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Students’ Perceptions of Formative Feedback in Primary Schools English Classrooms

by

Yeung Jaclyn

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Education in Language Education (Primary English) at The University of Hong Kong
13th May, 2013
Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted to this University or any other institutions in application for admission to a degree, diploma or other qualifications

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate how students respond to and interact with formative feedback provided in primary school English classrooms. Students’ perceptions and their experiences with feedback were documented using focus group interviews and questionnaires. The study found that students generally perceive formative feedback to be very useful to their learning and would actively use the feedback to make improvements in subsequent tasks. However, the data illustrated that the most popular type of feedback used in English classrooms were summative feedback. Students expressed that they often perceived those feedback to be “vague” or “meaningless”, and could not utilize summative feedback to support their learning. This might suggest that if students were to be active participants in the learning and teaching cycle, then there would be a need for us, as teachers, to improve feedback practices so as to cater to students’ needs.
Introduction

Assessment practices serve a variety of functions in teaching and learning. It provides information that informs future teaching and guides teachers to modify classroom pedagogy (Rea-Dickins & Gardner, 2000, p.230). Assessment practice plays a vital role in learning as well. It measures students’ learning progress and has the potential to enhance learning (Black & Wiliam, 2003, p.623). All assessment practices affect classroom pedagogy and student learning (Gipps, 1994, p.31). The Hong Kong education system has been advocating assessment for learning and the implementation of formative assessment into the primary school context. In the curriculum guide published in 2004, guidance and directions have been suggested to teachers on ways to provide quality feedback as part of the movement towards assessment for learning, for instance, phrases similar to “provide feedback on how to improve performances”, have appeared multiple times in the document (CDC, 2004, P.191). However, little research has been done on how students perceive or understand the feedback provided to them. As Black (2003, p.15) has already pointed out, “if the information is not actually used in altering the gap, then there is no feedback”. Therefore, it is imperative for us to investigate how students perceive the feedback provided to them so as to allow us to refine the feedback practices in classrooms, thus enhancing the power of feedback.

The aim of this study is to investigate primary school students’ perceptions of formative feedback received on English homework using focus group interviews and questionnaires. By looking at students’ experiences with the feedback received, I hope to gain some insights into how students interact with formative feedback, as well as to suggest implications for future practice. Given that formative feedback is being advocated in the Hong Kong education curriculum (CDC, 2004, P.191), it would be of high educational value to look into these issues and develop ways to enhance the effectiveness of formative feedback.

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1 The “gap” described here is the discrepancy between “the desired goal and his or her present state (of knowledge and/or understanding and/or skill)” (Black, 2003, p.14).
The main significance of this study would be its ability to document students’ interactions with the feedback received as well as how they perceive the feedback provided to them. Although quite a number of research have been conducted on how formative feedback could impact on learning (e.g.: Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Crook, 1988, etc), very few studies have explored students’ perceptions of the feedback received. In order for feedback to be effective and contribute to students’ learning, it is important for students to value the feedback received as well as to actively use them (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.82; Perrenoud, 1998, p.86). Therefore, this study aims to voyage into this domain and generate insights on the area of formative feedback.
Literature Review

“In another words part of the feedback given to pupils in class is like so many bottles thrown out to sea. No one can be sure that the message they contain will one day find a receiver.”

– Parrenoud (1998, p.87)

Impact of formative feedback on student learning

Formative feedback plays a vital role in the learning cycle and contributes directly to the progress of learning (Black, 1998a, p.25; Gipps, 1994, p.129; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.389; Weaver, 2006, p.379). It indicates to both the learner and the teacher the discrepancy between the intended learning outcomes and the current level of work produced (Gipps, 1994, p.7). By providing formative feedback, teachers act as “reflective agents” and offer constructive and meaningful feedback to support students to develop and grow in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Pollard, 1999, p.251). In a research conducted by Black (2003, p.43-48) where he worked with in-service teachers on implementing formative feedback, he explained that feedback with specific comments that identify strengths and weaknesses could motivate learning and support students to work towards the target goals because these feedback, i.e. formative feedback, are informative and could communicate to students about the actual learning itself and suggests ways to move forward and improve. This parallels with Sadler (1989, as cited in Tunstall & Gips, 1996, p.389) who emphasized the importance of expressing the “idea of excellence” through formative feedback. As suggested by Black and Wiliam (1998a, p.15), formative assessment can raise students’ standard. In a study investigating the impact of formative feedback on students’ writing skills, overall grade development was observed (Wingate, 2010, p.524). Formative feedback can also enhance students’ motivation and self-efficacy (Crook, 1988, p.463). When students are informed about their learning progress and provided with comprehensive strategies on how to progress towards the ideal goals, they would be motivated to continue with the task. A positive attitude towards learning could be cultivated as well (Crook, 1988, p.465). In the feedback typology developed by Tunstall & Gipps (1996, p.398-400), they also supported the use of descriptive feedback with the following features: a) feedback that specifies aspects of desirable attainment, b) feedback that values students’ work and acknowledges that it is “work in progress”, and c) feedback that suggests possible ways to
improve. These types of descriptive feedback could contribute to students’ learning progress and empower them with the autonomy to become autonomous and self-regulated learners, which promotes an equal power relationship between the teacher and the learner as well as constructs a positive learning environment (Tunstall & Gipps, 1996, p.403). It also celebrates the essence of the constructivist-model of learning and engages students in a reflective discussion of their learning experiences (Askew & Lodge, 2000, p.10).

Students’ perceptions of formative feedback

As there were very few studies conducted in the primary school or secondary school contexts, the research included below were carried out at higher education. However, the studies mentioned still have a high degree of relevance to this study. The justification is mainly two-fold: first, both university students and primary school students would spend a vast amount of time engaging in classroom evaluations, thus classroom evaluations occupy a significant proportion of the teaching and learning cycle in both contexts (Crooks, 1988, p.438); second, as students’ educational experiences can often have an extensive impact on their views towards learning, it is of prime importance for us to understand how students interact with the feedback provided to them and to derive ways to provide more effective feedback (Crooks, 1988, p.460). Therefore, while we should be cautious when drawing generalizations from some of the research included below, it is worthwhile to explore them and examine recently published literature related to the topic.

Drawing on individual interviews with teachers and first year undergraduate students in the United States, as well as analysis on the comments provided by the teachers on students’ writings, Treglia (2008, p.129) found that students generally perceive comments that acknowledge their effort and suggest strategies for improvements to be the most helpful for their learning. Feedback that focuses on skill development was also perceived to be comparatively more useful. Another study in The Open University in the United Kingdom reviewed feedback provided on written assignments and interviewed university students to find out how usable they thought the comments were (Walker, 2009). It was found that students generally perceive detailed feedback (e.g.: those with clear explanation of why a certain answer is wrong or correct, etc) to be the most usable (Walker, 2009, p.72). The literature mentioned above also provided some
corroboration with Cowie’s study (2005, p.139, 142) who found that pupils often use informational feedback as a guide for future learning.

Another qualitative study conducted by Weaver (2006, p.388) which draws on data collected from questionnaires and group discussions among undergraduate students from the UK suggested that students often find constructive comments helpful, as these could support them to make improvements in subsequent tasks. Also, students generally expressed that they would not use feedback that were perceived to be “general” or “vague” as these could not contribute to future improvements (Weaver, 2006, p.390).

Although these studies have documented positive responses towards formative feedback, some studies conducted in Hong Kong which focused on assessment practices have identified some contextual constraints that might hinder the use of formative feedback in primary school classrooms. In a study conducted by Berry (2011), she explained that students’, teachers’, and parents’ conceptualization of scores as “measurements” of the learning progress tend to contribute to the dominance of summative feedback in classrooms; Kennedy, Chan, Fok and Yu (2008) also agreed that the exam-oriented learning culture in Hong Kong as well as students’ learning orientations might explain the strong preferences towards summative assessment and an emphasis on learning outcomes, as well as a resistance to the implementation of formative feedback.

To sum up, while Western students generally perceive formative feedback to be useful for their learning and could support them to make improvement in subsequent tasks, there still exists a possibility that students in Hong Kong might not share the same opinions due to the contextual factors mentioned above. Therefore, it would be valuable to investigate how students actually perceive the formative feedback provided to them.

