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## **Teacher Feedback on Student Work: The Impacts of Assignment Feedback On the Quality of Student Work and Motivation**

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# **Teacher Feedback on Student Work: The Impacts of Assignment Feedback on the Quality of Student Work and Motivation**

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## ***Research Question***

How does teacher feedback on students' work impact their motivation to submit quality work and participate in class?

## ***Abstract***

The quality, frequency, and delivery style of feedback given to students by their teachers is crucial to the motivation and sense of belonging displayed by students. The purpose of this research was to strengthen my [the researcher's] abilities as a teacher and grader through examination of the relationship between the quality of teacher feedback and the motivation and sense of belonging displayed by students. In this research, feedback is defined as written or verbal commentary in response to a student's written work and/or verbal participation in class. This study combined analysis of published research and the conduction of personal research through student teaching in a public high school in Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The student data collected in the field came from 10th-12th grade students with diverse identities and experiences. Most of the students identified as Latinx, with the second largest percentage being Black, and the third being Caucasian. The study was significant in that it explored the effectiveness of various types of teacher-to-student feedback and the impacts on student performance and motivation as displayed through subsequent work and participation.

## ***Introduction***

While teachers across the United States may have different academic standards and curriculums to teach their students, one practice that all teachers take part in is the process of grading and subsequently providing students with feedback. As a student teacher preparing for a lifelong career in education, I was interested in how I could best improve my own teaching practices before graduating from college and acquiring my first teaching position. I decided that one of the areas in my teaching that could use some significant improvement was my feedback practices. I had very little experience giving students feedback and the task, initially, seemed like a waste of time. I dreaded the idea of spending hours grading over 100 papers that were going to end up at the bottom of a folder or in a recycling bin. I knew that there had to be a reason for feedback and that there must be something I could do to improve the feedback that I was giving to make it purposeful and rewarding for myself and the students. I specifically wanted to know how feedback could most positively impact students. In recent years, teacher scholars have heavily researched

the topic of quality feedback and the impacts of feedback on students and their sense of belonging. This research seems to focus on several different sub areas. Among these is the quality of the feedback provided by teachers to students. Quality feedback should be focused, descriptive, and meaningful (Feeney, 2007). Other sub areas that have been researched include the various delivery styles of teacher feedback. Whether a teacher focuses on strengths or weaknesses and grades the individual's ability or the performance of the task being asked of them all have different implications for the student being graded and how they perform on future assignments (Shin et al., 2021). One study found that students that received grades and feedback out performed those that did not and showed motivation to improve more than their peers that did not receive feedback (Koenka et al., 2021). A third sub area covered in modern research on feedback is the frequency at which feedback is received. One study found that while students believed that they received quality feedback from their teachers, they wanted more feedback than they got and at a more frequent rate (Reisetter and Boris, 2004). Another study found that the relevance of feedback given also plays a role in students' attitudes toward school work and ownership of work. When teachers provided students with feedback in a timely manner that focused on their strengths and weaknesses and commentary about how to address those weaknesses they were more likely to engage in class and strive for improvement (Peters et al., 2017). The existing research contributed to my own study and analysis of data and aided me in synthesizing my own research and findings.

## ***Review of Literature***

### ***Quality of Teacher Feedback***

Scholars agree that the quality of feedback given to students is instrumental in whether or not they have the motivation to improve and have positive attitudes toward school and assignments/ homework. James McMillan (1977) conducted a study on student attitudes towards assignments as a result of the feedback students received. His experiment involved giving students a set of assignments and pre-tests and then splitting the students up into groups where they had two conditions: high or low effort and high or no praise. The effort accounted for the amount of time the students spent on the work and the praise accounted for what type of feedback they got. Students that received high praise, regardless of their effort grouping, developed more positive attitudes towards the assignment than the students that received no feedback (McMillan, 1977).

