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# Humanizing Feedback: Responsive Feedback Practices that Value Student Identity and Build Feedback Literacy

by Jeff Austin, Heather Rottermond, and Laura Gabrion



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A couple years ago, Jeff had a student who was so deeply scarred by a feedback experience earlier in her school career that the thought of giving a peer feedback or receiving feedback from a peer or teacher was difficult. For her, feedback carried a substantial sting, and she was reluctant to pass that hurt along to anyone else. The student wrote about a passion she had, and she believed she had followed closely with the assignment criteria that would earn her high marks. Instead, she was met with a spate of negative comments that raised questions about her abilities as a writer, particularly in that course. The comments suggested that she change classes, even down a level, without offering guidance for improvement or additional support. While these comments might be seen as “honest” or “straightforward” by some, an example of so-called “tough love,” they left indelible marks on the student, as she talked often in writing conferences and reflections about needing to rebuild her identity as a writer and a healthy relationship with feedback, especially before heading off to college. Given her unwillingness to stomach a low grade, another indelible mark, the student opted to redo the assignment entirely, even though the new version was, for her, poorer than the one she turned in.

She felt powerless to do anything other than capitulate. Following this incident, almost any feedback—including informal formative check-ins—were cause for alarm and avoidance, as she would skip conference sessions or freeze in fear when she did attend. For her, feedback was always negative and usually intended to harm, especially feedback from those in positions of perceived power. Put more simply, feedback was a weapon used to hurt her, and she believed she could in turn use it to harm others.

While this vignette is one student’s story, it begins to show us where and how foundational understandings and beliefs about feedback are formed. The style of feedback lifted in the anecdote—often seen as focusing more on weakness or deviation from a standard—is generally not something that those receiving it consented to. In fact, it may have been done to them, rather than with them, which can negatively impact students’ identities as learners and harm feelings of self-efficacy (Marrs et al., 2016). This becomes amplified when grades are involved, as students are prone to looking at the score rather than any associated comments (Butler, 1988; Wiliam, 2018). While grades are not feedback in

and of themselves, they are the primary prism through which any written feedback is understood. Most importantly, however, the vignette helps us understand a central truth: feedback is a relationship, and like any relationship, it must be built on a foundation of trust, consent, and safety.

Our hope is that this article supports teachers in examining both how they provide feedback to students and what feedback they provide in an effort to build and sustain healthy relationships with their students. In other words, we are interested in exploring both the processes and products associated with feedback that is asset-based, honors students' identities, and leaves room for students to have authorial agency in their writing. This means reorienting practices to avoid compelling students toward a narrow single standard of success, which also asks us to reconsider the tools that we use for assessment, including rubrics. We are also interested in helping teachers model these kinds of edifying feedback practices with their students so that students can use them with their peers to build classroom cultures situated in relational care, as we believe deeply in the transformative power of caring peer-to-peer discourse. Put more simply, we hope this article helps both teachers and students become more adept and literate with humanizing feedback practices that have the potential to make teacher-student and student-student relationships even more generative.

### **Using Social Theories to Humanize Feedback Practices**

Rooted in the mid-twentieth century work of psychologists Maslow and Rogers, humanist approaches to teaching and learning often rely upon Maslow's "ascending hierarchy of needs which [range] from physiological needs, safety, love and belonging to esteem, and finally self-actualisation, where needs at the lower levels have to be met before one can tackle the higher level needs" (as cited in Tangney, 2014, p. 267). In practice, if the learning environment is not centered on safety and trust, it is unlikely that students will develop the self-beliefs necessary for success. Destin et al. (2022) note that "humanization embraces the full capacity of all students to contribute to the learning environment as they generate

and co-create knowledge rather than being cast as passive recipients" (p. 4). Thus, social learning theories can be a mechanism for framing humanizing-feedback practices, especially when dialogic feedback is embraced. In other words, rather than being an insular practice where the teacher provides feedback and the student is left to unpack it alone, feedback becomes a conversation that values the student's identity and potential.