**Importance of studying students’ perceptions of formative feedback**

Although formative feedback has been proven to have numerous merits, feedback would contribute to student learning only when students understand the feedback provided (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008, p.264). The fundamental conditions for this to occur would be for students to recognize and value teachers’ goals and criteria for success, as well as to use the feedback to
modify their thought processes (Cowie, 2005, p.138; Perrenoud, 1998, p.86). This aligns with Andrade (2010), and Black and Wiliam (1998b, p.142) who also stressed the importance for students to recognize the main function of feedback, which is to enhance the quality of learning. When feedback is integrated into the teaching and learning cycle, learning could be enhanced and the function of feedback could be fulfilled (Andrade, 2010; Black and Wiliam, 1998b, p.142; Hattie and Gan, 2011). In another words, learning could be facilitated by feedback when students understand the feedback and are willing to work towards the goal (Butler and Winne, 1995, p.257; Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.89). Therefore, feedback would be effective only if students interact with the feedback received and actively use it to affect their learning (Perrenoud, 1998, p.86). This resonates with Hattie & Timperley (2007, p.82) who stressed the importance for incorporating feedback into the learning context. Finding out whether the feedback provided is responsive to students need is also crucial for teachers in order to support their learning (Gamlem & Smith, 2013, p.3). Maclellan (2001) also conducted a study which investigated students’ perceptions of the functions of feedback. She stressed the importance for students to recognize feedback as a tool to support learning rather than a mere judgment of their performances. 

These studies have explicitly illustrated the importance of understanding students’ perceptions of feedback. Therefore, this research aims to unfold students’ perceptions of the formative feedback received as well as their conceptualizations of effective feedback, hence, to reduce the gap between the feedback provided and the feedback demanded so as to facilitate the learning process.

Addressing the Research Gap

In spite of the plethora of studies related to formative feedback, very few of them relate to the Hong Kong educational context (Carless, 2006). The majority of the research available also focused on higher education (e.g.: Duncan, 2007; Hendry, Bromberger, & Armstrong, 2011; Orsmond & Merry, 2011; Walker, 2009, etc) instead of the primary school setting. Therefore, primary school students’ perceptions and interactions with feedback still remain under-researched areas (Cowie, 2005, p.138). Moreover, little has been done to investigate students’ reactions towards the feedback received (Gamlem & Smith, 2013, p.150; King, Schrod &
Weisel., 2009, p.236; Reay & Wiliam, 1999, p.344). It is essential for us to note that students are in fact active participants in the assessment process and that they are immensely affected by it. Therefore, this research aims to document primary school students’ perceptions of the feedback received as well as their conceptualizations of formative feedback. By conducting this research, I hope to empower Hong Kong primary school students with the voice to articulate their perceptions and experiences with feedback, as students’ agencies to be active participants in the assessment cycle have often been deprived (Pong & Chow, 2002, p.147). I also hope that this research will cast light on future development of feedback practices in primary school English classrooms, as well as contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding around the issue, thus facilitating student learning. As suggested by Walker (2009, p.76), in order to help teachers develop the skills to give more constructive feedback that contribute to student learning, it is essential to raise their awareness towards the powerful impact of feedback as well as the need to utilize feedback to enhance more effective teaching and learning. Through this research, I hope to provide insight into the topic of formative feedback.
**Methodology**

In this research, the two major research questions are:

1) How do primary school students perceive the formative feedback provided? Do students claim to use the feedback provided by teachers?

2) What are some of the criteria that students use when evaluating the feedback provided by the teacher?

**Participants**

The data in this research came from 75 students (37 boys and 38 girls) selected from six primary schools. The main criterion for the selection of schools was to include schools that were of different bandings. This was done to construct a more comprehensive and representative picture of the issue. Students involved in this research were also of mixed ability. This could equip the findings with some degree of generalizability rather than limiting it to specific groups of students, e.g.: high achieving students or low achieving students etc. Primary 3 to primary 5 students were invited to participate in the research. They were identified as the target participants because they would have more experience with schooling and feedback practices than primary 1 or 2 students. Primary 6 students were not chosen because they were preparing for assessments related to the admission to secondary schools. The emphasis placed on those assessments might interfere with students’ perceptions of formative feedback and could cause bias in the results.

**Data Collection**

In this research, two data collection methods were included: semi-structured focus group interviews and questionnaires. Method triangulation was manipulated in this research so as to yield a more in-depth understanding of the issue (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.233). By manipulating the two forms of data collection strategies, I would be able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students’ perceptions as I could gather information from different aspects and identify intersections across data (Silverman, 1997, p.98). By incorporating
multiple data collection strategies, I could also ensure that the results generated were not biased but were well-informed by the diverse and distinct data collection methods in the research.

Procedures

The data collection process mainly took place in two phases:

- **January 2013 – early February 2013**
  Semi-structured focus group interviews were administered during this period among five schools to obtain a basic understanding of students’ perceptions of the feedback received.

- **Mid February 2013 – mid April 2013**
  The data collection procedures during this period were all conducted in the researcher’s teaching practicum school. Two data collection strategies were used: focus group interviews and questionnaires. During the first two weeks, i.e.: prior to the introduction of formative feedback to the students, the researcher first conducted focus group interviews with identified students to obtain basic information about the school’s common forms of feedback as well as students’ perceptions towards those feedback. The researcher would give formative feedback on students’ writing tasks starting from week three to week five. From week six to eight, the researcher carried out follow-up focus group interviews as well as questionnaires to collect students’ opinions and experiences on the formative feedback introduced.

Focus group interview

The first data collection method was semi-structured focus group interviews. These were conducted in both phrase one and two of the data collection process. This method was chosen to provide the capacity for students to engage in discussions and express their ideas and opinions about the feedback received. As the researcher was also the facilitator, this data collection strategy also offered the flexibility for the researcher to ask questions spontaneously and follow up on new insights emerged during the interviews which could be central to the research (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.273). The focus group interviews were conducted in Cantonese so as to put the students at ease and support them to speak freely about the issue (Lee, 2011b, p.382). 24 focus groups were carried out among the six schools. These involved 75 students (37 boys and
The focus group interviews mainly focused on the following topics: students’ prior experiences with feedback, students’ understanding of the functions of feedback and their beliefs and attitudes about the formative feedback introduced. Each group consisted of about 3 to 5 students and the focus group interviews lasted for around twenty to twenty five minutes. Throughout the focus group interviews, the researcher acted as a facilitator so as to facilitate the discussion as well as to prevent any individual student from dominating the discussion (McKay, 2006, p.52). (see Appendix A for the questions for focus group interviews)

Questionnaire

Questionnaires were deliberately included in the second phase of the data collection stage in an attempt to reduce the Hawthorne effect. As the focus group interviews would involve the researcher, it was possible that students would produce socially desirable response due to the presence of the researcher. For example, students might be aware that they were provided with a novel type of feedback by the researcher during the teaching practice and hence displayed more interest and preference towards that type of feedback, thus producing biased responses (Borg & Gall, 1983, p.215). Therefore, as the questions in this questionnaire involved students’ perceptions towards the formative feedback provided by the researcher, it would be necessary for the students to remain anonymous so as to yield more honest feedback. In this research, 17 students have completed the questionnaires (8 boys and 9 girls). The questionnaires were in English but the researcher has explained each item in Cantonese prior to giving out the questionnaires to students. Students could also ask for a verbal translation or elaboration when necessary. (see appendix B for a sample of the questionnaire)

Data Analysis

All semi-structured focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim in Cantonese by the researcher. The transcriptions were then translated to English by the researcher as well. The researcher reviewed all transcriptions and identified similarities, patterns, recurrence of topics and themes among the transcripts (see Appendix D for a sample transcription). Thematic frameworks were constructed and the transcripts were coded accordingly. The data were reviewed multiple times to ensure that important insights and opinions were captured and
addressed. The questionnaires were analyzed by generating the percentages for each statement. For each statement, three response options were included: agree, neutral, and disagree. The results from the questionnaire were compared with the findings in focus group interviews to check if any similarities or discrepancies were present.

Limitations

There were three limitations in this study. First, there might be some “interaction-effect” among students during the focus group interviews. While students may feel more relaxed and at ease when they were around their peers during the interviews, there might be a possibility which students would produce socially desirable responses or express very similar ideas with their peers under peer-pressure. This might cause a skew in the data.

Second, as the researcher was the facilitator in the focus group interview, observer-expectancy effect and Hawthorne effect might be present. Students might produce socially desired responses due to the presence of the researcher, e.g.: saying that they really like formative feedback, expressing strong preference towards formative feedback, etc. Although questionnaires were included to minimize the impact of the observer-expectancy effect and Hawthorne effect, this might still be a possible limitation in this study.

