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ORIGINAL

Feedback and justice in education: an exploration of the conceptions of teachers training future professors in a Chilean university

Retroalimentación y justicia en educación: una exploración a las concepciones de docentes que forman al futuro profesorado en una universidad chilena

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: sufficient studies allow concluding a favorable impact of feedback in the consolidation of deep learning. Research is also clear in indicating the formative benefits of integrating socially just approaches to assessment. However, there is little evidence of the link between feedback, assessment and social justice. Considering this gap, the present inquiry problematizes fair feedback by exploring the conceptions of teachers working in initial teacher education.
Method: with a qualitative approach of exploratory, descriptive and interpretive scope, the diverse conceptions of 10 academics (two men and eight women) representing all the careers of the Faculty of Education of a private university in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago de Chile were explored. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were studied with content analysis.
Results: there is a prevalence of conceptions that refer to feedback as a practice that is more informative than constructive. Regarding fair feedback, it is defined as a conversational and democratic instance that recognizes and legitimizes the variety of learning rhythms. Likewise, it is conceived as a space for collective construction that encourages reflection on learning and eliminates the punitive nature of evaluation.
Conclusions: the conceptions of good feedback are linked to the idea of fairness. The implementation of this form of feedback is impeded by cultural, personal and structural barriers.

Keywords: Assessment; Educational Justice; Feedback; Social Justice; Teacher Training.

RESUMEN

Introducción: suficientes estudios permiten concluir un impacto favorable de la retroalimentación en la consolidación de aprendizajes profundos. Las investigaciones también son claras al indicar los beneficios formativos de integrar enfoques socialmente justos en la evaluación. A pesar de las investigaciones, existe escasa evidencia del vínculo entre retroalimentación, justicia social y evaluación. Considerando esta brecha, la presente indagación problematiza la retroalimentación justa explorando las concepciones de docentes que trabajan en la formación inicial del profesorado.
Método: con un enfoque cualitativo de alcance exploratorio, descriptivo e interpretativo, se indagó en las diversas concepciones de 10 académicos (dos hombres y ocho mujeres) que representan la totalidad de las carreras de la Facultad de Educación de una Universidad Privada de la Región Metropolitana de Santiago de Chile. Se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas y se estudiaron los datos con análisis de contenido.
Resultados: existe prevalencia de concepciones que refieren que la retroalimentación es una práctica más informativa que constructiva. En lo concerniente a la retroalimentación justa, se la define como una instancia

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conversacional y democrática que reconoce y legitima la variedad de ritmos de aprendizaje. Así también, se la concibe como un espacio para la construcción colectiva que impulsa la reflexión sobre el aprendizaje y elimina el carácter punitivo de la evaluación.
Conclusiones: las concepciones sobre una buena retroalimentación se vinculan a la idea de lo justo. La implementación de esta forma de retroalimentación se ve impedida por barreras culturales, personales y estructurales.

Palabras clave: Evaluación; Formación Docente; Justicia Social; Justicia Educativa; Retroalimentación.

INTRODUCTION

Although there is no universal definition of feedback, there is consensus that it is a communicative process designed to reduce learning gaps. This is achieved by comparing the current state with an ideal state, explaining both successes and mistakes, and pointing out opportunities for improving products, procedures, and motivations.[1] From a socioconstructive perspective, feedback is defined as a practice in which students act to improve their performance and learning strategies.[2] Current feedback paradigms do not see it as a post-assessment report, but as a continuous practice where the student understands, analyzes, reflects, and critically transforms.[3]

Sufficient evidence allows us to conclude that effective and constructive feedback has a favorable impact on the consolidation of deep learning.[4,5,6,7] It has been established, for example, that systematic, timely, and personalized feedback promotes self-regulation.[5] Likewise, peer feedback, mediated by assessment criteria and opportunities for reconceptualization, has been shown to foster metacognition and critical-reflective interaction on procedures and products.[6] Other evidence[7] suggests a growing interest in literacy and in assessment concepts and practices where feedback occurs.

Despite this, research findings[8] are clear in posing a complex challenge: to conceive of feedback as a continuous and formative practice. Part of the problem is that there are still barriers that hinder feedback processes focused on the depth of learning and student participation. Reports from the teaching discourse indicate[9] the presence of dissimilar conceptions about its formative benefits, the lack of time for feedback, the limited interaction between the agents of the process, and the formal absence of formative-reflective instances.