Vygotsky emphasized the social interactions that comprise student-student and student-teacher relationships and compel individual growth (1934/1986) and "believed that learning results as a function of interacting with others" (as cited in Tracey & Morrow, 2012, p. 129). In fact, socialization, according to Vygotsky (1934/1986), must occur before internalization, and therefore, dialogue plays a significant role in all aspects of learning. Vygotsky's belief that learning is socially constructed promotes dialogic feedback practices, even if such conversations are asynchronous and written. Dialogic feedback can provide students with opportunities for growth, including the conceptualization and utilization of feedback to further develop their skills and self-efficacy. Effective feedback practices encourage teachers to seek occasions to understand the student, the context, and the potential; as noted previously, when feedback focuses on weaknesses, students perceive limited opportunities for improvement, and self-efficacy undoubtedly suffers.

Bandura's social cognitive theory bridges social and humanistic approaches to learning; while he asserted that students need to be active participants in their learning, his focus was on the interaction between "personal, behavioral, and environmental influences" (as cited in Schunk & Pajares, 2009, p. 35). Since efficacy is one's perceived belief that he or she can perform a particular action or skill, Bandura's (1977) work suggests that efficacy can be manipulated by "psychological procedures," and these include treatments or interventions to any one of a person's "four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (p. 195). Feedback that encourages or celebrates students' mastery of a task, considers "somatic responses" (Best et al., 2014), and/or positively reinforces what the

students are doing well enhances self-efficacy, but it also nurtures the foundational levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, such as safety and belonging. Ultimately, part of responsive feedback means being willing to consider the whole child when providing student-centered feedback.

### **Beliefs about Feedback**

Feedback practices are often slow to change because those giving feedback think they are meeting the needs and expectations of those receiving the feedback (Carless, 2006). When thinking about responsive feedback, it is important to attend to the ways in which power dynamics operate, especially with students who are already vulnerable and marginalized within school contexts. It is important for teachers to use whatever agency they have to advocate for more humanizing feedback practices that disrupt top-down hierarchies that negatively impact students. For instance, Best et al. (2014) revealed the somatic responses of multilingual students to feedback tied directly to grades, including elevated heart rates, making it more difficult for them to move past low grades and negative feedback. In fact, grades permanently dented their self-concept. One student remarked, "You mean after we get the low grade, we're still very confident? That's not possible." Indeed, while feedback has some power in formative contexts (Blum, 2021), feedback in summative contexts, especially when tied to grades, emphasizes teacher control and reduces students' willingness to take risks or engage in creative tasks (Kvale, 2007). Put more simply, if feedback signifies authoritarian judgment, teachers should consider redefining and reimagining feedback.

While top-down, grade-adjacent feedback is often well-intentioned, as students do require feedback in order to grow their skills, focusing only on a student's skills while ignoring the relational and somatic elements of feedback renders any commentary or advice less effective than it could be, no matter how excellent. Moreover, this approach generally relies on a single standard, which is often exclusionary rather than growth-oriented. Unfortunately, this feedback model is often situated in deficit narratives—stories about what students can't do—which leads to their feelings of inadequacy and low self-efficacy, especially for students already at the

margins (Young, 2000; Boud & Falchikov, 2007). To that end, students who had positive reactions to feedback are those who had their strengths recognized and affirmed (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). Top-down, grade-adjacent feedback is often seen as part of a teacher's reality and students' necessary preparation for success at a higher level of schooling or in the so-called "real world," which usually means the workplace. Teachers' working conditions and student learning conditions are deeply intertwined, so imagining and enacting more responsive systems in allyship with students benefits everyone in the system. The top-down, grade-adjacent approach to feedback is one manifestation of a savior mentality: our students do not require our rescue from their deficits, but they do require our responsiveness. Pushing back against deficit orientations requires teachers to take an asset-based, strengths-centered approach, which means understanding the social as well as the cognitive dimensions of our work (Wolter, 2021).

This also raises questions about the common mechanisms used to provide feedback, including rubrics. While rubrics might be believed to provide clarity or objectivity, the language required to differentiate learning levels or progressions can cause confusion (Inoue, 2021). For instance, what writing a detailed paragraph means to a student might be different than what it means to a teacher, and reaching a level of clarity requires additional language. For students that exist outside dominant identities, there is pressure to surrender their identities to reach what is pressure to assimilate to these norms in order to reach an "academic tone" (LeCourt & Napoleone, 2011). While feedback might be designed to help students reach certain standards or to prepare them for certain tests, it can also sometimes be disconnected from their identities and ways of knowing, so interrogating the feedback teachers provide and how it links to notions of identity and concept matter greatly. This isn't to say that conversations around convention or clarity can't or shouldn't happen, but it is to say that those providing feedback need to be mindful of identity, culture, genre, audience, and purpose.