The small sample size would be another limitation. Having only 75 participants in this study means that the validity and generalizability of this study are relatively low. It would be appropriate to enlarge the scale size so as to yield more valid data.
**Findings**

The findings address five themes related to the topic: A) the forms of feedback received by students; B) students’ perceptions of the functions of formative feedback; C) students’ perceptions of the usefulness of the formative feedback received; D) students’ interaction with formative feedback; and E) the characteristics of effective feedback suggested by students. For each theme, I will be including some examples of students’ responses so as to provide a more realistic picture of students’ perceptions towards the feedback received. Percentages will also be included in the themes so as to offer an accurate portrayal of the findings².

A. **Forms of feedback received by students**

The first theme concerned the common types of feedback received by students in primary school English classrooms. Grades (75%, N=56) seemed to be the most prevalent type of feedback given by English teachers. Teachers gave grades to students on worksheets, writing tasks, reading comprehension exercises, and other exercise booklets. Comments were also regularly given out to provide feedback to students. Two types of comments were identified: evaluative comments (47%, N=35), e.g.: “very good”, “keep it up”, “good job”, “excellent”, etc; and diagnostic comments (57%, N=43) (ie.: comments specifying the strengths and weaknesses in students’ work, as well as offering suggestions on ways to make improvements on subsequent tasks). Other forms of feedback include stamps (41%, N=31), stickers (19%, N=14), and scores (24%, N = 18). 8% (N=6) of students have also received verbal feedback which the teacher would comment on students’ work during the lesson.

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² In the themes below, the sum of the percentages may exceed 100% as students may offer more than one answer. For example, students may have experienced more than one type of feedback practices; students may also suggest more than one feature for effective feedback, etc.
B. Students’ perceptions of the functions of formative feedback

Students were asked about the functions of formative feedback: Why does the teacher give us feedback? What does the teacher want us to do? What is the use of feedback? Four main functions were identified: 1) to support students to obtain better examination results, 2) to indicate to students their current level of work, 3) to provide suggestions for improvements and 4) to act as a form of encouragement or praises. Some examples of students’ responses include:

B1. Supporting students to obtain better examination results

H: Then you can get a better result in exams. (a primary 5 student)

Z: Because it helps us improve and get better results. (a primary 3 student)

17% (N=13) of students perceived the main function of formative feedback as a tool to help them get better results in tests or examinations. These responses indicated that feedback was understood by students as a guide for revision so they could utilize the comments when they prepare for tests or examinations. Students also seemed to think that a causal relationship was present between feedback and the need to get better examination results, i.e.: the teacher gives us feedback because he/she wants us to do better in the exams.

B2. As an indication of the current standard of work

A: Grades represent my ability. (a primary 3 student)

M: The teacher can use these things to let us know our level of English because if the teacher gives us an A+, it means that our level of English is really good. (a primary 3 student)

13% (N=10) of students understood feedback as a reflection of their ability and their current level of work. Some students also suggested the presence of a “hidden meaning” behind each grade (see quotations below). When prompted by the researched on how they could derive the “hidden meanings”, students shared that they would often tell each other their own grades. Through this type of discussion, students were able to generalize the “hidden meanings” for each grade.
V: A+ is the best, A is average and A- means you need to improve next time and then B…
    B+ means… (a primary 3 student)

V: The hand-writing is poor and B means you really have some mistakes and B- is just
    simply…
A: Your hand-writing is bad and you have made mistakes.
V: Your hand-writing is bad and you have made mistakes, and then C…
A: You got all the answers wrong. (two primary 3 students)

B3. Provide suggestions for improvement

C: Because you can know your own mistakes and find out ways to work on it. (a primary 5
    student)

N: Comments can let me know how the teacher wants us to improve. For example, sometimes
    we might use the same word again and again. With comments, we know how to
    improve, for example, by reading more books and learning more new vocabulary. (a
    primary 5 student)

23% (N=17) of students commented that the feedback provided could often offer suggestions on
ways to improve and make progress in learning. The teacher offered useful suggestions and
supported students with ways to move beyond their current level of work.

B4. As a form of encouragement or praise

Below are other students’ (35%, N=26) responses that illustrated another function of feedback –
to offer encouragement and praise:

    K: Only for encouragement. (a primary 5 student)

    L: The stickers only let us know we’ve done a great job, it’s like a kind of praise. (a primary
    3 student)

    S: Yes, because it can give us some encouragement and motivates us to work harder. (a
    primary 3 student)
Student perceived feedback as a form of encouragement and praise from the teacher. This could be due to the fact that some teachers often use stickers and stamps to accompany the main form of feedback (i.e. the grade / score, or comments). Under those circumstances, students often found no relevance between the stickers or stamps and the homework. This may explain why students perceive feedback as a form of encouragement:

M: Those things (stickers and stamps)... I think the main purpose is to encourage us but I can’t really use those in my learning because they’re unrelated to the corrections we have to do. (a primary 3 student)
C. Students’ perceptions of the usefulness of the formative feedback received

Among the 43 students who have received formative feedback, the majority of them (67%, N=29) has expressed positive attitudes towards formative feedback and expressed that they would use the comments to support their learning. Students have identified four strengths for formative feedback: 1) to point out the weaknesses in their work; 2) to locate the strengths in their work; 3) to suggest possible strategies to improve; and 4) to act as a form of encouragement to them. Below are some direct quotations from students:

K: Em… correct the mistake so that I won’t make the same mistake again. With the teacher’s comments….. it tells me what my strengths and weaknesses are. I can enhance my strengths and improve my weaknesses. (a primary 4 student)

A: For example, if you know you have made some mistakes with grammar, then you will… open the English book to study… to study really hard so as to avoid making the same mistake again. (a primary 3 student)

D: Usually, it will be in a paragraph form, um… about how you can improve… (a primary 5 student)

S: Because it can encourage us. (a primary 5 student)

W: The comments represent a kind of… a kind of blessing for you, some encouragement to you. (a primary 5 student)
D. Students’ interaction with formative feedback

Students were asked “Do you use the comments provided by your teacher to support your learning?”. Among the 43 students who have received formative feedback, 93% (N=40) of them expressed that they would actively use the feedback to enhance their learning.

A: If I get a C, I will copy the comments on a piece of paper so I will refer to the paper every week when I do my revision and see which area did I know the least. (a primary 4 student)

M: Sometimes the comments might give you some advice on how to do your revision, so that’s better. (a primary 3 student)

Some students (7%, N=3) stated that they were unable to access the meaning of the formative feedback provided to them as the comments were too linguistically-demanding. Below is an example of a student’s response:

C: I will ask my classmates or even the teacher…if my classmates don’t understand either… Sometimes the teacher will not answer my questions. Next lesson we may have to do a task booklet. The teacher will give us the task booklet and do it together. If I ask the teacher the meaning of a certain word in the next lesson, the teacher will ask me “why didn’t you ask me in the previous lesson?”. (a primary 3 student)

The students shared that incidents like this happened quite frequently in her school due to the time pressure and tight schedule of the teacher. The feedback provided by the teacher was incomprehensible. Students were not able to access meaning in the feedback, thus defeating the purpose. In this case, students were not able to understand the feedback, so interaction with the feedback was impossible and feedback would not be utilized to promote more effective learning.
In the second phase of data collection process, 17 students were selected at random to complete a questionnaire which investigates their perceptions of formative feedback.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The comments provided by my teacher for my writing tasks are useful because they let me know about the strengths and weaknesses of my work.</td>
<td>88.2% (15/17)</td>
<td>5.9% (1/17)</td>
<td>5.9% (1/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The comments provided by my teacher were useful because they let me know how to improve next time.</td>
<td>82.4% (14/17)</td>
<td>17.6% (3/17)</td>
<td>0% (0/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The comments provided by my teacher were not useful because they did not let me know about my ranking in the class.</td>
<td>11.8% (2/17)</td>
<td>35.3% (6/17)</td>
<td>52.9% (9/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I don’t enjoy reading my teacher’s comments because they are difficult to understand.</td>
<td>11.8% (2/17)</td>
<td>11.8% (2/17)</td>
<td>76.5% (13/17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If I could choose, I would prefer to have…</td>
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<td>Just a grade / score (12%, N=2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Just comments (24%, N=4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both (65%, N=11)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because __________________________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The results showed that the majority of the students thought that the comments provided were useful for their learning. The feedback could also inform them of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as ways to move forward. These features align with some principles of formative assessment. Overall, students have expressed very positive experiences with formative feedback:

“They can let me know about the strengths and weaknesses of my work.”

“I think comments can help me improve.”
“With the clear explanation from my teacher, I can pretty much guess my own score by looking at the comments.”

(see Appendix C for all students’ responses on item 5)

Although students had positive experiences with the comments provided to them and also perceived the comments to be useful to their learning, 65% (N=11) of students prefer to get both a grade or score together with comments.