The issue becomes even more pressing when a contemporary challenge is added to the field of evaluation: justice. Socially just evaluation (SJE)[10] is a construct that intersects with the premises of equity, inclusion, formative evaluation, contextual sensitivity, dialogue orientation, and critical disposition. SJE promotes democracy by increasing student participation, transforming historically naturalized power relations into feedback, and, above all, analyzing how assessment can reform social exclusion.[11] Studies show[12] that SJE is based on the legitimization of the student perspective in both the design and implementation of assessment. In addition, SJE considers the social effects of assessment and adapts its methods to the diversity of learning styles.[13]

From the perspective of SJ, socially just feedback is explicitly integrated into teaching designs and conceived as a systematic interaction that promotes reflection and transformative action, legitimizing constructive student participation and rejecting the simple delivery of results without concrete opportunities for improvement, expression, and introspection.[14] This evaluative approach promotes the common good, challenges power relations, contributes to social well-being, and closes learning gaps through collective, critical, and reflective work.[11,15]

Despite all of the above, even in the face of the growing need to link feedback, assessment, and justice,[14] the literature still presents a significant gap. There is little empirical research that systematically examines how feedback is conceived and practiced from a social justice perspective, particularly in teacher education contexts. To address this gap, the following guiding questions have been posed: What conceptions do trainers have about educational feedback? What conceptions do teachers who train future teachers have about the relationship between justice and feedback? How do academics working in initial training understand the idea of fair feedback? In line with the questions posed, the objectives of the article are:

1. To describe teachers' conceptions of educational feedback.
2. To characterize conceptions of the link between justice and feedback.
3. To describe the meanings attributed to the idea of fair feedback. The three purposes are framed within a general objective: to explore the conceptions and meanings of teachers who train future teachers regarding fair feedback.

METHOD

Approach and design

This study uses a qualitative methodology that is exploratory, descriptive, and interpretive.[16] To investigate the various conceptions, understood as sets of meanings, dispositions, and beliefs that inform practices, a phenomenographic design is used.[17]

Participants and selection criteria

The participants are 10 academics (two men and eight women) who teach in Initial Teacher Training and represent all the degree programs of the Faculty of Education of a private university in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, Chile: Special Education, Language and Communication, Mathematics, Physical Education, English, Basic Education, and Early Childhood Education. The intentional sampling is justified by the need to have at least one representative per degree program who voluntarily agreed to participate in the research and who, due to contractual conditions, had the time and responsibilities available for outreach and academic management work.

Information collection techniques

To collect the information, a conversational procedure was used, employing semi-structured interviews as a technique. The 10 interviews were conducted between June and October 2024, totaling 448 minutes with an average duration of 44,8 minutes.

Scientific and ethical rigor

In terms of scientific rigor, the qualitative validation of instruments was conducted by five expert judges (three qualitative methodologists, an evaluation specialist, and a specialist in socially just education). Additionally, analytical-theoretical iteration was encouraged within the research team, and results were triangulated through constant comparison. In terms of ethical rigor, informed consent was obtained to clarify the principles of autonomy, privacy, consensus, and beneficence. These protocols were approved by the Ethics Committee of the project's sponsoring university.

Analysis sequence

To reduce the data, the following sequence based on thematic-qualitative content analysis[18] was used:

1. Pre-analysis of data.
2. Generation of a priori categories.
3. Filling in the analysis matrix.
4. Generation of axial and selective categories.
5. Interpretation of categories to identify thematic dimensions.

Through recurrence and saturation, two topics emerged that will be explained through interpretations and live codes:

1. meanings, beliefs, and actions of feedback; and
2. meanings, beliefs, and actions of fair feedback.

Regarding live codes, two clarifications should be made. First, whenever a teacher is quoted, code A (academic) will be used plus a number between 1 and 10 (number of participants). E.g.: A7 (academic number 7). Second, all codes reproduced in this article are textual segments of the central recurrences and therefore have discursive representativeness value.