Furthermore, Eric J. Feeney found that the most successful feedback is that which is descriptive and promotes reflection. His study focused on feedback for teacher performance, but there is a strong correlation between the effects of quality feedback given to teachers and quality feedback given to students. His study found that if feedback is exclusively external, it is not long term. People benefit more from feedback that requires them to reflect on their own performance in order to make improvements. The other

primary finding was that feedback must be focused. There should be some type of rubric to go off of when giving feedback that can help formulate observable, descriptive, and helpful commentary. That being said, there is an element of intrinsic motivation that comes into play and is essential for lasting results (Feeney, 2007).

With that in mind, Jay C. Percell's (2017) research noted the essential elements of feedback that are critical to the learning process and benefit students the most. He notes that feedback is a process and is not a one-and-done type of exercise. Feedback is a fluid and ongoing process. Percell advises that feedback should be personal, encouraging, and constructive. While these qualities may be difficult to achieve at times, Percell notes that by giving feedback with a positive mindset makes the process easier. While all of the qualities seem like enough to make a teacher's head spin, Percell also writes in his research that the feedback given should not be one-sided, but rather conversational and informal. Talking with the students can be not only easier to have a 2 minute conversation with each student, but talking with the student will also be more beneficial to them than a comment on their page that leaves them with unanswered questions about what the teacher means. He further cautions to keep feedback concise. No student is going to read a teacher's paragraph of feedback and thoughts on their work (Percell, 2007).

Along that same line, Keyes (2019) performed a research study that included a student sample in a Chicago high school and interviewed the students to see what their attitudes were toward teacher practices. She wanted to see what high school students' opinions were regarding important teacher practices to promote classroom belonging and foster student engagement. Her study revealed that, according to students, fostering teacher-student and student-student relationships along with teacher practices that promote participation were most important. Students revealed that they could tell when their teacher was trying to build the teacher-student trust and that they did so through honest feedback, listening to students, and engaging them in the lessons and activities done in class.

Another study by Gamlem and Munthe (2014) revealed that quality feedback can provide direction for students. They corroborated Percell (2007) with their finding that feedback should be collaborative by nature. Teachers, according to the study, should engage students in dialogue and talk with them about their work and their progress on said work in order to "better support the development of understanding" (Gamlem and Munthe, 2014).

All together, scholars agree that quality feedback is most equal to verbal feedback. Students get more from talking with their teachers and having the opportunity to ask questions. Quality feedback, according to published scholarship, must be direct, positive, and honest in order to motivate students to respond positively and show improvement. When these factors are present in feedback, scholars agree that students will experience a sense of belonging and trust toward their teacher and peers.

### ***Delivery of Feedback***

Similarly to the quality of feedback, teachers must pay attention to how they deliver feedback. Scholarship shows that how a student receives feedback can affect their motivation and future work.

A 2015 study conducted by Siv M. Gamlem looked at teacher feedback practices and how engaging in different types of teacher feedback and changing established practices can impact students. The study was performed through the lens of Assessment for Learning (AfL), which the researcher describes as “skills and activities that are undertaken by teachers to provide feedback to enhance teaching and pupil learning” (Gamlem, 2015). The study grouped students together and assigned them to a teacher. That teacher then responded to their needs through changing their practices and engaged in different behavior. The study recorded the perception of students after the study and found that students were receptive to the change in teacher practices and appreciated the support provided by the teacher.

In another study, the researchers findings corroborated published scholarship that dictates the benefits of “dialogic interactions”. The questioning and active listening that takes place through verbal feedback is most rewarding to students and teachers (Adie et al., 2018). There should be, according to the researchers, an equal amount of information intake between teacher and student during feedback conversations. The teacher is receiving feedback, just as the student is in these cases, according to the research. Without the equal exchange they conclude that there is no feedback.