E. Characteristic of effective feedback suggested by students

The last theme that emerged from the interview data concerned the characteristics of useful feedbacks: What should a good feedback include? Three main characteristics were identified: 1) giving detailed comments which identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as suggesting ways to move forward (75%, N=56); 2) providing a score to indicate current standard (13%, N=10); 3) incorporating encouragement or praise in the feedback (9%, N=7).

75% (N=56) of students suggested that a good feedback should identify their strengths and weaknesses. One of the main reasons for understanding their strengths and weaknesses was for them to improve on their learning. Students also explained that the teacher should include in the feedback some suggestions on ways to improve:

N: The pros and cons. They’re the most important. (a primary 5 student)

E: Give comments on other homework so that you know your strengths and weaknesses for all the homework. (a primary 3 student)

K: Your strengths and weaknesses. (a primary 5 student)

T: Um, I think the teacher should tell us the places we’ve done well and the areas we did not do well and also the ways to make improvements. (a primary 5 student)

E: For questions that I don’t know, it would be better if the teacher could give me some instructions on how to do that question. (a primary 5 student)

D: Give you some suggestions. (a primary 5 student)
13% (N=10) of students stated that a grade or a score should also be provided in a feedback so as to indicate to them their current standard of work.

C: Because getting grades like ABC can let you know how good your work is or how bad it is.

9% (N=7) students also shared that the element of encouragement and praise are also crucial in feedback as it motivated them to keep trying:

Z: Em… include, some comments for us, and how can we make improvements, and also, maybe a bit of encouragement. (a primary 4 student)

V: Because that gives us a lot of encouragement and confidence to keep improving.
Discussion

This research aims to provide insights into the topic of feedback. The findings illustrated how students respond to the feedback received as well as their perceptions of formative feedback provided by the teacher.

The majority of the students commented that they found the information provided in the feedback useful for their learning. The formative feedback explicitly addressed the strengths and weaknesses in their work, and offered possible solutions to the identified problems. They also commented that by referring to the suggestions provided by the teacher, they could avoid making the same mistakes again, hence lead to improvements in subsequent tasks. Moreover, with the detailed feedback, students could easily make improvements in other tasks as they would have an idea of what to do next and what is expected of them. Comments could also act as a reference point or guide when students do their revisions. These findings demonstrate that students’ perceptions of the usefulness of formative feedback align with the findings from Western research on students’ perceptions of the usefulness of formative feedback (e.g.: Treglia, 2008; Walker, 2009, etc).

While some previous research argued that students from holistic-oriented cultures (e.g.: Asians countries with Confucian-heritage) tend to prefer implicit feedback (De Luque and Sommer, 2000, p.835; Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008, p.204; Pong & Chow, 2002, p.140), the findings in this study seem to suggest the opposite. The majority of the students expressed positive preferences towards the formative feedback provided by the teacher and also valued the information included in those feedback. They also shared that the formative feedback provided could help them make improvements in subsequent tasks. However, one issue worth discussing would be the motive behind such preference for formative feedback. For example, are students craving for formative feedback because they wanted to enhance their results? Are students going to use the feedback provided to support the actual learning process, to alter their cognitive process, and to develop their learning skills? Or are students demanding formative feedback for the sake of achieving better grades, obtaining high scores, and performing better in examinations and tests? If students prefer formative feedback just for the sake of getting better academic results (i.e.: a performance-oriented approach), then are we still adhering to the rationales of
formative feedback, i.e.: to support the learning process? Although the data collected could not answer these questions, I feel that it is well justified to address these possibilities.

Another finding which arises from this study was students’ perceived criteria for effective feedback. Students expressed that good feedback should pin-point strengths and weaknesses in their work and offer suggestions to make improvements. They also stated that good feedback should not only judge the outcome. The criteria suggested also align with some principles of formative feedback, e.g.: provide data on actual level of work, focusing on what needs to be done (Black, 2003, p.14, 46), consisting information about the progress and ways to proceed (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.89), etc. Therefore, these findings reflected that students seem to have a fairly good grasp of the elements that make a good feedback. The formative feedback provided by the teachers also seemed to align to and match students’ perceptions of the characteristics of effective feedback.

Although the findings indicated a strong student preference towards detailed and informative feedback, but evaluative feedback continues to be the most prevalent type of feedback provided in English classrooms instead. What causes this mismatch between students’ preferences and the reality? One major force that might possibly contribute to this phenomenon could be the heavy emphasis on public examinations as well as the highly selective nature of the Hong Kong education system (Pong & Chow, 2002, p.142). The focus on academic performance poses additional resistance for change as any modifications in assessment practices might also come with a greater risk. When other stakeholders, e.g.: parents, school principals, prefer evaluative feedback, it could be challenging for teachers to implement change in feedback practices (Lee, 2011a, p.9; Berry, 2011, p.208). Nonetheless, other practical constraints, e.g.: the heavy workloads and tight schedules, etc, would certainly reduce the time available for teachers to provide detailed feedback to students.

Finally, students also seemed to prefer receiving both a grade and comments as feedback. While this form of feedback could both address the summative and formative functions of feedback, i.e. to provide students with a “judgment” of their performance on the task as well as constructive feedback that identify their strengths and weaknesses, and suggesting ways to improve, there are still certain drawbacks of giving this type of feedback. Hong Kong students’ over-emphasis on
academic *achievement* has been well-documented (Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008, p.204; Pong & Chow, 2002, p.140). When a teacher gives a combination of a score (or a grade) and comments, it is likely that students will just glance at the score (or grade) and ignore the rest of the comments provided to them. Therefore, giving a combination of both summative and formative feedback might not be the best option as the summative component often dominates students’ attention and distracts them from accessing and using the formative feedback to enhance their learning. This issue has been identified by Lee (2011b, p.391) who recommended teachers to withhold the scores until the formative feedback has been utilized.
Implications for Future Practice

Arising from my reflections from the findings, I am going to suggest two implications for teachers to enhance the impact of formative feedback in primary school English classrooms. First, teacher could try to incorporate dialogic feedback sessions at the beginning of the lessons, e.g.: use 10 minutes to address the common strengths and weakness in students’ work. From the findings, it was shown that the linguistic demand presented in the comments could impede students’ interaction with the feedback received. This pedagogic strategy enables the teacher to provide interactive feedback that addresses the merits and drawbacks in students’ work, as well as offer opportunities for students to raise questions and negotiate meaning with the teacher during the dialogic feedback process, which resonated with Black & Wiliam(1998b, p.143) who stated that discussions can facilitate students to increase knowledge and understanding; teachers can also respond and orient students’ thinking through dialogues.

While this strategy could support the teacher in giving detailed and constructive feedback to students, there still exist some limitations. Students may feel inhibited to raise questions or interact with the teacher due to the fear of being labeled as “stupid” or “dumb”, the issue of “personal risk” to respond publicly or failing in front of other classmates might also arise (Cowie, 2005, p.147; Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.100). This would impede students to engage in the dialogic interaction with teacher, which could defeat the purpose of the whole feedback session. One possible solution to this challenge would be to construct a supportive classroom atmosphere and establish relationships of respect and trust. These could promote teacher-student interaction during verbal feedback sessions (Cowie, 2005, p.148), enhancing the effectiveness of these dialogic feedback sessions.

The second implication would be to raise students’ awareness to their responsibility of actively using feedback to enhance learning. Students commonly think that it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide feedback to them on their learning progress, on the expected goals, and suggest ways to move forward (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.99). However, as mentioned in the previous sections (see Literature Review, p.8), it is always fundamental for students to recognize their own responsibility to interact with feedback. Teachers could illustrate to learners how to utilize the feedback to support their work. For example, the teacher could use think-aloud
strategies to demonstrate to students the way he / she uses feedback to reflect on his/her work. This could facilitate students to gradually develop an understanding of the functions of feedback as well as to develop the habit of using feedback constructively to support their learning.
Conclusion

This study aims to add insights to the topic of formative feedback, and specifically, how students perceive the feedback provided to them. From the data collected, it was demonstrated that the majority of the students had positive experiences with formative feedback as well as showed preference towards this type of feedback compared to the evaluative feedback they normally received. Students were also able to articulate accurately how formative feedback could contribute to their learning, e.g.: identify strengths and weaknesses, suggest strategies to improve, etc. More importantly, students have also shared explicitly how they would use feedback to support their learning, which fulfills the function of formative feedback.

Although the findings showed a strong preference towards formative feedback, the reason behind such a preference has not been identified in the study. As mentioned in previous sections (see Literature Review, p.7; Discussion, p.23-24), the exam-oriented culture in Hong Kong has created some resistance towards formative feedback. The reasons that elicited such shift towards formative feedback would be an appropriate area for future research.