RESULTS

Recurring meanings, beliefs, and actions of feedback

In terms of the meanings of feedback, the predominant textualities refer to it as an informative practice with a greater role for teachers. For example: "feedback is a bridge between where we are and where we want to go; it consists of providing information to students about their performance" (A2). To a lesser extent, it is understood as a constructive process with a greater role for students. In this case, premises for reflection and formative assessment emerge: "It is about stopping along the way to see how we are doing. It goes beyond saying what is good and what is bad; we reflect on why something is right, why it is wrong, and what the challenge might be" (A7). Similarly, A10 states: "It is a horizontal, not vertical, process that should not be used to indicate that everything is wrong, but rather to encourage students to self-evaluate."

Consistent with the meanings attributed, an exploration of beliefs about the purposes of feedback indicates a prevalence of informative purposes, such as the culmination of a stage and to explain errors. According to

the participants, "it is the evaluative process in which information is given to the student to close a process" (A5). In the same vein, for A4, its purpose is "to inform the achievement of learning after a teaching process in order to review and raise awareness and understanding of mistakes." To a lesser extent, feedback is assigned a didactic regulatory purpose: "feedback allows me to have strategies so that I can look at myself and adjust, adjust my teaching practice" (A1). Likewise, in isolation, feedback is attributed a reflective purpose: "the purpose is for the other person to realize where their strengths and weaknesses lie and what their challenges are; to reflect on why we do things the way we do" (A7).

A radical change is evident when inquiring into the meanings of good feedback. In fact, by adding the adjective "good," the idea of providing information about errors to conclude a process is abandoned, and meanings linked to continuity, constructiveness, reflection, collaboration, and context emerge: "Good feedback is a deep, dynamic, continuous, and collaborative process that is not limited to reporting results, but encourages reflection" (A1). A3 states: "Good feedback is feedback that causes the student to reconstruct or rebuild knowledge; it is an instance of construction, not simply an instance of review." For A4, "good feedback is a continuous process that is not limited to specific moments." In contrast, for A5, "good feedback is feedback that is tailored to the audience, highlights the positive, encourages reflection and interaction, and is sensitive to the needs of students."

The findings on the difference between the meanings attributed to feedback and good feedback are reinforced when exploring recurring practices. In summary, the main feedback actions confirm the idea presented above of conceiving feedback as a contested instance between the delivery of information to close a process (to a greater extent) and a dialogic instance to encourage reflection on how to construct learning (to a lesser extent).

In terms of information, two actions are relevant and representative. First, reporting errors collectively or without interactions integrated into the teaching process: "After a test, I put together a guideline and tell them to review it, check it against their test, and ask me if they have any questions; in other cases, I correct some things on the board and we refine common errors" (A4). Second, providing oral and/or written feedback that is not systematic or only offered as a voluntary option (again, not integrated into the teaching process): "They hand it in to me and I try to give them feedback within a week. Sometimes I take a little time on the same day to do it orally and then send an email... I also give them the option of writing to me if they want me to comment" (A6).

About feedback as a dialogic instance for fostering reflection, practices refer to individual and collective spaces integrated into the sequence of classes: "For me, the feedback process is ongoing, always individual first and then collective; I use reflective questions to help students identify strengths, weaknesses, and next steps" (A7). In the same constructive vein, collective practices mediated by metacognitive questions emerge: "We usually do this with teamwork. They self-evaluate the process based on certain questions... I like them to build... Before an assessment, for example, I ask them to work and give each other feedback" (A9).

In short, as table 1 shows, there are different conceptions of good feedback and non-adjectival feedback. Paradoxically, the least repeated premises and the least frequent actions become desirable across the board when the phenomenon is viewed positively.

Table 1. Prevailing conceptions

Dimensions	Recurring feedback	Good feedback
Type of practice	Informative	Constructive
Distinctive quality	Occasional and discretionary	Systematic
Prominence	Faculty	Student body
Role of students	Correct	Reflect and build learning
Purpose	Report errors	Regulate teaching and learning
Timing	End of the assessment process	Continuous
Teaching	Independent and non-integrated	Dependent and integrated
Modality	Oral and unidirectional	Interactive oral and/or written dialogue
Recipient	Group	Individualized and collective

Social and educational justice: conceptions of fair feedback

The primary meanings of social justice refer to the idea of equity and equality. A2 states that "social justice is closely related to equal opportunities." Along the same lines, A3 states: "I place social justice firmly in the

realm of equal access." To a lesser extent, there are meanings of justice as participation and recognition: "social justice is giving a voice to those who do not speak" (A7); "justice is recognition and dignity within socioeconomic structures" (A5).

