

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Feedback [Hi]stories: Exploring the Role of Linguistics and Culture in Feedback Through Digital Storytelling

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Abstract: With the growing number of international students coming to the UK efforts have been made to make the curriculum more culturally aware. This cultural awareness though only partially extends to feedback. While there is acknowledgment of contextual differences around broadly labelled 'international' students, European learners' often fall under the umbrella term of 'home'. This sometimes aligns with an assumption that their experiences are closer to that of native English speakers. Using digital storytelling methodology this presentation will focus on exploring European students' experiences of feedback and will unpack the cultural lens they bring from their home countries that shapes their feedback experiences. It will further look into students' interpretations of feedback messages and explore the role that language and culture play in understanding feedback comments and taking action from feedback. The presentation will conclude with the need to establish intercultural feedback literacy to aid European students' transition into UK HE.

Paper: Higher Education is becoming increasingly international. This is very much the case in the UK where 8 of the UK HE institutions occupy the top 20 spots for world's most international universities (THE, 2021). The development of online learning accelerated by the pandemic can potentially diversify student cohorts even further. Given current internationalisation over the years across the sector we have been putting effort into making our teaching and assessment more inclusive. Acknowledging and celebrating different cultural backgrounds was a big part of this campaign as reflected in decolonising the curriculum initiatives. Those efforts however were not extended onto feedback.

The research on feedback is rich and is developing rapidly, however with little recognition of how internationalisation might impact feedback practices. The recent idea of authentic feedback introduced by Dawson et al (2020) presents an interesting angle on discipline discourses, however, omits language and culture as an important aspect of authenticity. Similarly, Bee Bond (2021) calls for a language aware curriculum and feedback should definitely be considered as part of that discussion.

Overall, there is some recognition that limited attention is being paid to how students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds might affect how they understand feedback messages (Tian and Lowe, 2012). The existing body of research around language mostly focuses on understanding discipline specific terminology (see Maxwell, 2021; Chanock, 2002) or evidence often comes from the second language teaching perspectives (see Hyland and Hyland, 2006), a context that is by default more sensitive

towards cultural and linguistic differences of their learners and better equipped to support those learners than teachers working outside of linguistic focused disciplines. Furthermore, in the body of research that exists, there is a tendency to group cultural diversity under the heading of 'international students'. This proves problematic since as Hofstede (2011) indicates there is a lot of cultural variety under the term 'international' and even with this broad labelling the research tends to gravitate towards Chinese students' experiences. The discourse around home students is also problematic as it means grouping European diversity under one label alongside native speakers and hence creating an assumption that the language gap is narrower and feedback practices overlap. This is often not the case as knowing from own experience, practices, understanding and language skills that enable interpretation and engagement with feedback vary greatly. Furthermore, in a context where understanding of the content specific terminology places high demands on the students (for example in Science Technology Math Medicine (STEMM) contexts), the ability to master complex vocabulary and concepts can sometimes be equated with good sociolinguistic understanding, which again might cause a false impression of actual proficiency, especially when it comes to feedback.

Using digital storytelling methodology, this presentation will explore feedback experiences of 13 European students studying at a UK STEMM institution as told in their own words. This methodology uses a combination of video and audio interviews to capture the interactivity, nonlinearity and complexity of student experiences (Barber and Siemens, 2016). The topic will be explored from two angles – cultural and linguistic.

From a cultural perspective, the presentation will explore the variety of home feedback practices amongst the interviewed students with a focus on their past experiences and attitudes, their openness or hesitance to accept criticism or praise, their tolerance for ambiguity, as well as the language used across the nations to denote feedback and how it is defined. Hence in the first instance this presentation will unpack cultural histories that students bring when it comes to feedback and how those impact their transition to the UK context. This will be further examined through the linguistic dimension unpacking the language used in feedback. While the language of feedback can be thought to be linguistically simple, it is often loaded with cultural meanings and requires good sociolinguistic awareness to fully decode and translate it into action. The presentation will therefore highlight the relationship between language, culture and sociolinguistic awareness and how it impacts on students' interpretation of feedback messages and subsequently the actions they take from feedback as a result of this interpretation.

Drawing on the thematic analysis of this data the presentation will highlight the importance of developing the dimension of intercultural feedback literacy. This is crucial for teachers to be able to help students ease the transition from their home to the UK system of education and monopolize on learning from feedback.

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