLICATIONS:

       For teachers in India, where there is a national emphasis on addressing diversity and raising achievement, constructive feedback is a key strategy for developing a partnership with all students.

1. The findings are useful and could be used to support teachers learning to improve their understanding of feedback and its complexities. The more they are given opportunities to share and discuss issues around feedback ,the easier they will apply formative feedback principles. While feedback is seen as a key to improving learning, this notion has yet to be embedded in practice. Ad hoc and piecemeal initiative will not be enough on their own.
2. Some approaches to assessment and feedback remain traditional, have minimal student involvement and give little or no useful information. A balance needs to be found for summative- formative assessments so that all learning is monitored but nothing is measured without learning.
3. It is much more than just 'feedback' and teachers and students need to have a common understanding about what determines learning and the quality of the learning. Students need to be involved in the assessment process and be encouraged to reflect on their own performance in order to become self-monitoring and self-regulating learners.
4. The findings also will have impact on decisions made about the content of professional development programme.
5. The comments that the teachers give can be further developed in individual conferences. Conferences are an excellent time for teachers and students to ask direct questions to each other and uncover any misunderstandings by either parts.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Teachers educators would benefit from having someone with expertise analyse their feedback to determine what is effective and what is not.
2. Teachers would benefit from developing their skills in formulating comments to indicate specific actions students should take to deal with misconceptions & inaccuracies.
3. Schools/Colleges need to address feedback as an important aspect, as it will only be truly effective when embedded in a whole school/college policy which is consistently applied. Decisions about how students' performance is marked should be discussed at college level to ensure consistency across the college. Feedback needs to become an important part of policy procedures, planning and performance.
4. The purpose of feedback, both oral & written must be clear to all those involved especially teachers, students and parents.
5. Unless teacher-educators address the issue of giving formative feedback, as opposed to feedback which is purely Summative, then it is likely that there will be little change in the ways that students understand and use the feedback and indeed how they make sense of the assessment and learning context in general.

CONCLUSION:

       To sum up, most of the frequently used methods of teacher feedback on Teaching Sessions are ineffective when it comes to developing and promoting student's skills. Methods such as outright correction of surface errors, inconsistently marking errors, unclear and vague responses on content have all been found to

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have little positive and some negative impact on student-teachers. Systemized and consistent focus on feedback that take advantage of the process and makes it clear to students what the feedback means and what they are to do with it should be emphasized.

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