About the idea of educational justice, the premises of equality and equity are once again preeminent. Other meanings define it as a means for "the elimination of power and domination relationships" (A4), a way for "the differentiated development of skills" (A5), a form of "recognition of diversity" (A10), a mechanism for "legitimizing the different types of knowledge that students have" (A7), and a method for teacher co-responsibility and classroom democratization: "It is very common for teachers to blame students for issues that are our responsibility. It is our responsibility to create a democratic climate in the classroom, where the teacher generates interest and motivates learning" (A1).

The evidence shows that participants believe that educational justice and social justice are linked and intertwined, i.e., that one cannot exist without the other, and that the fairer the education, the fairer the society. A1 states: "Justice in education requires changes in teaching practices that affect classroom democracy and the construction of social justice: if the school moves in one direction, this will have an impact on broader issues." In a similar vein, A2 points out: "Educational justice is a path to social justice, and feedback is a mechanism for ensuring educational justice and contributing to social justice."

About feedback as a guarantee, the meanings conceived around the idea of fair feedback refer to "democratizing the conversation that allows for improvement" (A1), "not making value judgments and allowing everyone the opportunity to improve at their own pace" (A5), "taking into account the needs and characteristics of students, recognizing differences in learning pace" (A6), "validating what they think or feel about what they are doing right and wrong" (A9), "generating reflections based on democratic interaction and validation of students' knowledge" (A7), and "collectively building feedback without just punishing mistakes" (A4).

To compare meanings, experiential examples that participants judged to be unfair feedback were explored. Episodes emerged where teachers stated that "the greatest injustice I have committed is to make voices invisible, to silence my students, because they are supposed to know less than I do" (A1). Reference was also made to homogenizing, "seeing everyone as the same, at the same pace" (A6), and using a test as a tool to punish "students, because I gave an 'unanswerable' test and they all got a red mark. I was angry with them" (A4).

As can be seen, notions of injustice are associated with preventing participation, hindering the development of "student voices," generating homogeneous practices, and using assessment as a punishment device. On the contrary, fair feedback is understood as that which democratizes participation, recognizes differences, legitimizes student expressions, builds collectively and procedurally, eliminates punitive weight, and encourages reflection on learning processes. These premises of justice dialogue with the meanings given to good feedback, establishing semantic links with the following attributed qualities: processual nature, constructive capacity, reflective practice, collaborative instance, and contextual meaning.

"For me, fair feedback would be to rebuild with them, based on their responses, on the meanings they gave to this learning experience, rather than what I as a teacher expect them to respond... Because we often make deductions invisible, our students sometimes present us with hypotheses about certain things. However, we are conditioned to expect them to respond in a certain way. For me, giving feedback would involve explaining why this concept arose, which I believe to be wrong. However, for the other person it may not be... So, for me, fair feedback would be not only saying how you expected them to perform, but why they performed the way they did, what that means in terms of the knowledge they are developing. Feedback has to do with the things we teachers do to make decisions after an assessment process, but fair feedback, good feedback, would be something different. It would be more about delving deeper into how I build knowledge as a student" (A9).

When exploring the reasons that prevent the development of good and fair feedback, across the board, participants indicate a lack of time, an overload of administrative tasks, and a culture of grading that is ingrained in all agents of the system. In addition to these cross-cutting barriers, the perception that the main obstacle is teachers' lack of knowledge emerges strongly, as indicated by A3: "Even more than time, I think it is the absence of methodologies or perhaps my lack of knowledge, because I do not know if fair feedback methodologies exist." In the same vein, A6 states: "Now I am my obstacle, that is, my lack of clarity or knowledge." As a corollary, A9 points out: "The barrier is us academics, because we are very much in tune with the idea that we are the owners of the absolute truth."

In summary, as shown in figure 1, recurring concepts indicate a direct relationship between social justice and educational justice. In this link, feedback is understood as a guarantee of distinctive qualities that make it similar, in some dimensions, to the previously explored notion of good feedback. In both cases (good and fair feedback), some barriers prevent its development.