By contract, Koenka et al. (2021) make an argument for written feedback in their study. They evaluated the different types of written feedback in their study with the aim of finding which was most beneficial to student motivation. They found that, overall, students that received some version of feedback performed better than those that received no feedback at all. The study found that the motivation displayed by the graded students was less present when it came to engaging in academics internally and greater for completing academic tasks as a “means to an end” (Koenka et al., 2021). Other findings from the study included recommendations for teachers that are related to the findings in the qualitative feedback section of my research. The four recommendations listed include: provide specific written comments when possible, do not provide grades if they are unnecessary, if grades are necessary, give the student the written feedback before the grade, and grades can be toxic to a students motivation if they are struggling academically—proceed with caution (Koenka et al., 2021).

Likewise, Shin et al. (2021) writes, “... feedback orientation and valence and how to deliver feedback should be considered differently according to students’ psychological differences. That is to say that the way in which feedback is delivered should vary depending on students’ needs. The study found that different elements of feedback given by teachers to students impact the “cognitive appraisal processes” of students. The focus of the feedback provided is imperative to how it is received by the student. Some students will

benefit from feedback that focuses on what they did wrong, other students will benefit more from feedback that praises them for their strengths while addressing what they did wrong or what could be done differently. There are benefits and drawbacks depending on which type of feedback is given and what the psychological needs of the student are (Shin et al., 2021).

Equally important, Hu and Choo (2016) address the pivotal nature of teacher feedback and its ability to motivate or demotivate students. Their study focused on the positive and negative elements of feedback and the impacts the delivery style of feedback can have on students. Language is important when giving feedback to students (Hu and Choo, 2016).

Man et al. (2021) engaged in a study to prove that teacher feedback is useless without student engagement. Their findings concluded that students have to notice and be aware of the feedback in order to get anything beneficial from it. Teachers have to deliver the feedback to students in a way that is accessible to them. In order for the feedback to have a positive impact on the student, their motivation, and their academic performance they have to engage with the feedback given and have opportunities for self-revision (Man et al., 2021).

As far as delivery of feedback goes, scholars that have focused their research on this element of feedback can agree that the way in which teachers deliver feedback to students is powerful. Feedback is not one size fits all. Like many other areas of teaching, feedback requires thoughtfulness on the part of the teacher to meet the needs of their students.

### ***Frequency of Feedback***

Furthermore, researchers have also contributed scholarship to the topic of feedback through the analysis of feedback frequency, otherwise described as the number of occurrences in which students receive feedback and how often. Reisetter and Boris (2004) have done research in the area of study and created a survey to collect data regarding the impacts of distant learning. One of the major findings that can be applied to my research was that while students complimented and appreciated the feedback they received from their instructors and found the feedback helpful, they wanted more time to talk with the educators because of the connections that were established. They wanted even more feedback than what they got. Another finding showed that students enjoyed the online instruction because they were able to have more flexibility and communicate with their instructor, even though it was not a face-to-face meeting, which would have made the distance learning experience better (Reisetter and Boris, 2004).

Moreover, Núñez et al. (2015) conducted their study on homework and feedback and behavior related to homework. This quantitative study intended to look at the relationship between gender, grade level, and homework feedback. Overall, the data showed that students perceived teachers' homework-related feedback positively when they had completed the homework and felt positively about the quality of their homework

time management. The study showed a relationship between the amount of feedback given and the amount of homework completed. The more feedback students got on their homework, the more likely they were to keep doing their homework (Núñez et al., 2015). They also found that as students move up through the grade levels, the level of homework feedback from teachers lowered. I found this interesting for my purposes because I am going into the secondary level and personally believe that the time to really hone in on feedback is in the higher levels of education.

Likewise, research completed by Burns et al. (2021) focused on the role of teacher feedback and feedforward. The scholars draw attention to the purpose of teacher feedback being to acknowledge the gap between where students are in their performance and where they should be through guidance of how to reduce the gap. They also address the relationship between the rate of feedback in relation to achievement levels. Through sampling and data collection the researchers concluded that students who “more frequently receive corrective information and improvement-oriented guidance from teachers may be more likely to set personal best (PB) goals” (Burns et al., 2021).