Finally, from the insights arising from this study, I have recognized the importance of giving detailed feedback to students. In fact, I was pleasantly surprised by how students were able to use the information from the comments to support their learning and make improvements. Therefore, when I become an English teacher this year, I am determined to implement formative feedback in my own practice. As a novice teacher, I could first provide formative feedback once a month on students’ writing tasks. Primary school students in Hong Kong normally have around three pieces of writing tasks each semester. Given the practical constraints mentioned before, e.g.: time pressure, heavy workload, administrative work assigned, etc, giving formative feedback to students for each writing task (i.e.: once per month) seemed to be a practical start for a novice teacher. When students have grasped the functions of feedback and the routine, and after I have get used to the school culture and work schedule, I can start introducing formative feedback on other homework, e.g.: grammar exercises, reading comprehension exercises, journals, etc. I am grateful that I have conducted this study as it has tremendously deepened my understanding on
this topic. I also hope that this dissertation will be a constant reminder to myself when I embark on the journal to becoming an English teacher.
References:


Curriculum Development Council (2004). *English Language Key Learning Area: English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1-6)*, Hong Kong: Government Logistics Department.


Appendix A
Questions for focus group interviews.

1. Does the teacher give you any feedback when you do your homework, tests, exams etc?
   What type of feedback does your teacher give you?
   ➔ To get a brief understanding of what students conceptualize as “feedback”.
   ➔ To get an idea of the feedback students usually receive.

2. Why do you think the teacher gives you feedback? What is it for?
   ➔ To check if students have any understandings of the functions of feedback.
   ➔ To check what students think are the functions of feedback.

3. After receiving the feedback, what will you do? Do you use the feedback?
   ➔ To investigate how students interact with the feedback.
   ➔ Again, this could complement with the previous question and get a more in-depth understanding of how students understand and “use” feedback.

4. What information does the feedback tell you?
   ➔ To understand how students process the feedback and conceptualize feedback.
### Appendices B:

A sample of the questionnaire which was used in phase 2 of the data collection process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The comments provided by my teacher for my writing tasks are useful because they let me know about the strengths and weaknesses of my work.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The comments provided by my teacher were useful because they let me know how to improve next time.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The comments provided by my teacher were not useful because they did not let me know about my ranking in the class.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I don’t enjoy reading my teacher’s comments because they are difficult to understand.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If I could choose, I would prefer to have…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Just a grade / score ☐ Just comments ☐ Both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because __________________________________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix C:

Students’ responses on item 5 of the questionnaire. Responses in Cantonese were translated to English by the researcher:

Students who prefer to have just a grade / score:

我不知道評語有什麼用處。

(I don’t know what are comments for.)

Students who prefer to have comments only:

因為老師解釋非常清潔，所以有評語也就可以知道分數。

(With the clear explanation from my teacher, I can pretty much guess my own score by looking at the comments.)

我覺得評語可以令我更加進步。

(I think comments can help me improve).

我們知道名次也沒有用。我們需要知道自己的強處和弱處才會有進步。

(It’s useless just to know your ranking. We need to know our strengths and weaknesses in order to improve.)

對自己已經有幫助。

(It’s already helpful.)

They can let me know about the strengths and weaknesses of my work.
Students who prefer to have both comments and a grade / score:

They are all important, I wouldn’t know how to improve if either type of the feedback is missing.

Sometimes I need to know what I need to work on. I can refer to the comments when I want to know the things I need to work on. The score can also let my parents know what score did I get.

I can tell if my score is good or not and I can know what I have to work on.

A score and comments I think are very important.

Comments and score can tell me good or not good.

I can show my family my score and my learning progress.

I can get some comments and the score.

I can know my strengths and weaknesses as well as my score.

I can know my strengths and weaknesses. With scores, I can know if I have made any improvements.
分數能使我與同學比較，增加動力；評語能使我知文章的好與弱處，加以改良。

*(Having a score enables me to compare with my classmates, which motivates me; comments allow me to know my strengths and weaknesses, and so I can improve.)*

沒有了分數和評語，我就不知道自己還有很大的改善空間。

*(Without a score and comments, I will never know how much room for improvement there is.)*
Appendix D:

24 focus group interviews were conducted. Each interview was transcribed verbatim in Cantonese and then translated to English. One set of sample transcription will be included for illustrative purpose.

K = Student K
E = Student E
H = Student H
J = Jaclyn (the Interviewer)

Date: 1\textsuperscript{st} February, 2013

Transcribed and translated by Jaclyn Yeung

J: 好。咁我想問下呢，我地兒家講嘅會大部份都係英文科啦。我想問下平時你地做左功課之後，老師會俾 D 咸回饋你地嘅？

SS: …

J: 知唔知咩係回饋呀？

K: 即係好似禮物啲 D 呀？

J: 嗯。即係比如分數啦，ABC 啦，俾一個分數啦，評語嘅，印仔嘅，即係呢幾類都係唔同嘅回饋囉。咁老師係功課上面會俾 D 咸你地嘅？

K: ABC 啦通常都係。

J: ABC，重有冇呀？

K: 重有少少評語，但係好似簡單嘅評語。

J: 嗯。

K: 即係好似 ‘GOOD’ 咸有待改善。

J: 嗯。
K: 或者 D 字要寫靚 D 呀下次，咁靚囉。

J: 嗯。你地呢？

E: 默書如果儲夠印仔可以換禮物。

J: 嗯，咁默書就俾俾咩嫁？

K: 分數。

J: 分數啲。嗯，你呢？

H: 其實我覺得平時啲 D 工作紙都係，UM…都係俾佢咁 D ABC 嫁。

J: 俾系 ABC，係。

H: 啲 D 評語就係好似，一個字嫁啫。

J: 嗯，一個字，即係例如咩呀？

H: 多數，‘GOOD’呀，‘WELL DONE” 啲啲 D 嘢。

J: 嗯。咁我想問下呢，老師除左比如工作紙呀，或者平時做比如 GE 啲啲 D 之外呢，會唔會有其他類型嘅功課嫁，你地英文？

K: 我地有時會有作文呀，寫日記呀，EH…

J: 咁老師係作文同日記會俾咩嘅回饋你地嫁？

H: 個…啲個日記啲度你會俾你講番，即係好溝通俾嫁，會寫啲 D 野俾你。

J: 嗯。咁如果係作文呢？

H: 作文就會俾 ABC 你，同埋俾分數同埋評語。

J: ABC，分數同評語。嗯。

H: 倆呀。

J: 咁我想問下呢，比如老師俾好多唔同類型嘅啲地，例如 ABC 呀，分數同印仔啲，其實老師俾呢 D 野我地做咩嫁？點解老師要俾呢 D 野呢？

K: 俾我地知道自己嘅等級係邊度，得我地下次可以再升去邊度。
J: 嗯，咁 JEFF 呢？有冇諗過老師點解俾啲 D 我地呀？

E: 覺得分數同埋評語最重要。

J: 點解嘅？

E: 因為冇嘅 D 先可以進步。

J: 有嘅 D 先可以進步，點解你覺得冇嘅 D 先可以進步呀？

E: 有評語就可以進步，見到分數如果太差又有個動力會繼續努力。

J: 嗯，咁評語呢點樣可以幫到你去進步呀，學習上面？

E: EH…比如話 GOOD，咁係係話自己做得好。

J: 嗯，好。咁 KA HEI 呢？點解你覺得老師要俾呢一 D 唔同類型嘅回饋我地嘅？

H: 因為呢，其實我覺得呢佢地俾呢 D 報語我地呢，其實係想，同我地講番…我地嘅，UM…嘅 D 成績呀。

J: 嗯，成績。

H: 咁可以係屋企溫習啲陣呢可以溫番你錯誤嘅 D 呢野。

J: 嗯。

H: 咁係考试就可以搵到 D 好成績。

J: 嗯，係係考試嘅陣時就可以做得好 D？

H: 嗯。

J: 好啦，咁我想問下呢，EH…老師俾嘅評語呢，嘅 D 報語係係話嘅？

K: 就會話你篇文章，好似邊方面，但係呢就例如話你嘅內容唔夠詳盡，有少少 TENSE 錯，咁…係係會話佢你聽有邊方面唔好，邊方面好，你下次要進步 D 呢。

J: 嗯。咁你地呢？你地嘅評語係唔係都係咁嘅？

H: 嗯嘅。差唔多係啦。

E: 有時作文太少都唔知點解佢會俾呢個分數。
J: 點樣話?

E: 有時評語太少都唔知點解有呢個分數。

J: 嗯, 咁你會唔會有時收到老師嘅評語好少呀?