Being responsive, however, does not mean being uncritical or withholding feedback from students. Again,

feedback is relational, and honesty and clarity are part of healthy relationships (brown, 2018); our relationships should be able to bear the weight of honesty. Not providing clear, honest feedback around areas that students identify as places they want to focus is another manifestation of savior mentality. While this approach might also be rooted in good intentions, it is also rooted in deficit mindsets about who is capable of academic growth (Shevrin Venet, 2021). This approach is tantalizing because it feels benevolent, but it is another form of rescue that builds even more barriers when feedback should be in the service of removing them. Indeed, half-truths and omissions can be as harmful to students as implementing a single standard. Being able to give honest, clear, and responsive feedback requires students to believe their teachers not only care *about* them but also care *for* them (Caines, 2021). Put differently, while students must know that their teachers are partners in helping them achieve their academic goals, they must also know that care does not need to be earned and is not dependent on grades, scores, or outcomes. This balance is key to avoiding enacting saviorism and helping students build and maintain a healthy relationship through feedback.

Taken together, what's demanded, then, is thinking about what responsive feedback practices might look like, feel like, and sound like, practices that honor and value students' identities, celebrate students' ways of knowing, and help them achieve academic success without compromising who they are. This will require a full interrogation of beliefs around feedback, teacher control, and the role that standards—and other instruments of standardization—play in the feedback process, and it will require use of restorative practice to address the dented relationships that students have with traditional feedback models. Rather than a perfunctory action, teachers must believe that feedback can be part of a caring relationship between students and teachers and between students themselves.

### **Restoring Student's Relationship to Feedback**

Most teachers have had the experience of sitting at their kitchen table, often after a long day, writing

comments on student work, and, sadly, many teachers have had the experience of watching a student throw those comments in the wastebasket on their way out the door after getting their work back. While this can feel personal and result in our hurt feelings, it's also an invitation to think about why our feedback is receiving short shrift. Building a responsive approach to feedback—an approach that restores students' relationship to feedback—requires addressing issues of alienation and mystification.

While the feedback a teacher gives at their kitchen table might be robust and of excellent quality, the student, is not present, making it difficult for the comments to be situated in their needs and goals. This kind of traditional written feedback is univocal, meaning, even if it is well-intentioned and of high quality, it still may not directly align with the student needs, purposes, or goals, causing feelings of alienation (Hyland, 1998). Because of the teacher's power in the univocal conversation, especially if a grade is involved, students may shift away from purpose-driven writing toward compliance-driven writing, parroting the teacher's ways of seeing. In the story about Jeff's student that started this piece, the student became alienated from her work because her lived experience was minimized in favor of the teacher's perceptions of her topic. In other words, the feedback she received—which was more mandate than suggestion—compelled her to fundamentally change her meaning and message, forcing her to abandon part of her identity and experience in order to achieve quantitative success. This problem is sometimes referred to as appropriation, and it happens often to writers with marginalized identities, including multilingual writers (Tardy, 2006). A less appropriating approach—one that invited the writer in rather than pushed her away—would have been beneficial in allowing her to retain control and ownership of her writing and maintain her sense of identity in the process. Instead, the lack of generative discussion between writer and teacher about purpose and audience served to dent a student's relationship with feedback. Given what is known about somatic reactions to negative feedback, the student pushing back from feedback, figuratively and physically, is no surprise.



This does not mean that directive feedback should be universally avoided, however. Denny et al. (2018) studied how working class students responded to writing center feedback, and these students wanted directive feedback that could help them fit into the university's academic culture and feel a sense of belonging. When students feel alienated from the culture and the expectations of the institution and the teacher representing the institution, it becomes difficult for them to know what to make of and what to do with feedback (Bowl, 2003). Overly non-directive approaches can leave some groups of students feeling unseen and undersupported, heightening a sense of alienation and leaving them to navigate and decode feedback and expectations alone (Robinson et al., 2013). Directive feedback does not signify a return to the kitchen table commentary or other univocal feedback approaches that reinscript teacher power and control. Instead, responsive directive feedback might involve showing students models and working through text features or helping them apply feedback for direct improvement of certain focus areas, making it more usable and less abstract, or even using some whole-class feedback approaches on certain focus areas to ensure students feel less singled out.