All in all, research shows that students that regularly receive feedback are more likely to be motivated to do work and close the gap between academic expectations and academic performance.

### ***Relevance of Feedback***

Another aspect of feedback that has been well documented by scholars revolves around the relevance of feedback given. Relevance in this case refers to the focus of the feedback as it is applied to student work. Duchaine et al. (2011) analyzed the role of behavior-specific praise statements (BSPS) as performance feedback. The study took place in a metropolitan highschool and involved students and teacher samples. In analyzing the data from the study, the researchers found that students that received BSPS and teacher coaching showed on-task behavior, showing the positive relevance between behavioral praise, instruction, and on-task behaviors.

A second study in this category the relationship between homework completion and teacher feedback at the secondary level. Teacher feedback was used as a variable in the study both at the student and class levels of the study. The quantitative study synthesized data to conclude that “aggregated teacher feedback was found to have a positive effect on homework completion” (Xu, 2011).

Likewise, Peters et al. (2017) began their research paper, “Students are entitled to accurate and timely feedback on their strengths and deficiencies and about actions that can be taken to achieve learning goals” (Peters et al., 2017). The student was designed to collect data on student attitudes toward standards-based grading. Among the findings from the study were the concerns students had about the implementation of SBG. The students reported inconsistencies in the grading system and how teachers use it. The students said that some teachers use SBG, but others do not. Due to the lack of communication between

teachers and the inconsistencies in the grading practices, students get frustrated and lose motivation to do their work. One student reported that, “Some teachers seem to [purposely] make it hard to reassess” (Peters et al., 2017). The students also showed concerns for the grading as a whole. The four-point scale creates problems for students, and makes it easier to fail. Overall, they feel that SBG is unfair and irrelevant. The lack of clarity provided by SBG leaves students feeling discouraged, self-conscious, and unmotivated.

Still, Ryan and Deci (2000) took a closer look at extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in their study. They define intrinsic motivation as the willingness to do something because one finds it interesting or enjoyable. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is motivation to do something because of the separate outcome or physical reward one will get from completing the task. One of the findings from their study included the relationship between students’ feeling respected and cared for by their teacher and their willingness to take up the classroom values. The feedback and relationship built between teacher and student is essential for student progress and development of motivation. This study also concluded that extrinsic motivation brings about greater engagement, lower dropout rates, and higher quality learning (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Moreover, Icy Lee (2009) calls for a change in feedback practices in his paper. He notes that it is imperative that the hierarchical power structure of schools create a culture based on personal trust that gives teachers autonomy. This would lead to teachers having more freedom on things like grading and updated feedback practices. He finds that the feedback practices implemented by schools need to change to best fit the needs of students.

As mentioned, students rely on relevant feedback that is suited to their needs in order to be successful. Without relevant feedback, students will not have a clear idea of what they need to improve upon. They could lose the motivation, extrinsic or intrinsic, to make improvements and receive the best learning experience.

### ***Summary of Literature***

Scholars agree that the quality of feedback is very important when identifying the levels of student motivation and participation in class. While the task of grading over 130 assignments at a time, especially at the secondary level, is daunting and time-consuming, the impact that quality feedback has on students makes the effort worth it (Feeney, 2007). When the feedback provided is of high quality (honest, concise, encouraging, and focused), relevant, and consistent students will express feelings of belonging and trust (Percell, 2017). The impact of such feedback will increase the quality of work coming from students and will positively impact their learning experience overall, according to research on the topic.