E: [點頭] 嗯。

J: 咁你收到之後你覺得點樣呀? 你有咩感覺呀?

E: 唔知點解有啲個分數。

J: 咁可唔可以令到你下次改進到呀? 如果得好少評語呢?

E: 多 D 好 D。

J: 多 D 好 D, 點解多 D 好 D 呀?

E: 因為多 D 會知道自己邊方面唔好。

J: 邊方面唔好。嗯, 咁我想問下你地啦, 你地 ARM ARM 咦話呢, 老師嘅評語, 比如唔會話你咩地方係優點, 唔咩地方係缺點嘅, 你覺得呢一 D 咁樣類型嘅評語呢, 幫唔助到你係學習上面進步或者改呀?

SS: [點頭]。

K: 幫到。

J: 幫到, 全部都覺得幫到, 點解呀?

K: 因為呢假如你知道自己邊 D 唔好, 邊 D 好, 就可以互補不足。溫番 D 唔好嘅。

J: 係。

K: 唔呢就可以, 即係你唔好嘅 D 可以進步, 咁你下次再做即係考試測驗做差唔多類型嘅野就可以好 D 囉。

J: 嗯。好咁你地呢, 覺得老師咁樣類型嘅評語幫唔助到你地呀?

SS: [點頭]。

J: 幫到呀, 點解呀?

H: 因為可以 EM...我地可以...溫番嘅時可以睇番老師寫俾我地嘅評語, 之後可以改番。
J: 嗯。明白，啲 JEFF 呢？你覺得老師講埋你優點同缺點嘅評語好唔好呀？

E: 好。

J: 好，點解呀？

E: 因為知道自己好唔好嘛。

J: 知道自己好唔好，咁知道左之後可以點呀我地？

E: 如果溫書嗰陣見到好嘅部份就可以溫少 D。

J: 即係幫你溫書溫得快 D。

E: [點頭]。

J: 吵，咁我又想問下啦，你地收到 ABC 同印仔，你地通常功課係唔係都係得 ABC 同印仔嘅？

K: 有時冇印仔嫁，淨係得 ABC。

J: 即係 né 敦得 ABC 好多時？

K: 好。

J: 咁係唔係都係周記同埋作文先會有評語嫁？

K: 好。

H: 唔 D 都係多數嘅。

J: 吵，係唔係係 JEFF？你地係唔係同一班嫁？

SS: 好呀。

J: 好啦，咁我想問下啦，當你收到 né 敦得 ABC 嘅時候呢，你會點樣用 ABC？或者 ABC，就啲 ABC 嘅，幫唔好到你學習呀？

K: 都唔係好幫到。

J: 唛話？

K: 都唔係好幫到。

J: 嗯，點解？
K: 因為你淨係得 ABC, 你唔知邊方面好, 邊方面唔好嫁嗎。

J: 嗯。

K: 即係佢下面 D 題目佢淨係會打個交叉, 跟住就括住個答案, 一係就直頭寫埋個答案出黎。

J: 嗯。

K: 唔有咩唔好呢?

J: 唔有咩唔好呢?

K: 唔好呢就係因為假若我地做錯左, 我地唔知點解錯嫁嗎, 老師直頭俾個答案俾我地, 我地就唔會再谂, 就抄左落去嫁啦。

J: 嗯。咁有咩唔好呢?

K: 改到正但係我地都係唔識嫁嗎, 淨係知道個答案抄落去囉。


H: 冇咩囉。

J: 冇咩囉。點解呀?

H: 囉因為 UM…其實我覺得係分數, 或者 ABC 加評語係好 D。

J: 嗯, 點解呢?

H: 我地可以改...改番之前, 補償番之前錯嘅 D 野。

J: 嗯。咁 JEFF 呢? 唔你覺得如果老師係俾 ABC 你, 幫唔幫到你學習呀? 或者唔唔話到任何野俾你聽呀?

E: 我通常都會睇幾多個剔埋埋幾多個交叉嘅。

J: 嗯。點解嘅?

E: 唔會知道自己嘅進度。

J: 唔會知道進度之後幫唔幫到你啲學習呀? 其實, 淨係俾 ABC 你?

E: 最好加埋評語囉。
J: 嗯，點解加埋評語好 D 呀你覺得？

E: 因為可能老師都有 D 意見想俾同學囉。

J: 嗯，咁點解老師嘅意見你會覺得係重要嘅?即係對你嘅學習？

E: 因為可以幫到我地考試囉。

J: 幫到你考試。嗯...咁我想問下啦，其實你收到 ABC 之後呢，你會點樣做呀?你會唔會去用黎去幫你考試呀？即係係係 ABC 嗎。

K: 假如係係 ABC 呢冇俾 D 咁評語我地呢就唔係太好。

J: 嗯。

K: 因為唔我地淨係知道有 ABC，啲我地唔知自己有咩錯嫁嘅，個分數冇寫評語，唔知有咩錯嫁嘅。

J: 嗯。

K: 即係係係最好寫埋個評語話俾我地聽邊 D 好，邊 D 唔好囉。

J: 嗯。咁其實 ABC 話左 D 唔俾你地聽嫁?或者係唔代表任何野嫁？

K: 都冇代表嫁。

E: 例如老師會寫例如 A+呀，A-咁嫁。

J: 唔 A-, A+ 呢 D 呢，或者 A 啦，唔好代表任何野呀?

K: 唔好代表。

J: 唔代表。嗯，點解係唔代表任何野呀?

K: 因為個 ABC 只係一個好簡單嘅分數係係 JAH 嗎，個分數唔重要，最緊要係係你識呀嗎。

J: 嗯。

K: 假如你係個 A+, 但係係唔識係，抄其他係嘅案嘅，唔係用嫁。

J: 好啦，咁我想問下啦，例如老師係 JOURNAL 啦，或者 WRITING 嘅 D 價左 D COMMENTS 你係，即係係你地 ARM ARM 講係唔係係係一種 COMMENTS 啦，啲 EH，你會點樣利用呢一 DCOMMENTS 去俾到自己嘅學習呀?
K: 我會睇下邊方面，自己邊方面弱邊方面係強，咁我就會訓練番我弱嘅邊嘅。

J: 嗯，點樣可以 EH，訓練到…EH…點解你覺得呢 D COMMENTS 可以幫到你做呢樣野？

K: 因為 D COMMENTS 係老師嘅專業意見黎嫁嘅，咁佢俾得我們九成都係得嘅，咁我就就同番老師話佢我地知唔好嘅 D 就再學多 D，即係再做完幾本練習咗，學番好佢，咁就係可以係考試嘅陣時識番嘅。

J: 嗯，咁你地呢？比如，JEFF 呢？KA HEI 呢？你地覺得老師俾嘅 DCOMMENTS，即係有優點同缺點呢一種型嘅 COMMENTS 呢，幫唔到你學習呀？

H: 幫到嘅。

J: 點解幫到呀 KA HEI？

H: 因為例如你係 D TENSE 入面錯，咁你就可以主力溫番 D TENSE。

J: 好。咁 JEFF 呢？老師…比如你收左老師呢一篇 DCOMMENTS 之後你會點利用佢去幫你自己學習呀？

E: EH…我會睇番嘅 D 評語，跟住就知道自己好唔好，跟住…如果唔好嘅話就繼續努力嘅做練習。

J: 嗯。咁其實你知唔好啲啦，其實 ABC 都講到你聽嫁，係唔係呀？講唔到講到呀你覺得？

E: 講唔到。

J: 講唔到呀？點解呀？

E: 因為 ABC 有咩規定。

J: 有咩規定…即係…點樣？

E: 有時可能錯兩條又係 A…錯一條又…錯兩條又係 A-，錯一條又係 A-。

J: 唔 DCOMMENTS 點解你呢一方面好過 ABC 呀？

E: 因為 DCOMMENTS 會…準確 D 講到出黎。

J: 嗯，唔 KA HEI 呢？ARM ARM 唔記得左問你，你覺得 EH…你會點樣利用呢一 D 唔 DCOMMENTS 去幫助你學習進步呀？
H: 對我黎講都係做番啲 D 練...做多...做番多 D 啬 D 練習囉。即係老師同你講你係邊方面弱，主力就係練習，主力就係做番啲 D...啲個...例如 TENSE 啬 D 啬。

J: 咁其實呢，你地覺得老師俾啲嘅回饋你地啦，係唔係大部份都係 ABC 呢？

K: 通常都係。

J: 咁你地覺得其實呢一 D 對你地有咩幫助呢？

K: 有的幫助。

J: 有的幫助。點解呀？

K: 因為 ABC 只不過係一個分數嘅話，分數唔代表你邊 D 好，邊 D 唔好呀。即係假如俾一個 B 佢，你淨係知自己唔好，唔知邊度唔好邊度好唔係嘅，咁假如俾個評語你就知道具係你呢 PART 唔好，呢 PART 好，咁咪可以溫啲好啲嘅嘅 PART 喔。