Directive feedback approaches can also reduce a sense of mystification that students at the margins often feel about academic expectations. Denny et al. (2018) showed that working class students who were mystified by feedback felt like the system was rigged against them or like they were playing a game where everyone knew the rules but them. Making feedback accessible is critical, but it is important to be critical and careful in the approach. Often, demystification means the uncritical imposition and adoption of dominant writing standards and values. This can manifest itself in designing extensive rubrics that outline an array of learning progressions, but, again, this maintains the problem of using more language to justify beliefs and standards around language (Inoue, 2021). Even the best designed rubrics struggle to sufficiently capture student writing holistically, serving to foreclose student agency (Stommel, 2018). Many of the writers in Denny et al.'s (2018) study reported feeling behind or lacking, but, in a quest for access, it is imperative that those providing

feedback help students recognize, celebrate, and multiply the funds of knowledge they bring with them rather than seeing them as empty vessels, a hallmark of savior mentality. Recognizing, celebrating, and multiplying funds of knowledge demands that those giving feedback must have an understanding of the identities held by the person receiving the feedback in order for it to be effective.

The tie that binds here is that feedback is deeply relational. Without a humanizing classroom space where caring *for* is at least as important as caring *about* (Caines, 2021), then even feedback that checks all of the “best practice” boxes will be minimally effective. Being at the kitchen table in isolation or relying on rubrics, no matter how clear, cannot substitute for relational efforts, or what Blackwelder (2021) calls “the actual work” (p. 42); grades and feedback are not substitutes for relationships. Put differently, students are less likely to meaningfully use feedback from someone they don't trust. The students interviewed in the Denny et al. (2018) piece frequently talked about the importance of mentors who cared deeply about them and opened doors that permitted their success. These stories were juxtaposed against writing center tutors with whom they did not have deep relationships. Students didn't remember much about their sessions, and what they did remember was perfunctory. Far from being a rebuke of peer feedback, these students' experiences help us understand the bed-rock importance of community and trust.

An inconvenient truth is that each student will likely need something different from us, and that can be difficult to manage. There are ever-increasing calls for efficiency in feedback given decreasing budgets and increasing class sizes, but this sometimes leads teachers down the path of giving students what they think they need rather than what they say they need. In systems that privilege efficiency as the primary core value, feedback systems—computer programs, gradebooks, detailed rubrics—are often used to defend grading positions rather than to help students get what they need (Stommel, 2018; Kohn, 2021). This gives us an off-ramp of doing the hard-yet-necessary work of building and establishing relational trust.

## **Bolstering Feedback Skills to Guide Revision**

Peers and teachers can provide effective feedback throughout many stages of the learning process, and by making revision an integral part of the conversation between students, their peers and their teachers, feedback can be better understood, and students can make more informed decisions about how to proceed as they revise. As Brookhart (2017) observes: “When we give feedback to students, our work is only half done. We need to design regular opportunities for students to reflect on our feedback, coaching them in how to do so, to ensure such reflection becomes a durable habit ” (as cited in Housiaux & Dickson, 2022, p. 31). Thus, feedback cannot simply be delivered to students in a static, one-way manner. It helps if teachers consider feedback comments as an invitation to a conversation.

As stated before, relationships are at the heart of the feedback process. If students feel as though the teacher is a distant entity who simply dictates content and procedures, it is possible that their self-efficacy will remain low. By signifying the relationships in the classroom as central to student growth, it is clear that these relationships, based upon mutuality, can also promote the positive emotions necessary for the growth of self-efficacy and student autonomy. Trust-based classroom relationships pave the way for dialogic feedback where comments can be delivered in “real time” (Wolsey, 2008, p. 312). Furthermore, if feedback should be negotiated (Giberson, 2002), students are more apt to do so face-to-face; conferences support the value of interactive feedback (Wolsey, 2008). Therefore, if provided the time to talk about their work, it is the hope that students will engage more in the feedback provided and will subsequently plan to revise.