### ***Methodology***



I began my research wanting to investigate how my performance and teaching methods impacted my students' learning, trust, and comfortability with me as their teacher in the classroom. I believed that I would be able to find a correlation between my responses to their work and participation and the quality and quantity of future work and participation. This interest led me to my question: How does teacher feedback on students' work impact the quality of their work and class participation? I set out to record student performance and participation in class at the start of my time with them and see how, and if, my interactions with them through written and verbal feedback would impact their continuing and future work and interactions. Would the student be encouraged by my feedback and strive to get more positive feedback? Would students that didn't turn in quality work be inspired to work harder and complete their assignments? How would my responses as their teacher promote or inhibit their willingness to volunteer in class or raise their hand and actively participate in class? The participants in this study were public high school students in grades 10 through 12. They varied in academic performance, truancy, and class participation efforts. The school was in an urban setting and was made up of primarily Latinx students, followed by Black students, Asian students, and White students, respectively. The research took place in a classroom setting and included four 45 minute class periods per school day of between 17-24 students. The data used for the study was recorded in more than a dozen field note entries, various pieces of graded student work, and multiple lesson plans. My supervisor and cooperating teacher were the only other individuals to have access to my recorded data.

## ***Results of Study***

### ***Analysis of Field Notes***

Before I began my research I had an understanding that feedback was an essential part of the teacher-student relationship. I operated with the assumption that feedback and grading were tasks that teachers must complete in their day to day work. I thought that the main purpose of giving feedback was to let students know what they had done wrong and what they needed to work on. I was interested to see if feedback provided by teachers had a bigger purpose and how I, as a practicing teacher, could stimulate students to be motivated by feedback and encourage them to improve and strengthen areas of academic weakness through my written feedback and commentary as their teacher.

During my time student-teaching I referenced several different data sources including field notes, student work, and gradebook trends. Over the course of a semester, I kept diligent field notes about my written and spoken interactions with students. I took note of behaviors and discussions in class and recorded changes that I saw in student behavior and participation.

When I began my student teaching experience in September, the feedback that I gave to my students was pretty general. It consisted of smiley faces and "Good Job!" type of

wording. There was no evidence for them that I was really looking at their work. I did this under the instruction of my cooperating teacher. He told me that as long as it looked like the student tried to do the assignment and was mostly correct to give them the full points. He instructed me to not worry about grammar or spelling because it was a history class not an English class. This did not sit right with me. I thought that I should at least be marking spelling and grammar errors where I saw them. He told me that it would take me longer to grade and told me that as long as I could understand what they were trying to say I should focus on the concept of the answer. For about a week this is exactly what I did. Very quickly though I began to feel like this method wasn't right and was missing something. In addition to the smiley faces and "Good Job" comments I began to include questions about their responses or comment on their interpretation or answer. I also marked capitalization, grammar, and spelling errors when I saw them. This change helped my students to see that I was continuously interested in their work and their academic progress.

Through data analysis of my field notes, this progress is evident. One student, Giselle [pseudonym], shows the overall transformation in student behavior and work quality evident. In September, the first assignment I returned to Giselle, one that had a "Nice work! 8/10" comment at the top was glanced at and then promptly thrown in the trash can. This happened two to three more times with assignments that I handed back in class during the first couple weeks of my time there. When I began writing actual feedback on the assignments of Giselle and her classmates, I watched closely as I handed Giselle her graded work and moved to the next desk. She continued the conversation she was having with her classmate, picked up the paper, and without even looking at it, tossed it in the trash can and continued her conversation. As I made my way around the room, I returned to her pod to return her friend's assignment. Shea [pseudonym], the student Giselle had been talking to, began to look at the feedback and commentary that I had written on her work. Giselle, realizing that there were actual notes made on Shea's paper, slowly got up from her desk and removed her paper from the trash can to look at the notes that were on her own paper. Over the next couple of weeks, as my assignment feedback improved and became more in-depth, Giselle's quality of work and thoughtfulness began to improve and become evident on her assignments. This was the case for many of the students. My analysis of the data presented about Giselle shows an overall trend that when I neglected to show the students that I was taking the time to read their work they responded by not submitting quality work and not caring what I had to say about the work they submitted. Interacting with their answers by writing comments and asking questions of them and their answers proved to them that I was not giving them busy work and resulted in the majority of students submitting assignments with increasing quality that showed they were learning.

