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**Naomi Winstone and David Carless (2020) Designing Effective Feedback Processes in Higher Education: A Learning-Focused Approach, Abingdon: Routledge (ISBN 978-0-8153-6163-3 [Pbk], 208pp)**

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### Article

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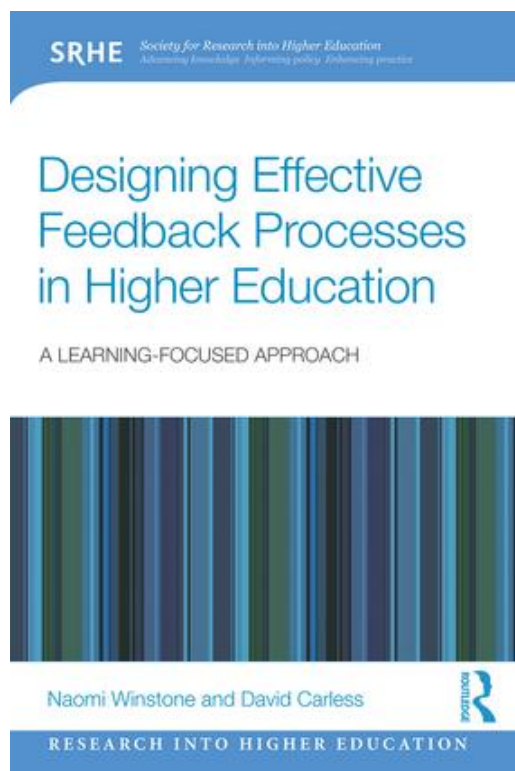
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**Naomi Winstone and David Carless**  
(2019) *Designing Effective Feedback Processes in Higher Education: A Learning-focused Approach*, Abingdon: Routledge (ISBN 978-0-8153-6163-3 [Pbk], 208pp)



Many in higher education have advised of the need to move from transmission-based approaches to those in which students are active participants in their learning. Assessment and feedback, especially, have been much slower – even, seemingly reluctant, to adapt. Encouragingly though, pedagogic discourse and research on feedback is now shifting away from

teachers' actions towards those of students and, more specifically, how they engage with and use messages about their work.

The authors argue that feedback is a *process* – one in which learners should be actively involved in understanding, applying and generating dialogue about their work – as opposed to a *product* created by teachers and transmitted to students. They advocate a 'new paradigm' – a term they adopt throughout – in which students are, "... literate in the domain of feedback, from understanding standards and criteria prior to submitting an assignment, to engaging in meaningful dialogue with peers and teachers about their work, to managing the emotional response to feedback, and understanding what feedback is and why it is important" (pp. 38-9). They envisage all of these as necessary dimensions to this new paradigm, which supports students taking meaningful action in response to feedback.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn (1996) describes how periods of continuity in science are interrupted with episodic paradigmatic shifts; these revolutionary shifts dramatically upset conventional wisdom and alter the course of future research and practice. When an existing conceptual paradigm is stretched, and enough anomalies emerge, occasionally a rival to the established framework of thought is generated. Initially most of the scientific community will oppose the conceptual change, but in time – if the challenging paradigm is solidified – it will

supplant the old and a paradigm shift, or scientific revolution, will have occurred. However, the paradigms preceding and succeeding the shift are so diverse that their conceptual theories are incommensurable: those unwilling or unable to accommodate their work to it must proceed in isolation or attach themselves to another field of thinking.

A new paradigm sounds, therefore, like a seismic shift from current practices. To a significant extent, this is what the authors argue for – and for which they make some very cogent and convincing arguments. However, they draw an analogy from competitive cycling – that the aggregation of marginal gains can combine to affect significant change – to illustrate that, whilst transforming feedback practices may appear daunting, a paradigm shift can be affected by the combined impact of numerous small changes.

A launch event for the book took place at the Assessment in Higher Education (AHE) Conference on 26 and 27 June 2019 in Manchester, UK. Carless led a masterclass session, ‘Developing staff and student feedback literacy in partnership’, which touched on a number of themes that occur in the book, such as the shared responsibilities of both students and teachers in feedback, the need to provide opportunities for students to use feedback through appropriate assessment design, and how feedback processes might be negotiated around students need and preferences. Reading this book gave me the feeling of reliving that masterclass – the clarity and compelling way in which the ideas are presented will engage many.