To prioritize the benefits of trusting classroom relationships, teachers need to take the time to build a community within the classroom in order to ensure positive collaborations. Jones & Kahn (2018) argue “Students who have a sense of belonging and purpose, who can work well with [others] to solve problems, who can plan and set goals, and who can persevere through

challenges [...] are more likely to maximize their opportunities and reach their full potential” (Jones & Kahn, 2018, p. 16). While strategies for establishing a positive classroom environment are often tackled early in the school year, it is never too late to start. Honoring and affirming students’ identities means acknowledging and promoting the many aspects of students’ selves that comprise their identity, such as their “name, race, culture, language, family, interests, appearance, personality, gender, and more” (Safir, 2016). Establishing classroom norms and giving students various roles and responsibilities reinforce the idea that each student contributes to the learning of all. To this end, teachers must ensure equity of voice, and they cannot undervalue the motivating nature of praise. These efforts produce a fertile ground for students’ consideration and use of feedback comments and encourage their engagement in the revision process.

What, then, does revision entail? Simply put, revision looks at the piece as a whole and employs the learning goals of the assignment. Revision requires decision-making, flexibility, and time. Students need to critically think about what needs to be revised rather than simply changing aspects of an assignment because someone told them to do so (Muldoon, 2009). Revision demands reflection and reaction (Hayes, 2000), but revision is most often done alone, leaving students with questions about how to proceed. Involving students in the feedback process can result in “positive change in [students’] revision” (Martin, 2011, p. 26) practices. It takes students out of the role of passive receivers and provides them with decision-making control over their learning.

In order to revise comprehensively, students need to be able to conceptualize and discuss potential changes. Such discussions can be synchronous or asynchronous, as either method provides students with an opportunity to think about and engage in the revision process. These conversations can also provide students with an opportunity to defend or explain decisions they’ve made in the first stages of their assignment. Thus, while feedback is an integral part of the learning process, challenging students to think about teacher

and/or peer comments are crucial to their skill development. Ultimately, it takes a self-regulated learner (Schiaffino, 2007) to first seek constructive criticism and then use it.

### **Time Constraints**

Feedback takes time and effort, and in current contexts where teachers often feel overwhelmed and overworked, providing detailed feedback may feel more like time wasted than time well spent. As noted previously, some teachers have watched students discard drafts and final projects, feedback and all, as they leave the classroom. Yet, the issue is not about the feedback given; instead, the problem is centered on helping students use the feedback to improve their work. Additionally, teachers might feel as though the dialogic feedback described above will be too time consuming. There is so much content to cover, how could teachers devote entire class periods to conferencing? Finally, there is only one teacher and sometimes over one hundred students. The time constraints are an obvious barrier, but there are ways to mitigate them.

In her decades of work devoted to improving students' writing, Harris (1986) encourages even "the briefest of conversations" with students (p.18). In other words, teachers do not need to necessarily set aside several days for student conferencing but can instead engage in quick check-ins. This allows students to ask questions, voice concerns, or seek direction, and it reinforces the relational aspect of feedback. In addition, it is important to note that teachers do not need to conference with all of the students in the class every time. A teacher might, for example, post a schedule to conference with students who would like additional feedback on their work. Or, teachers might conference with groups of students with similar needs by allocating specified class time for areas of focus (i.e., building and organizing evidence in support of a claim). Teachers might also consider using delayed grading where they provide targeted feedback to students based on their self-selected focus areas and the student must reflect on and use the feedback received before receiving a grade. This helps center the feedback rather than the grade, making it more likely that students will use the feedback to revise.

Another time-honoring technique is the mini-lesson. Gallagher and Kittle (2019) write about whole group mini-lessons geared toward common issues in writing, such as the synthesis of quotes or generating audience interest in the introductory paragraph. Whole group mini-lessons are targeted and short, and they allow teachers to introduce a concept, model it, and provide exemplars. Students can practice and share their work. Essentially, mini-lessons remove the need to make the same comments on several students' assignments, and they provide an opportunity for whole class growth. This also serves to reduce the feeling of students feeling singled out when receiving feedback.

