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Feedback, in its stereotypical conception, ends when students or teachers receive a response. The less common word, feedforward, might be more appropriate for those responses intended to initiate positive change in students' attitudes and actions. This article describes a workshop that introduces class newsletters, a form of feedforward made from students' reflective comments on class activities. The presenters ask participants to do what their students do: experience activities like story telling, pair-work, and mini-lectures, and both evaluate and comment on them. The comments are collected and during a general discussion of student feedback, a newsletter is created, printed, and returned to the participants. Finally, the presenters and participants discuss the newsletters, the value of returning students comments, and how teachers can direct enthusiasm and adjust subsequent activities as they focus attention on proactive attitudes and behaviors.

Introduction

We have been making class newsletters from student feedback and reflection on class activities for a number of years (Kindt, 1998; Murphey, 1993; Murphey & Woo, 1998). It is an important cycle of getting reflective feedback from students and then returning the comments to the class for further reflection, use, and consideration. We think this return of comments is a special kind of feedback called *feedforward*. We find that when we do this, learners feel more involved, more motivated, more like a community of learners, and thus, learn more quickly.

When we teach other teachers about this, we like to have them actually experience the process we are introducing, using Tessa Woodward's idea of *loop-input* (Woodward, 1991). For our presentations, this means that a group interacts with the ideas of *feedback* and *feedforward* and, at the same time, we get feedback from participants and feed it forward to them for further reflection. So we do some activities (#1-8 below) and then ask participants to evaluate them. Then we take their comments and feed them forward to the group with a quickly made newsletter. As readers, you might think about how you might respond to the following activities.

Feedback as Feedforward: Action logs and class newsletters

A story

We tell a story of two mischievous little girls trying to trick a wise old man into giving the wrong answer to a question. “I’ll ask him if the butterfly in my hand is alive or dead,” one little girl says. “And if he says ‘alive,’ I’ll quickly squish the butterfly. And if he says ‘dead,’ I’ll let it go!” But when they asked the old man, he thought carefully about the question. Then he said, “The butterfly is...”

How do you think the old man finishes? We’ll tell you what he said at the end of this paper.

Stretching

We form a circle, stretch, and then massage the shoulders of the person to the left. A short break and a stretch might also help students to relax while hopefully building good rapport.

Introductions

We take a few minutes to see how many people we can meet and names we can learn and remember. Knowing one another’s name is one of the first steps toward developing supportive relationships in the classroom.

Talking about the recent experiences and learnings

Once we had met a few new people, we take about ten minutes to hear about other’s recent experiences and learnings. Students too have much to gain from reviewing and summarizing what they have recently learned.

Mini-lecture—Feedback & feedforward definitions

As teachers, we are quite familiar with the term *feedback*. But *feedforward* may be new. The simplest definition of feedback is: *a response*. Information about the system—be it a class, or a particular student, or someone’s interlanguage—is returned to the system. Most definitions of feedback, however, are not concerned with future states. They simply describe information that is returned to a system, as if that system remains static, thus, feed back.

Feedforward, on the other hand, is a term that deals with future states. John Casti, a science writer, describes feedforward loops: “[They] enable the system to restructure, or at least modify, the interaction patterns among its variables, thereby opening up the possibility for a wider range of behaviors” (Casti, 1994, p. 271). Note that feedforward deals with anticipatory states. The information is returned to the system with the purpose of moving the system to a new level. This movement to another level of behavior is what we mean by feedforward. This idea is part of the definition in the New Oxford Dictionary: feedforward “is the modification or control of a process using its anticipated results or effects” (1998, p. 672).

Class newsletters are examples of feedforward because the students’ comments about class are chosen as the teacher anticipates future states of the class. These comments are passed to the class in a similar way the famous ice hockey player, Gordie Howe, reportedly commented, “I don’t pass to the man; I pass to where the man is going to be, or to where I want him to go.” Goethe’s famous comment has a similar message: “Treat people as they are, and they will remain as they are; treat people as they may become, and that is what they will become.”

Mini-lecture—Action Logs

Murphey (1993) introduced a type of learner’s study journal called an *action log*. Students evaluate class activities on a Likert scale under each of three headings: *Interesting*, *Useful*, and *Difficult*. They also write any general comments they may have about their classes, learning, etc. (Appendix 1). Here are some advantages for both students and teachers:

Action Log Advantages for Students

- Pay more attention in class
- Take more notes
- Recycle information outside of class
- Reflect on their own performance, class content, and teacher performance
- Contribute to the class
- Keep a record of work done, goals, and accomplishments
- Get other perspectives by reading other students’ logs

ActionLog Advantages for Teachers & Programs

- Get to know what students think and know (instead of guessing)
- Learn and can adjust our teaching to students
- Build a relationship with individuals
- Handle problems individually
- Be trained by our own students
- Fun to read (shared experiences)
- Guess less, know more, and, thus, are more confident teachers