Over time, I noticed that the effort I applied to my feedback helped the students, like Giselle, to see that I was actually reading their work and putting effort into grading it. In changing my approach with grading I noticed that students started coming up to me to ask questions about their grade or to answer the questions I had written on their papers. I also

noticed that the errors they were making in their writing started happening less. They were still happening and continued to happen, but not at the rate they were occurring at the beginning of the school year.

Additionally, the verbal communication changed over the course of the semester. At the start of the school year, there were only about two students per class that routinely responded to questions or commented on material during class. Most of the time getting students to participate was very challenging and included a considerable amount of awkward silence. I would ask the students questions like, “What do you think it would be like to live through this situation?”, “What kind of sights, smells, feelings, sounds do you think the people involved were experiencing?”. The questions varied based on the subject matter. After some self-reflection, I decided that I could offer more encouragement and reassurance. In continuing class periods, I began to start class discussions by saying that there were no wrong answers and that the space was judgment free. I wanted to reassure students that they were not going to be told they were wrong for sharing their opinion because it was in the name of learning. I consciously talked to the class in an encouraging manner. I also began making sure that I talked to students that didn’t regularly contribute or tried to stay quiet. I noticed that as my time and effort with the students increased and the relationships started to grow that the students, overall, became more comfortable with me and each other and were more willing to take the risk of sharing their thoughts and opinions about what we were learning.

One example of this involved the transformation I saw in Keo [pseudonym]. At the beginning of my instructional takeover, Keo came late to class, spent class time on his phone, and did not contribute to class discussions; even when I asked him a question directly. The only time he talked in class was during my instructional time with his peers. While it was difficult for me as a student-teacher to manage this type of behavior initially, I decided that there was a reason behind it and that the behavior might improve if he knew someone saw his behavior and showed that they cared. As the semester progressed, Keo’s behavior slowly changed. Looking at my field note entries, I believe that this change is contributed, in part, to how my behavior changed. The first day that I began doing the one-on-one conferences to talk with students individually about their goals and academic progress I wrote, “I was nervous about how the students would respond to talking with me one-on-one, but it went better than I thought. It was very awkward, but I think the questions I provided them with on the worksheet helped them and myself prepare and have a sort of guide,” the note continues, “I was especially interested to see how my conversations with Alfonso [pseudonym] and Keo would go.” When it was Keo’s turn to step out in the hallway for our conversation, I was pleasantly surprised that he had some notes written on the sheet. I was encouraged by this and began to ask him about how his semester was going and how he thought he was doing in class. He said that he thought he could do better. Together we looked at his sheet and I noticed that for the section of the worksheet that prompted students to write what steps they could take or things I could do

to help them achieve their goals had one word—No. We talked about the question verbally and decided that in order for him to do better in class one thing he could do was to get rid of distractions. In his case this meant not talking to the people around him at inappropriate times and staying off of his phone and computer, unless prompted to take them out. Subsequent field notes reveal that after the initial conference Keo did try to stay off his phone for a while, but ended up increasingly pulling out the phone when he wasn't supposed to. When the next one-on-one session happened we talked about the phone again and came up with a signal that I would give him to put the phone away, which involved me walking past his desk and tapping twice on the desktop. After that, the phone was very rarely seen. Through analysis of my data involving Keo, it is evident that by engaging with Keo multiple times about his behavior and discussing issues and behavior with him in a respectful manner, I repeatedly proved to him that I saw him and I saw his behavior and I cared about how his behavior impacted his learning.

In analyzing the data of my field notes I have concluded that my students responded positively when spoken to with respect. These results are also reflected as a result of written feedback. The trust that I built with my students was a result of my effort and compassion shown to them. The progression shown by my field notes reveals that students will match the energy of the teacher. The more I indicated to them that I wanted to help them learn and grow, the more they were willing to listen, participate, and learn.