Teachers sometimes find themselves offering abundant feedback, but teachers can minimize the amount of feedback provided by simply eliciting student choice. When teachers establish protocols such as two stars and a wish or praise-question-suggestion (as shown in this video from EL Education: [vimeo.com/84899365](https://vimeo.com/84899365)) they situate student autonomy in the feedback process. Teachers who have participated in the National Writing Project's summer institutes might also be familiar with bless-press-address protocol. Students seeking positive reinforcement will ask the feedback provider to "bless" the work; students might also ask a teacher or peer to "address" a specific area of concern or to "press" by offering comprehensive feedback on the assignment as a whole. It is prudent to remember that teachers are not editing our students' papers for publication, but that their feedback is in the service of helping them grow by trying again. Feedback should not necessarily be designed to help students achieve "perfection"—whatever that might mean—but, instead, it should be in the service of helping them live into their own growth goals through dialogic processes that are humanizing and affirming.

Finally, while it does take time to foster effective peer feedback routines, the end result is well worth the effort. The next section provides several strategies teachers can employ to establish and maintain strong peer feedback practices, a true unsung hero, that have several benefits beyond the improvement of student work.



## Building Peer Feedback Skills

While students benefit from regular teacher feedback, the teacher does not have to be the sole provider of feedback during the learning process. According to Pintrich and Zusho, students can reap the benefits of feedback from their peers, which in turn can have a positive impact on self-regulation as it relates to learning, motivation, and behavior (as cited in Feldman, 2018).

There are several key advantages to engaging in regular peer feedback. Notably, the practice of peer feedback can provide social interaction that can aid in learning (Chappuis, 2015). Other advantages have been noted in the research by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), who found that students can sometimes explain things better to their peers because it is delivered in language they understand. Often, students can provide insight and strategies for overcoming roadblocks or challenges because they are engaged in the same task (Chappuis, 2015). Additionally, when students engage in this process, they are deepening their own understanding of quality as they formulate and deliver descriptive feedback to a peer; their peers can be more receptive to the feedback because they are not viewed in an evaluative role that would deliver a grade or judgment, like a teacher (Chappuis, 2015). Consistent peer feedback routines can replace the traditional top-down power dynamic with a democratized accountable learning environment that can empower students to be self-directed, take ownership, and build their self-efficacy.

The practice of peer feedback must be cultivated in tandem with creating a safe and supportive classroom environment. Effective peer feedback as a modality for learning does not happen overnight; it must be modeled, and regularly practiced. As such, when making peer feedback part of the classroom routine, teachers must be mindful that the benefits come when peer feedback is regular and ongoing. Teachers may encounter students that are reluctant to give or receive feedback, or that may be especially sensitive to critique, which is often seen in adolescent learners (Somerville, 2013). These feelings can be calmed when teachers commit to creating an environment that values student identity and feedback as part of the learning process.

To develop peer feedback skills, teachers can create opportunities to build community so that students can connect in engaging and authentic ways outside of core content. Students can connect through the sharing of stories, lived experiences, and artifacts related to students' funds of knowledge, fostering connections and relationships through vulnerable and humanizing conversations (Shepard, 2021). Setting aside time to allow students to provide low-stakes practice to engage in peer feedback conversations, such as a 3-Minute Conference (link to "View Only" Google Document for copying: [bit.ly/3oJgZvy](https://bit.ly/3oJgZvy)), allows students to focus on the quality and specificity of feedback they are giving and receiving (Chappuis, 2015). Initially, students may not be equipped with the language to coach their peers. As a scaffold when starting the peer feedback process, question starters that are co-constructed and modeled can be a powerful support. The co-constructed question starters could be composed on an anchor chart and displayed in the classroom to assist students initiating a peer feedback conversation. Suggestions for specific and actionable questions are listed below:

1. Can you share with me what you think the strongest part of your work was?
2. I could really connect with \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Might you consider \_\_\_\_\_? What else might you add to make your point stronger?
4. Your choice in \_\_\_\_\_ is strong because \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When you said/wrote "\_\_\_\_\_" it strengthened your argument/thinking because \_\_\_\_\_.
6. I noticed you \_\_\_\_\_, and I think you are on the right track. What else might you consider adding/changing/omitting \_\_\_\_\_?

