



# Enhancing feedback practices and formative assessment in education: insights and challenges from diverse contexts

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## 1 Overview of EAEA 2/2024

In the first article of this issue, Lee et al. (2024) present a systematic review of academic articles from 1990 to 2021 focusing on teachers' data literacy. The aim of the article is to refine the understanding of teachers' data literacy and contribute to updating its conceptual clarity. The authors build on previous reviews and frameworks in this area and recognise further developments, for instance, that teachers' responsibilities extend beyond teaching, the growing significance of data literacy in the context of technological advancements and teachers' personal dispositions in data literacy research. The methodology involved a systematic literature search following PRISMA guidelines, which resulted in identifying 95 descriptive codes organised into five dimensions: knowledge about data, skills in using data, dispositions towards data use, data application for various purposes and data-related behaviours. These dimensions highlight the multifaceted nature of teachers' data literacy, extending beyond knowledge and skills to include attitudes, behaviours and engagement in professional development.

The second paper by Kim et al. (2024) investigates the characteristics of principal feedback associated with high-quality instruction in the context of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the USA. According to the authors, the ESSA allows states greater autonomy in education, prompting a focus on principals' instructional

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This issue addresses various forms and aspects of feedback practices, including teachers' competences and the need for professional development, assessment for learning and the role of stakeholders in shaping assessment policies and practices.

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leadership capacity. The authors refer to previous research emphasising that effective feedback from principals to teachers is crucial for teacher development, although its quality varies. Feedback is analysed through psychological lenses, considering its impact on recipients' behaviour and performance improvement. The authors also analyse data from teachers and students on surveys administered in the state of Missouri at the end of each school year. The study identifies three characteristics of principals' evaluative feedback linked with enhanced instructional quality among teachers, as assessed through student ratings, while controlling for prior instructional quality. It is observed that focusing solely on strengths, without addressing areas for improvement, correlates with improved performance in promoting cognitive engagement. Conversely, feedback addressing both strengths and areas for improvement is associated with higher quality in promoting critical thinking, a less common and complex instructional practice that may benefit from specific improvement guidance. The study highlights that immediate and face-to-face feedback is not imperative for enhancing instructional practices. Given the resource-intensive nature of evaluating teachers and training principals, the study underscores the need for educational researchers and policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of effective evaluative feedback and refine feedback processes to optimise benefits for both teachers and students.

In the third paper, Máñez et al. (2024) explore written feedback provision by pre-service high school teachers in Spain, focusing on how feedback characteristics vary based on individual teacher attributes and the quality of student writing. While previous studies have mainly examined the feedback practices of in-service teachers, this research fills a gap by investigating pre-service teachers' approaches. Building on the previous research, an analytical framework consisting of four key categories of feedback — focus, content specificity, emotional valence and past and future orientation — is used to analyse 1835 feedback comments on standardised essays. The results indicate that pre-service teachers generally provide task-focused feedback, with over 40% of comments addressing the writing process, reflecting a balanced approach. The feedback tends to be constructive, emphasising actions to improve writing, although neutral and criticism-laden comments are also prevalent. Notably, gender and academic discipline influence feedback types, with male teachers focusing more on argument quality and female teachers focusing on grammar aspects. Disciplinary differences impact feedback orientation and emotional tone, suggesting tailored training approaches for diverse teacher cohorts. The authors underscore the need for structured training programmes to cultivate effective feedback practices aligned with evidence-based principles. Such initiatives should prioritise process-focused feedback, forward-looking perspectives and neutral communication styles. Overall, the findings highlight the potential of feedback to enhance writing proficiency, contingent upon its quality and alignment with students' needs.

Numerous educational institutions aspire to implement assessment for learning (AfL) methodologies to foster students' autonomy in learning and cultivate their self-regulatory abilities. In the fourth paper, Wolterinck-Broekhuis, Poortman and Schildkamp examine students' perceptions of AfL in English language and mathematics based on a survey conducted among secondary education students in the Netherlands. Drawing on Black and Wiliam's foundational strategies, the authors

employ scales to gauge students' experiences with key AfL practices: (1) clarifying and sharing learning intentions and success criteria, (2) eliciting evidence of student learning, (3) providing feedback to enhance learning progression, (4) activating peer-assessment and (5) encouraging self-assessment. An analysis of the survey responses, encompassing 685 students, reveals no discernible disparities between the two subjects. Notably, students frequently encounter activities aimed at clarifying learning objectives and success criteria as well as eliciting evidence of their learning progress. However, activities facilitating peer and self-assessment are markedly less common, occurring in fewer than 25% of instructional sessions. Nonetheless, cluster analysis unveils three distinct clusters delineating the extent of students' exposure to AfL strategies. The findings underscore an incomplete integration of AfL into instructional practices, prompting the authors to advocate for enhanced attention to teachers' skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to bolster student engagement in AfL practices and reinforce their self-regulated learning capabilities through future teacher professional development endeavours.

The final paper in this issue explores parents' resistance to standardised testing in England. The prevalence of standardised testing in modern education systems has sparked an ongoing debate among stakeholders, including scholars, practitioners, parents and politicians, regarding its merits, purposes and effectiveness. In England, the educational landscape is shaped by a high-stakes accountability framework comprising standardised assessments, end-of-secondary high-stakes examinations (GCSEs) and an inspection system that publicly displays performance data through rating systems and league tables. Holloway and Santori (2024) explore parents' involvement in the More Than a Score (MTAS) campaign, which advocates for reducing testing among early years students. Through an ethnographic lens, the authors examine how parents are strategically positioned within MTAS to influence its message, identity and goals. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of social capital, the study reveals that MTAS diverges from typical resistance movements by prioritising long-term objectives aimed at catalysing a paradigm shift rather than immediate policy changes. Unlike opt-out movements centred on individual withdrawals from standardised tests, MTAS requires various material conditions, including time, understanding of the education system, awareness of policy processes and partisan politics and historical traditions and alliances, to sustain its resistance efforts effectively.

## 2 Some reflections

Several of the papers in this issue address feedback relating to formative assessments. Based on a review of empirical studies, Lee et al. (2024) highlight the multifaceted nature of teachers' data literacy and argue for the need to broaden the conceptual understanding beyond technology, knowledge and skills by incorporating attitudes, behaviours and engagement in professional development. Both the Dutch (Wolterinck-Broekhuis et al., 2024) and Spanish (Máñez et al., 2024) studies generally address challenges integrating formative assessments into more traditional summative-oriented assessment systems and underscore the importance of enhancing

teachers' skills and knowledge, however in different ways. By contrast, the studies in the USA (Kim et al., 2024) and England (Holloway & Santori, 2024) reflect that formative assessment in high-stakes accountability systems may present a manifold challenge requiring careful navigation of competing priorities between fostering development and meeting external performance benchmarks.

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