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**Feedback for Learning:
Deconstructing Teachers' Conceptions and Use of
Feedback**

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for the degree of Doctor of Education**

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ABSTRACT

Cognisant of the critical interplay between beliefs and practice, the current study investigated primary school teachers' beliefs and understandings about feedback, and the use of feedback to enhance student learning. Central to the investigation has been an exploration of teachers' beliefs about the nature and place of feedback in student learning and of their role and that of learners in the feedback process. Of equal importance has been an examination of the strategies and practices that teachers utilised and ascribed importance to within the feedback process, including the opportunities offered to students in relation to the development of evaluative and productive knowledge and expertise (Sadler, 1989). To facilitate this investigation, Sadler's (1989) theory of formative assessment and feedback was used as a framework to inform both the research design and subsequent analyses.

Utilising an interpretive, qualitative, case study methodology the current research was conducted in two sequential phases. Phase one consisted of semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of 20 experienced teachers. In phase two, three of these 20 participants were selected purposively for classroom observations of teachers' feedback practice during the teaching of a written language unit. These teachers also participated in a semi-structured interview following each series of observations. During both phases, additional data were generated through field notes and the collection of relevant artefacts. Together, the multiple forms of evidence provided complementary information and ensured a rich pool of data. Three recognised approaches to data analysis were utilised, namely thematic analysis, the constant comparison method and discourse analysis.

The use of Sadler's theoretical framework illuminated both similarities and differences among teachers in regard to the nature, place and role of feedback in learning and teaching. As teachers' feedback discourse was examined in more detail the influence of efficacy beliefs on the uptake and enactment of new ideas and practices associated with formative assessment and feedback

became apparent. Teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning were a further mediating influence, particularly in regard to how the feedback process was conceived and with respect to the norms of behaviour that teachers promoted within the feedback process. The complexity of the beliefs/practice nexus was highlighted in regard to the influence of teachers' tacit, at times outmoded beliefs, on practice.

Observations revealed that each of the three case study teachers had adopted many of the strategies associated with contemporary notions of good feedback practice. However, the ways in which these strategies were implemented in the classroom was a matter of considerable variation particularly in regard to the nature of student involvement and the amount of control maintained by the teacher. Findings from this phase of the research supported Fang's (1996) consistency/inconsistency thesis. In two of the three cases there was a high degree of consistency between teachers' stated intentions and their actions while in the third the opposite was apparent.

Overall, it was concluded that while all teachers had adopted elements of the contemporary feedback 'discourse' none had mastered the 'Discourse' (Gee, 1996). Looking to the future, it is argued that this Discourse cannot be enacted through the mere bolting on of strategies to existing classroom programmes. To enact the contemporary Discourse in the ways imagined three conditions must be met. Firstly, beliefs about teaching, learning and feedback must reflect those embedded in the Discourse. Secondly, there must be a close alignment between those beliefs and practice. Thirdly, teachers must acquire in-depth subject matter knowledge, which will enable them to create the dialogic forms of feedback necessary for students to become self-monitoring and self-regulatory.

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