Additionally, assigning feedback partners, another strategy to support a safe and supportive learning environment, can alleviate the stress some students might experience if they are partnered with peers randomly. Maintaining this partnership for several days or weeks

will allow students to build rapport and trust, and students may be less reluctant to provide constructive feedback to a peer. Lastly, encouraging students to self-select the feedback they would like to receive not only honors their agency to make important authorial choices in their own writing, but also allows peers to focus on giving feedback that is most meaningful to the writer and their work.

When engaging in the peer feedback process, teachers will need to ensure the learning intentions and success criteria are clear to students as they craft descriptive feedback; for example, teachers and students can co-construct single-point rubrics or checklists that feature student-friendly language. While we have noted some problems with rubrics, namely with the confusing language used to delineate gradations and progressions, we also know that rubrics are part of many teachers' feedback practice. Depending on their design, single-point rubrics can be a way to mitigate the stream of boxes featured on most traditional rubrics while still providing a frame for students and teachers to work in. Moreover, co-creating a single-point rubric with students also serves to lift student voice, as they can express their needs and articulate their goals, avoiding the top-down, evaluative model of feedback that has been shown to be less effective and, in some cases, harmful. Using the co-constructed, single-point rubric, students can then apply the success criteria to a piece of work in a low-stakes environment using previous students' work as a model. This strategy takes away the fear of being evaluated so students can focus on the process and practice of giving and receiving quality feedback. Teachers should leverage peer feedback as another layer of support to not only build students' ability to work collaboratively, but independently.

### **Enacting Humanizing Practices**

As previously noted, central to both social constructivist and self-efficacy theories are strong classroom relationships that support "active and collaborative learning" (Laird et al., 2008, p. 91) and encourage the development of students' self-beliefs that aid in their continued academic success. Housiaux and Dickson (2022) urge teachers to "measure [their] care for

students not in terms of the volume of feedback [they] provide, but in terms of how much time and guidance [they] give students to reflect on it" (p. 34). Students' ability to anticipate, respond to, reflect upon, apply, and sometimes negotiate feedback can form a dialogue, either synchronous or asynchronous, that improves students' self-identification as learners, and this correlates directly to their performance and persistence (Zimmerman, 2000; Pajares, 2003).

To nurture a feedback process that honors the identities of both teachers and students, we recommend the following practices:

1. Commit to building and sustaining strong teacher-student and student-student relationships that reduce top-heavy feedback practices, thereby flattening dehumanizing hierarchies and vastly asymmetrical power dynamics
2. Give students clear instructional tasks that are appropriately timed and directly related to their learning
3. Build compelling, authentic reasons to read, write, and discuss with embedded opportunities for teacher and peer feedback
4. Practice and model specificity, while avoiding evaluative or judgmental comments which can impact student motivation (Butler & Nisan, 1986)
5. Appropriately time such responses, as students need to be open to and prepared for comments that are meant to assist in their development
6. Provide time and opportunities for students to use feedback comments
7. Build students' self-efficacy because it contributes to their academic success and social-emotional development
8. Practice metacognition by providing students with ample opportunities to pause and reflect on their writing strengths and areas of desired growth

### **Closing Thoughts**

Writing this article asked us to think deeply about our own past practice, and our thoughts tended to drift to

our setbacks, not our successes, despite growing significantly over our careers. Feedback is given by humans to other humans, so the reality is that we will always find ourselves in “beta,” learning more and growing our practice. Growth—not perfection—is the goal; giving ourselves the grace to continue getting better is critical to our success as practitioners. As we grow our feedback practices, let’s push to eschew internalizing the issuing of verdicts and rankings in favor of the hard-scrabble, deep-down work of resisting notions of failure and always finding the lesson (brown, 2017). As teachers, we never set out to give ineffective feedback or do less than our best, but there were times where we lacked information, resources, or experience to make the best possible choices in our contexts. There is no shame in what we lacked, but pride in that we continued knowing better to do better.

The relational elements of feedback—including our relationships with ourselves and our own professional growth—are paramount. Teachers are not machines, and neither are students; teachers have the power to provide responsive feedback to students’ social-emotional needs and academic goals, to create healthy, humanizing spaces for students to give feedback to one another, and to ensure that our words honor, celebrate, and amplify student funds of knowledge and identity. Machines can’t nurture, sustain, uplift, or amplify; that’s a teacher’s work with students in their care.

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