J: 唔，你地呢？你地覺得呢？點解...你覺得係唔家老師俾 ABC 你地幫唔係咁嘅呢？

E: 唔係好幫到。

J: 點解呀？

E: 因為最...最重要都係啲 D 評語，知道自己邊 D 唔好。

J: 唔，即係知道自己缺點，係唔係呀你意思？

E: [點頭]。

J: 唔。咁你覺得呢 KA HEI？

H: 我覺得呢其實都唔係大幫助嘅。

J: 點解呢？

H: 我覺得就係啲 D 評語就係會準確 D 嫁。

J: 準確 D，點樣準確 D，係邊一方面呀？

H: 系。

J: 係邊一方面準確 D 呢？
H: EH…佢可以同番你個嘅 D TENSE，例如嘅 D 你係錯嘅，咁你可以向老師問番或者係屋企同 DADDY 媽咪…問番 DADDY 媽咪 UM…去叫佢地教自己。

J: 嗯！即係你地唔係係話 COMMENTS 嘅好處係係因為佢地可以好清楚話俾你聽你嘅缺點，邊度係優點呀？

J: 好啦，咁我想問下啦。你地就覺得老師係家大部份係佢地嘅 ABC 都未必咁有幫助啦，除左 WRITING 同 JOURNAL 可以幫到你地。因為有 COMMENTS 係唔係? 嗯……咁我想問下啦。你覺得老師應該點樣，或者佢 D 啥嘅回饋你地呢，其實最有效呢對你地嘅學習？

K: 其實評語係最好嘅回饋黎嘅。

J: 點解呀？

K: 因為你…禮物嘅 D…佢係貼紙玩具咁都係你玩一兩次就唔玩就拋開佢嫁嘅，但係個評語係永遠記住佢嫁嘅。

J: 你覺得評語入面應該有 D 啥嘅? 應該寫 D 啥係評語入面？

K: 自己嘅優點同埋缺點。

J: 自己嘅優點…點解你覺得呢兩樣野咁重要呢？

K: 優點，你可以知道自己邊方面強，邊方面弱呀嗎，假若我呢方面弱嘅，我就努力培訓呢一方面。

J: 好，咁你地呢? 你地覺得老師應該俾 D 啥回饋你地，即係應該係回饋入面應該包含 D 啥可以令你地更加進步呀？

H: 優點埋缺點。

J: 點解你覺得呢兩樣野咁重要呀？

H: 因為你如果係你嘅缺點嘅話呢，你可以主力溫番佢邊…係嘅 D 野。

J: 嗯。咁跟住呢？

H: 如果係佢優點嘅邊嘅你就可以…可以溫少 D，但係又唔可以太少。

J: 好。咁 JEFF 呢？你覺得老師嘅回饋應該包括 D 啥嘅內容呀？

E: 即係可能我唔識嘅，佢會寫番點樣先可以做…做嘅題嘅。
J: 點解你覺得呢樣咁重要呢？點解你覺得老師嘅指引係咁重要呢？而唔係直接抄個答案俾你重要呢？

E: 如果真係唔識嘅話，而考試又真係出呢個題目嘅話呢，咁我就唔識呀嘅。

J: 唔，咁即係你主要覺得老師俾你嘅回饋係可以幫到你考試多啲嘅？你覺得幫到你考試多啲定係長遠嘅學習多啲呀？

E: 長遠嘅學習。

J: 唔。點解嘅？

E: 因為可能之後六年班，佢又會問番五年班問嘅野囉。

J: 唔，你地覺得呢？其實老師提供俾你嘅回饋主要係貢獻緊咩啲呀？

K: 我地嘅學業囉。

J: 你地嘅學業。點解嘅？

K: 因為佢假如俾你印仔我地，咁佢吸落個簿度，就換禮物嫁 JEH，咁你唔會知道自己邊啲好，邊啲唔好，即係得個禮物冇用嫁嘅，要自己知道…要知道自己嘅好處同壞處囉。

J: 唔，咁你覺得呢？其實老師點解最主要俾你嘅回饋我地呀？

H: EM…可以改番之前嘅錯誤。

J: 唔，咁改之前嘅錯誤係對你邊一方面有幫助呀？

H: 之後嘅學習嘅程度。

J: 之後…嗯…好。好啦，我今日就同你傾住嘅先嘅啦。就真係唔該煩你地！
J: In this interview, we will mainly focus on the English subject. I would like to know what type of feedback would you receive from your English teacher after you have completed your homework?

SS: ..... 

J: Do you know what ‘feedback’ means?

K: Is it something like ‘presents’?

J: Well, for example, marks, grades like ABC, a score, comments, stamps, etc. These are different types of feedback, so what type of feedback would your teacher give you on your homework?

K: Grades like ABC, usually.

J: Grades, what else?

K: Maybe some comments, but the comments are really simple.

J: Right.

K: Something like ‘good’ or ‘needs improvement’.

J: Okay.

K: Or asking me to improve my hand-writing.

J: Okay, what about you?

E: For dictations, we can get a present if we have collected a number of stickers.

J: Okay, but for dictations, what feedback would you get?

K: A score.

J: A score, okay, what about you?

H: Actually, I think we usually get grades like ABC for worksheets.

J: Okay, so grades like ABC.

H: Comments are usually one-word comments.
J: One-word comments, like what?

H: Usually we get ‘good’, ‘excellent’, etc.

J: Okay, I would like to know, apart from worksheets or GE homework, what other types of homework do you have for the English subject?

K: Sometimes we have compositions, journals, um…

J: So for compositions and journals, what type of feedback would your teacher give you?

H: For journals, the feedback we get are like…the teacher will ‘communicate’ with us through giving us feedback.

J: Okay, what about compositions?

H: For compositions, the teacher will give you a grade like ABC, and also a score together with some comments.

J: Grades like ABC, score, and comments, okay.

H: Yes.

J: So I would like to ask you, your teachers give us a lot of different feedback, for example, grades like ABC, a score, some stamps, etc, so what are these feedback for? Why do teachers have to give us feedback?

K: To let us know what grade we can get and so that we can get a higher grade next time.

J: I see, what about Jeff? Have you thought about why do teachers give us feedback?

E: I think comments and scores are the most important feedback.

J: Why?

E: It’s because you will improve only if you have those feedback.

J: Alright, so why do you think so?

E: You can make improvements if you have comments. If you get a bad score, you will have the motivation to keep working.

J: Okay, so how can comments help you make progress in your learning?

E: EH… for example, if the comment says ‘good’, that means you are doing quite well.
J: Right, so what about Ka Hei? Why do you think teachers have to give us different types of feedback?

H: It’s because… I think the reason why teachers give us comments is to…tell us….our…um…our results.

J: Okay, results.

H: So that when you revise at home, you can review your mistakes.

J: Right.

H: Then you can get a better result in exams.

J: I see, so you can do better in the examination?

H: Yes.

J: Okay, so I would like to know, when teachers give you comments, what are the comments like?

K: The teacher will tell you the strengths of your composition, but will also say things like, “your content is not detailed enough, there are some mistakes in the tenses”, so the teacher will tell you your weaknesses and your strengths, and the areas you need to work on.

J: I see, what about you? Do you get similar comments?

H: Yes, similar comments.

E: Sometimes, I have no idea why I would get a bad score if the composition is too short.

J: What do you mean?

E: Sometimes if the comments are too short, I have no idea why I got the specific score.

J: Ok, so have you ever got comments that are too short?

E: [nod] Yes.

J: So how do you feel after you get those comments? How do you feel?

E: I have no idea why I got that score.

J: So does it help you to make progress in your learning? If the comments are very short?

E: It would be better if the comments are longer.

J: Better if the comments are longer…why?
E: Because you can know your weaknesses.

J: Your weaknesses…Okay, I would like to know then, as you have just mentioned how the comments provided by your teachers can tell you about your own strengths and weaknesses. Do you think these types of comments can help you to make progress in your learning?

SS: [nod].

K: Yes, that’s helpful.

J: Okay, so all of you think that it’s helpful, why?

K: Because if you know your weaknesses and strengths, you can make plans to revise and focus on your weaknesses.

J: Alright.

K: So that you can make improvements on your weaknesses and perform better in examinations or tests that focus on similar areas.

J: Okay, what about you? Do you think those comments are helpful?

SS: [nod].

J: Helpful? Why?