### ***Analysis of Student Work***

Additionally, student work provided insight into the impacts of teacher feedback. Over the course of my time with the students, I collected and made copies of student work for the purpose of analysis. I studied the samples I collected, the feedback on that work, and the corrections and subsequent work that followed, and noticed several common outcomes.

Through the month of September, my feedback mainly consisted of smiley faces and scores in the 10/10 format, as mentioned above. Occasionally, during this time, I would include a comment on the assignment about taking another look at a specific section or asking a question to get the student to think differently or deeper about the question or their answer. I was simultaneously trying to use my feedback and commentary to start building relationships with the students and get to know them and how they worked. I very rarely received replies or questions about my comments, especially early on in the semester. One written interaction I had in the comment section of an assignment included:

**Teacher (Me):** *Thank you for sharing. I really enjoyed reading your autobiography! The dress is beautiful. Who is your favorite makeup person to watch [on Youtube]?*

**Student:** *Thank you! I like to watch many people. Some people are Nikki Tutorials, Manny MUA, and James Charles. Do you have any hobbies?*

**Teacher:** *I also like to watch Youtube videos... I also hang out with my cat and read.*

Interactions like this helped me to learn about my students' interests and about who they were as people. Beyond these exchanges I would receive replies to my comments like "Thanks" - when I praised them for the work they submitted or complimented the way they did something; "I turned this in" - when I asked them where the work was or put a low grade on an assignment. A majority of the time I would not receive and reply or follow-up from the students on my feedback. I cannot be certain that they even looked at my feedback in some cases. Still, some students would respond with questions about my comments or would ask me to clarify what I meant. In these situations, I would respond by complimenting them on their initiative in asking for help and I would rephrase what I asked or would explain where my question came from in reference to their work.

As my time with the students continued, and my responsibility grew, my feedback and the response to that feedback changed. I began encouraging students to look at the feedback posted on Google Classroom and in the gradebook. By doing this I noticed that more students would follow-up with me about the feedback they received. I scheduled time in class for them to work on missing work and to revise assignments that had been returned to them. The same students consistently revised when given the opportunity and did what they could to raise their grade and respond to feedback.

As I mentioned in the above section, one of the routines I began practicing involved meeting with students several times throughout the semester to do one-on-one check point conferences. In these meetings, the student and I would sit and go over the recent assignments and how things were going for them in class and otherwise. These meetings included action plans and steps that the student could take to improve and gave them the opportunity to ask questions one-on-one. The students responded positively to these individual meetings and I noticed in my data collection that immediately following these meetings, grades would increase because students were completing and turning in assignments that they had previously neglected or making revisions to improve their grade.

The result of these conferences and the trust being built through interactions in class discussion and verbal contributions of students became more prevalent. This could be attributed to many factors, but I am certain that among those factors is the atmosphere of trust that was built by the positive tone and quality of feedback and discussion held in class. It is worth noting that when my classes and I began doing the conferences and I initiated class discussions, encouraging answers from students, and eliciting responses from their peers, the atmosphere was slightly uncomfortable. I combatted this by pointing out that we were experiencing the awkwardness together and that it would get easier if we trusted the process. It is my conclusion that making class experiences into group experiences is significantly beneficial to the sense of belonging exhibited by students. Letting students know that they are not the only people with hesitations or feelings about

group participation in class discussion or group work is important and helps enable students to open up and participate with less anxiety about doing so.