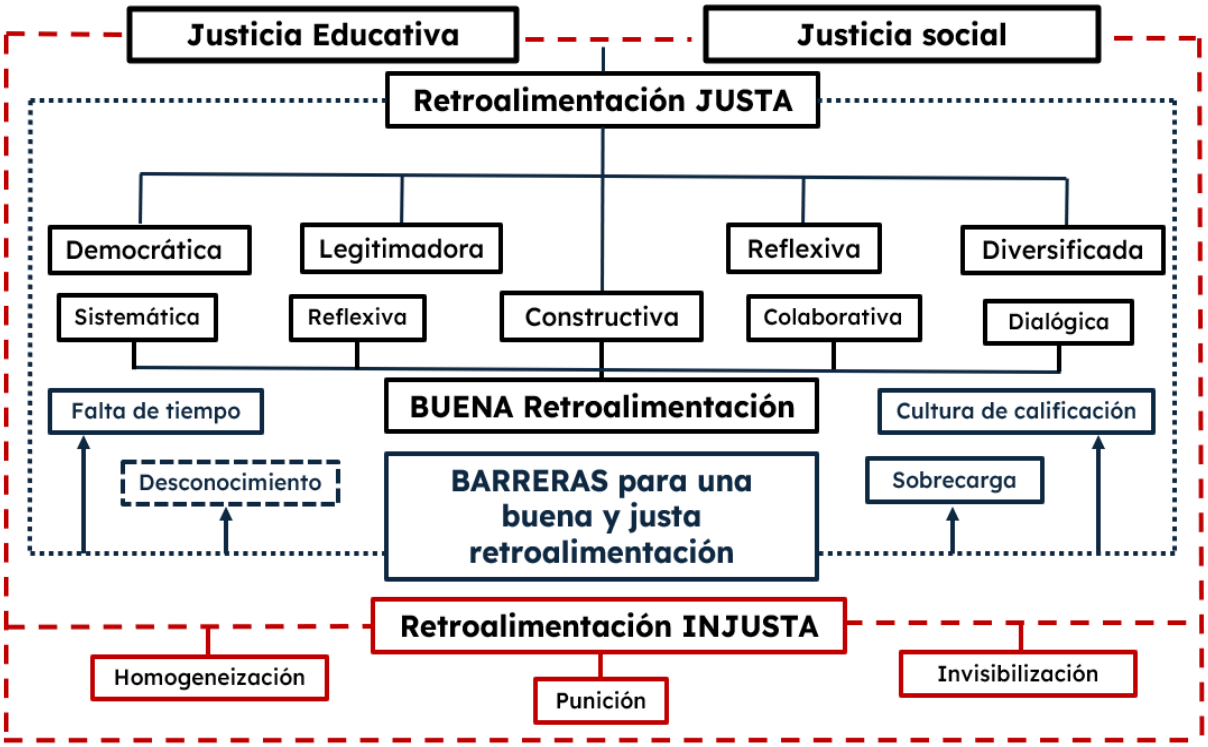

Figure 1. Feedback and justice

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that the prevailing conceptions of feedback refer to this practice as an informative process with greater emphasis on teachers, whose purpose is to inform students of errors in order to close processes. These conceptions are similar to those found in other studies[19] that indicate the prevalence of feedback conceived as the final delivery of instruments with corrections (rubrics, for example) or as oral amendments on specific errors, even though the literature maintains[1,5,6,7] that effective feedback should be aimed at the continuous improvement of learning, rather than the completion of a specific evaluation cycle.

Our results also indicate that feedback is conceived as something that occurs after grading, orally, unsystematically, without individualized messages, and integration into the teaching sequence. This finding reinforces the need identified[20] to transform conceptions and practices of feedback in initial teacher training in order to demystify its unidirectional value, regulate its integration into teaching designs, and promote the creation of reflective and participatory instances.