H: Because, um…we can…when we do our revision, we can refer to the comments and make changes.

J: I see, what about Jeff? Do you think it’s helpful that the teacher tells you your weaknesses and strengths?

E: Yes.

J: Why?

E: Because then, you can know if you’re good or not.

J: Know if you’re good or not… what can we do after we’ve found out if we’re good or not?

E: So if you know your strengths, you can spend less time on those areas when you do your revision.

J: So it helps you to study more efficiently.

E: [nod].
J: Okay, so I would like to know, as you have received grades like ABC and some stamps, is that what you would get most of the time?

K: Sometimes we only get the grades but not any stamps.

J: You mean you usually get the grades only?

K: Yes.

J: Is that you would only get comments for journals and compositions?

K: Yes.

H: Yes, mainly.

J: Is that the same for you Jeff? Are you in the same class?

SS: Yes.

J: Great. SO I would like to know, when you only get the grades like ABC, how would you use those grades? Or for grades like ABC, only the grades, does it help you to learn?

K: Not really helpful.

J: Sorry?

K: Not really helpful.

J: Okay, why?

K: Because if you only get the grades like ABC, you don’t know what your strengths or weaknesses are.

J: Okay.

K: Like, if they put a cross under the questions, and then bracket the correct answers or even write out the answers directly.

J: Right.

K: So…

J: So what’s bad about that?

K: It’s bad because…for example we have made a mistake but usually we don’t know why we got it right, right? So if the teacher just writes the answer for us, then we won’t think about it anymore and we will just copy it directly.
J: So what happens after you have copied down the answers? It helped you to do the corrections if the teacher writes the answer for you, right?

K: Yes we will be able to do the correction but we still don’t know how to arrive at that answers, we only know that we have copied the answer directly.

J: I see. What about you? How do you feel when your teacher only provides you with a grade like ABC? What can the grades tell you? Or do you think the grades can tell you anything?

H: Not much.

J: Why, Ka Hei?

H: I think it would be better if we get a score or grade together with some comments.

J: Okay, why?

H: We can make corrections by ourselves and compensate what we have done wrong.

J: Okay. What about Jeff? Do you think it will help you learn if the teacher only gives you a grade like ABC? Or does it tell you anything?

E: I will usually count the number of ticks and crosses.

J: Okay, why?

E: So that I can know my own progress.

J: So is it helpful if you know your own progress by just getting grades like ABC?

E: It’s better if we can have comments too.

J: Why do you think it’s good to have comments too?

E: Because the teacher might want to give us some suggestions.

J: Okay, why do you think the teacher’s suggestions are important, I mean for your own learning?

E: Because it contributes to the examination.

J: It helps you a lot in the examinations. Okay, so I would like to know, after you get the grades like ABC, what would you do with it? Will you use those grades to support your performance in examinations? I mean if only grades were given.

K: I think it’s not that good if we only get grades without much comments.

J: Okay.
K: Because if only get the grades, we won’t be able to know what our mistakes are. You don’t know your mistakes if there’s only a score but not any comments.

J: Okay.

K: So the best would be to give us some comments and tell us what’s good or what’s bad in our work.

J: Okay, so can grades like ABC tell you anything? Or do they represent anything?

K: No.

E: The teacher might give you A+ or A-.

J: So for A+ or A-, or even A, do they symbolize anything?

K: Not much.

J: Not much…why do you think they don’t symbolize much?

K: Because grades are just like scores, the scores are not important. The most important is that you really understand.

J: Right.

K: For example if you get A+ but you know absolutely nothing and you just copy the answers from others, then it’s useless.

J: Okay, so I would like to know, after you get some detailed comments in your writing or journal…I mean comments that tell you your strengths and weaknesses…how would you use those comments to support your own learning?

K: I will look at the areas that I am good at and the areas that I need to work on, then I will work on my weaknesses.

J: Right, so how can comments help you do that?

K: Because comments are professional advice from our teachers, so 90% of the comments are accurate. We just have to find out which areas the teacher tells us we need to work on, so we can buy some exercise books and develop a better understanding on those areas. By doing so, we will be able to do better in examinations.

J: What about you, Jeff and Ka Hei? Do you think those types of comments, the ones that tell you your strengths and weaknesses, can help you learn?

H: Yes.
J: Why, Ka Hei?

H: For example, if you have made some mistakes with ‘tenses’, then you can put more effort in the ‘tenses’.

J: What about Jeff? How would you use those comments to support your own learning?

E: Eh…I will look at the comments and find out the areas that I am good at or need to work on, so… I will continue to work on my weaknesses and do more practice on those areas.

J: Right, so do you think grades like ABC can tell you your strengths and weaknesses too? What do you think?

E: No.

J: Why?

E: Because grades like ABC they don’t have a fixed standard.

J: Fixed standard…what do you mean?

E: So sometimes you might get an A even if you get two questions wrong…and if you got one wrong…you can get an A- if you got two questions wrong, and you get an A- if you got only one question wrong.

J: So why do you think comments are better than grades like ABC?

E: Because comments are more specific.

J: Okay, what about Ka Hei? I forgot to ask you just now, how would you use comments to help you progress in your own learning?

H: To me, the main thing is do more practice, like…if the teacher tells you the areas that you need to work on, then you do more practice on those areas, like tenses.

J: Okay, so currently, your teacher gives you grades like ABC as the main type of feedback, right?

K: Yes, usually.

J: So how do these types of feedback help you?

K: Not much.

J: Not much…why?

K: Because grades like ABC is only a score, it won’t tell you the areas that you’re good at or you need to work on. For example, if the teacher gives you a B, you only know that you’re not good
enough, but you will never know what’s good in your work or what you need to work on. But if they give you a comment that directly tells you which part is good or which part you need to work on, then you can directly focus on those areas.

J: Alright, what about you? What about you guys? Do you think the feedback you receive now, the grades like ABC, can help you learn?

E: Not much.

J: Why?

E: Because…the most important thing is to get some comments, so you know the areas that you are weak in.

J: Right, so you mean knowing your weaknesses?

E: [nod].

J: What about you, Ka Hei?

H: I think it’s not that helpful.

J: Why?

H: I think comments are more specific.

J: Specific, in what ways?

H: Yes.

J: In what ways are they more specific?

H: Like, if the teacher tells you that ‘tenses’ is your weakness, then you can ask the teacher or your parents for help, like ask your dad and mom to teach you.

J: So what you guys mean is comments are better because they can tell you your weaknesses and strengths?

SS: [nod].

J: Okay, so now you have told me that you think it's not really helpful by just receiving grades like ABC, but it’s good to have comments for your writing and journal. So I would like to know, what feedback would you like to receive from your teachers? What type of feedback do you think is the most helpful to your learning?

K: Comments are the best.
J: Why?

K: Because if they give us some presents, or stickers and presents... usually you just play with it several times then you leave it there, but you will always remember the comments you get.

J: So what you think the teacher should write in the comments? What should they include in the comments?

K: Your strengths and weaknesses.

J: Strengths, why do you think these two are important?

K: Strengths, so you can know which area you are good at; and you can put more effort on your weaknesses.

J: Right, what about you guys? What kind of feedback do you want to receive from your teachers? Like, what should be included in the feedback so it could help you to progress in your learning?

H: Strengths and weaknesses.

J: Why do you think these two are important?

H: Because if you know your weaknesses, then you can focus on that area.

J: And?

H: If you know your strengths, then you can put less time on the areas that you’re good at, but not too little time.

J: What about Jeff? What should be included in the feedback provided by your teacher?

E: For questions that I don’t know, it would be better if the teacher could give me some instructions on how to do that question.

J: Why do you think that’s important? What is the teacher’s guidance important, instead of just giving you the answer?

E: If the teacher just gives me the answers directly and if I really don’t know how to do that question, then I won’t be able to do these types of questions in the examination.

J: So you mean by teaching you how to solve the questions, it can help you in your examinations? Do you think it will contribute to your examinations or for your learning in the long-run?

E: In the long-run.

J: Why?
E: Because if you get promoted to primary 6, sometimes they might include questions that focus on the things you learnt in primary 5.

J: Okay, so what are feedback for?

K: Our learning.

J: Your learning, why?

E: Teachers sometimes give us stamps and stickers so that we can get a small present if we have collected a certain number of those, but you will never know what you’re good at or weak in. Like, presents are useless, you need to know your strengths and weaknesses.

J: Okay, what do you think? Why do teachers have to give us feedback?

H: So you can work on your mistakes.

J: Okay, so what’s the advance of working on your own mistakes?

H: It helps me to better understand the materials I learnt before.

J: Okay, so I think that’s about it for today. Thanks a lot!