It has been argued that feedback provided to students that is not then utilised to enhance their learning or learning strategies is not feedback at all, but merely information (Sadler, 1989). A central thesis of the book is in creating environments that facilitate students’ uptake of and learning via feedback. Dialogue lies at the heart of these practices, moving away from teacher-dominated forms of communication and enabling students to solicit and engage in feedback interactions. The new paradigm approach is characterised by ongoing cycles of learning through which students hone their skills, interrogate and crystallise their disciplinary knowledge, and develop the capacity to judge the quality of their work. As such, the book aligns well with Boud et al.’s (2018) *Developing Evaluative Judgement in Higher Education*.

The subjects covered in each chapter include the importance of developing teacher and student feedback literacy; facilitating student engagement in the feedback process; the use of technology in enabling feedback processes; enabling feedback through assessment design; enabling dialogue in feedback processes; interweaving students’ internal feedback and external feedback sources; peer feedback; and the influence of relational factors on students’ uptake of feedback.

The book is exceptionally well referenced throughout, and the central argument is supported by a wealth of evidence; this provides the keen researcher with many opportunities to extend their reading beyond the volume itself. Each chapter contains a boxed synopsis linking the key issues being discussed with pertinent findings in pedagogic research, and each

contains detailed case studies describing how the concepts have been implemented in a range of different disciplines; together these effectively interweave pedagogic theory and real-world assessment and feedback practice. The reader is also signposted to a multitude of pertinent online resources to support the development and application of the concepts being discussed.

Although student feedback literacy has been discussed in research, the authors argue that both student and teacher need to be feedback literate, as often their perceptions of its purpose can be very different. In his presentation at the AHE conference, Carless defined teacher feedback literacy 'as expertise and dispositions to design feedback in ways which enable student engagement and uptake, and student feedback literacy as the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to use feedback for improvement'.

The book contains numerous examples of how new paradigm approaches have been implemented, which are within practical grasp – it is exemplary in this respect. One of note is that of Rick Glofcheski (Chapter Five). Glofcheski developed an approach that diversified assessment from the traditional end of semester examinations. In a large class context, he introduced a reflective diary in which students analysed real-life cases reported in the local media and thereby authenticated their learning, provided anticipatory feedback through guidelines and exemplars to support students' understanding of both task and expectations. It also facilitated same-day feedback dialogue with students immediately following examinations, which even had the

potential for them to shape the marking scheme.

A central thesis in the new paradigm approaches to feedback is in enhancing dialogue and bolstering student uptake of feedback. Whilst the book describes many potential strategies to facilitate this – such as interactive cover sheets, exemplars to facilitate discussion around quality and pre-submission feedback, and screencast delivery of feedback – a challenge remains that there is relatively little evidence in of how these methods actually impact on both students' application of feedback to their work and – crucially – on students' subsequent learning. Research often relies on students' self-reported preferences and likelihood of using such feedback, or comparison with the performance of previous cohorts in which causality remains unclear due to inherent variations between each cohort.

As the authors highlight, satisfaction metrics continue to focus on feedback transmission, such as timeliness, reinforcing attention on what teachers *do* as opposed to considering *how* feedback facilitates students' learning (pp. 167-8); it is an evaluation rooted firmly in a different paradigm. Consequently, where institutional priorities place precedence on metrics of feedback delivery and student satisfaction over the impact of feedback practices on student learning, the shift to a new paradigm may be inhibited. As Kuhn highlights, paradigms preceding the shift are incommensurable with the conceptual basis of the ones that follow; new paradigms upset conventional wisdom and alter the course of future practice.

Other implications of the new paradigm approach are the need to consider feedback processes as iterative cycles within a longitudinal, programme-wide context to enhance students' opportunities to apply feedback through interlinked tasks or multiple stage assessments, and whether modules of longer duration can facilitate a less fragmented approach to learning. This may prove challenging for individual academics or even programme teams where there is an institutional orientation toward shorter modules.

Reviewed by **Charlie Smith**

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