### ***Analysis of Gradebook Trends***

A third data source I analyzed was the gradebook itself. I synthesized my field note entries and progressions I saw in the quality of student work and my feedback with the grades in the gradebook to see if the feedback practices I had taken up were reflected in the grades. Over the course of the semester I did notice a couple patterns between my feedback practices and the gradebook. In the beginning of the semester the gradebook was as scattered as my grading practices. I feel that it is important to clarify that the semester that I student taught was the first semester in person for my students since the pandemic had started. Some of my students who were sophomores had never been in the building before and had not been in a school since eighth grade. I felt that as I was looking at the gradebook, it was important to take that situation into consideration. The first month of the gradebook was pretty scattered as far as grades go. Not only were the students getting used to the building, but I was trying to figure out how to be a teacher that was responsible for their learning and providing them with what they needed in order to learn the material and concepts while juggling the grading, the planning, and the collaboration required to teach the students. Once things settled into a bit more of a routine, the numbers in the gradebook began to reflect my self-evaluation of my teaching and the feedback that I provided the students. In September, the majority of the grades were put in as participation points. I did not spend much time grading these assignments. I checked for correctness, but as long as everything had an answer I gave full credit, as directed by my cooperating teacher. October reflected my teaching a bit more. I began taking over multiple classes and planning and teaching almost independently. The lessons that I reflected on as not great tended to be corroborated by the grades. I would have a few kids submit work that was of high quality, which I contribute to their intrinsic motivation. There was also a group of students who did not turn in anything, regardless of how I taught. My favorite pattern in the data came in November when I began to get more comfortable with myself as the teacher and with the students. I started opening up to them more and they opened up to me in return. I made myself available to them and placed myself in different spots around the room. I interacted with them during work time and asked them questions to help put them on the right track when they were stuck or confused. The assignments that were graded during this part of my student teaching experience were of much higher quality and I was proud of the progress that the students and I were making. The feedback that I was giving in November was of much higher quality than what I gave in September. I expected more from myself and the students as my time there with them went on. Additionally, most of the grades in the gradebook were in-class projects, worksheets, or activities. My cooperating teacher and I did not assign homework because there was almost always time given at the end of the period to work, even though the time was not always utilized for work. Overall, when my

feedback practices consisted of “Keep up the good work”, “Nice job”, “You can do better next time! Nice Effort!” and other similar phrases the students would not spend time doing quality work. They would open their assignment, fill in the answers as fast as they could, and turn it in. I would quickly return the work back to them with a completion grade and a circle around the wrong answer with a “?” next to it—if the occasion arose. It did not feel like there was learning going on. It felt like busy work for me and for them. As my lessons became more in-depth and engaging, the assignments became more about critical thinking and knowledge-based, rather than fill in the blank/ find the answer. Along with this change, I began writing comments like, “Great work, Liza [pseudonym]! You are really improving on your critical thinking skills. Take another look at #7. I think you might be getting the 6th and 7th Amendment confused. Let me know if you have questions!”. This type of feedback was much more beneficial to students. When I combined this type of feedback with the opportunity for revisions, the grades improved and the students began to feel more comfortable with me as a mentor and an academic resource.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, this research has the potential to help in-service teachers change their grading practices to best meet students needs. As an emerging first-year teacher, I view the research I have conducted over the past year as invaluable. I plan to utilize the researched grading practices and engage my students in dialogue about their work that will challenge them to become stronger academically and help them develop the motivation they need to engage in and complete quality work and learn the most they can. I believe that this research can not only be beneficial to me as a new teacher, but to veteran teachers that could use a change in their teaching practices. When done correctly, teacher feedback provides students with a sense of belonging and motivates them to do quality work. The action of giving feedback must be purposeful, honest, and positive. Delivering feedback to students whether the feedback is verbal or written must have these qualities in order to close the gap between where students are performing and where they should be performing statistically. Of course there are other outside factors that could be impacting the transformation in quality of work submitted over the course of a semester, but there is no doubt that teacher feedback and the relationships in the classroom are imperative for student success and learning. There remains many opportunities for future research on the topic of feedback. Future researchers could find themselves initiating a quantitative survey to see how much of the transformation in student work and participation comes from teacher feedback. Another way to improve upon the research in this field would be to add student voice and interpretation rather than, or in addition to, teacher interpretation of data. For the research presented here, I would say that was one of my shortcomings.

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