Regarding the link between feedback, social justice, and educational justice, the main conceptions indicate, across the board, a direct and contained relationship. In both the social and educational dimensions, the results express the prevalence of conceptions of justice as equity and equality; to a lesser extent, the idea of justice as recognition, legitimation, participation, and co-responsibility. Findings from the field of social justice[21] corroborate this distinction whenever it is possible to identify approaches to justice such as equality of resources and capabilities, as well as approaches to justice in terms of recognition of differences and democratic participation. Specifically in the educational domain, it has been concluded that, unlike the conceptions identified in this study, socially just assessment inextricably intertwines dimensions of equity, recognition, participation, shared responsibility, and democracy.[22]

As a consequence of the link between feedback, social justice, and educational justice, the results demonstrate a proximity between conceptions of good feedback and fair feedback. In the first case, good feedback is defined as a constructive practice with greater student involvement, whose purpose is to improve teaching and learning through collaborative and contextual reflection. Similarly, it is defined as a continuous and systematic process, integrated into the teaching sequence and involving collective and individual interactions. This conception of good feedback is associated with the constructive and dialogic perspective of feedback,[8,23], which refers to the crucial role of the actions carried out by students to construct learning through analytical and reflective dispositions.

Specifically, the concept of fair feedback refers to a conversational and democratic practice where the diversity of learning rhythms must be recognized and different expressions of knowledge must be legitimized. Along the same lines, it is conceived as an instance of collective construction that encourages reflection on learning and the elimination of the punitive nature of assessment. Other studies[24] indicate that the prevailing

conceptions of what is fair refer to the deployment of equitable actions that strengthen formative, reflective, differentiated, emotionally favorable, and contextually sensitive feedback processes.

The results also confirm the existence of conceptions of fair education/assessment as one that:

1. Eliminates power and domination,
2. Recognizes and legitimizes differences,
3. Favors democratic participation, and
4. Promotes shared responsibility.

In this sense, it has been established that unfair feedback is a discursive practice that renders the voice and participation of students invisible, leading to homogenizing and punitive events. These results coincide with other proposals[15] which indicate that the full participation of students, reflection on the construction of knowledge, the elimination of oppressive relationships, and the questioning of the individual and social contribution of the knowledge being assessed are essential for the socially just development of assessments and feedback.

Our results also coincide with other studies that suggest that socially just assessment requires feedback mechanisms that recognize and enable multiple forms of expression and action to ensure the critical-reflexive participation of students.[25] These findings support previous research[22,26] indicating that equitable environments are those that challenge the hierarchical function of grading. In turn, they are those that go beyond an egalitarian perspective to adopt a constructive approach, validating individual differences and accepting feedback and evaluation as mechanisms of power.[14,15,22,26]

Finally, the results show that the barriers to developing fair feedback are a lack of time, administrative overload, the culture of grading embedded in all agents of the system, and, particularly significant, teachers' lack of knowledge about constructive and fair perspectives. These results corroborate other studies that indicate, first, that the quality of feedback is affected by external factors such as lack of time and excessive teaching loads[9,27] and, secondly, research[28] that reinforces the need to develop new assessment cultures that dispel recurring ideas that feedback is not helpful, does not contribute to improvement, and is not relevant to university students. About the results that express teachers' lack of knowledge of constructive and fair perspectives for providing feedback, the evidence[29] suggests, in a consistent manner, the need for ongoing training on fairness in order to align individual beliefs with the evaluative and social needs of each context, to develop critical, dialogic, and constructive instances of feedback that highlight student participation.[7,8,23]

In any case, these findings should be interpreted considering the limitations of the study, such as the lack of triangulation with other educational agents and the absence of formal analysis of the assessment instruments. Based on these limitations, future research on socially just feedback is proposed. This will include the perspective of students and their participatory actions, specific interaction scenarios, and the instruments used. It is also suggested that further research be conducted on the operational differences between "good" feedback and unqualified feedback, along with research that delves deeper into the premises of socially just assessment in teacher training.

CONCLUSIONS

About the objectives of the study, a predominant conception of feedback as an informative practice focused on correcting errors to complete processes is observed. Less frequently, a view of feedback as a formative practice that prioritizes reflection and student participation emerges. Regarding the second objective, which seeks to characterize the relationship between social justice, educational justice, and feedback, it is concluded that these are perceived as interconnected. As for the third objective, the idea that fair feedback is a conversational and democratic practice that recognizes and respects diverse learning rhythms and multiple forms of expression predominates. Furthermore, fair feedback is conceived as a space for collective construction, which encourages reflection on learning and eliminates the punitive nature of assessment. The main difficulties in implementing these concepts include lack of time, administrative burden, the entrenched culture of grading, and, fundamentally, a lack of knowledge about constructive and social approaches to feedback.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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