Mini-lecture—Class newsletters

Class newsletters are simply a collection of comments from students’ action logs or other forms of feedback. Teachers read through students’ responses and select certain passages that can be used as points of departure for discussion, for getting students to think more about their learning and the class, and for selectively moving the class towards news levels of understanding (Appendix 2). Newsletters, like action logs, also have several advantages including:

Advantages of newsletters —the feedforward

- Reading at students level, ZPD, i+1
- High Interest, Classmates comments
- Students see their own comments and feel more part of the group
- Valuable reflections to reflect on more
- When we select the more positively-oriented ones, the class tends to go in that direction
“Energy goes where attention flows.”
- Helps form a sense of community
- Can be used in many ways

Filling in a questionnaire

After we finish doing the seven activities mentioned above with teachers at our workshops, we ask them to fill out the following feedback form (see below), which is similar to an action log.

PRESENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

We would like your feedback on the following portions of today’s presentation:

I = Interesting; U = Useful; D = Difficult

1 = not really; 2 = quite; 3 = very

Class newsletters: feedback as feedforward	I	U	D	Comments
Story				
Stretch				
Names				
What are the some valuable things you have learned at the conference?				
Feedback/ Feedforward definitions				
Action logs				
Newsletters				
Filling out this questionnaire				
How did you like...				
Changing partners				
Summarizing				
BGM				
Presenters walking around				
Overall comment				

Kindt & Murphey: Feedback as Feedforward: Action logs & Class Newsletters

After collecting the feedback forms, we pass out some of our own students' action logs from our classes. Participants read them and find an interesting comment to share with others. We have learned that simply letting teachers look for and discuss real comments from real students' action logs is a very "grounding activity" for the action logging/newsletter cycle. While participants are reading and talking about the action logs, we quickly make a rough newsletter from their comments. Then print and distribute it. We have included one group's newsletter in Appendix 3 (from JALT 1999) which is both an example of the process and an evaluation of the process by teachers. In the workshop, participants share the newsletter with a partner, alternating reading passages and discussing whether they agree or disagree with the comments.

Conclusion

Action logs and newsletters are powerful tools to assist classes in building a sense of friendship and togetherness as a learning community. They allow the teacher to choose comments that can build positive attitudes towards classmates, teacher, and learning. They help students to be a part of a cohesive group striving to learn. We believe that getting feedback is great, but that this can be used more, and more proactively, when we feedforward student comments in the form of newsletters. When using class newsletters, learners feel more involved, more motivated, more like a community of learners, and thus, learn more quickly. Many students support the process with further comments in their action logs about the newsletters: "I got the latest newsletter today and again found it very useful and interesting. When I don't have any information like this, I feel like I'm walking alone. By knowing others' opinions and thought, I realize each one of us creates this class, not only me. I am not learning English by myself. The newsletter is really helpful for my English learning, I feel."

Oh, yeah! The end of the story! The old man says to the little girl, "The butterfly is...in your hands." We know that he means not just physically in her hands, but that she is responsible for caring for the butterfly, whether it lives or dies. In a similar way, the ideas presented here—action logging, newsletters, and feedforward—are now in your hands. And when you do them with your students, you are putting the learnings in your students' hands.

References

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- Murphey, T. (1993). Why don't teachers learn what students learn? Taking the guesswork out with action logging. *English Teaching Forum*, January, 6-10.
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- Woodward, T. (1991). *Models and metaphors in language teacher training: loop input and other strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Online resources

Resources related to feedback, action logs, and class newsletters. Available at: <http://www.ic.nanzan-u.ac.jp/~dukindt/pages/resources.html> [2000, July]. Kindt & Murphey: Feedback as Feedforward: Action logs & Class Newsletters Kindt & Murphey: Feedback as Feedforward: Action logs & Class Newsletters

Appendix 1

May 7 (Written May 7, 18:30) English Target 80%
 Today's Partner: Hironao, Kayoko English Used 75%
 and Mikoko

P/D	Interesting	Useful	Difficulty
Newsletter	6	6	4
comparing / talking about action log	6	4	3

comments: I found today's class very full and very interesting. I especially found 'the Cape Diem Newsletter' interesting. It's so useful. I can get to know other classmates' thoughts or opinions, which are sometimes very new to me. These different opinions stimulate me and make me think over the topics. And besides, through the discussion with the partners, I find another interesting opinion again. I think through the Newsletter and discussions we can make our classes more better and vivid. I was really satisfied with today's class.

I was very happy to read your comments on my action-log. The comments encouraged me a lot. Your comments have big power for me. They are as useful as the comments on the Newsletter are, I feel.

There is one thing that I noticed today. It was I like this class. I like this class for the class' atmosphere. I felt, in this class, not only a teacher but also students try to make the class better together. I feel happy that I'm in this class and I believe that I can improve my English speaking skill here.

Maybe you can't imagine how happy I was to read this!