

## 'Only true friends could be cruelly honest': cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support in teacher feedback literacy

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### ABSTRACT

Feedback is an important but challenging aspect of higher education pedagogy. In addition to providing quality feedback, teachers are expected to develop students' skills and awareness for effective feedback processes. This case study addresses both processes and products of a Chinese university English teacher's feedback enabling practice by involving students in peer feedback on oral presentations. Data from classroom observations and interviews reveal various strategies of cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support in the teacher's feedback enabling processes, as well as skill development of generating peer feedback and awareness enhancement in accepting critical feedback with a positive attitude. Our analysis revolves around generic and contextually grounded strategies in cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support, as well as how verbal peer feedback can be utilised as a productive solution to mitigate resource constraints. The paper concludes by highlighting the centrality of the 'enabling construct' of teacher feedback literacy and drawing implications for research, policy and practice.

### KEYWORDS

Teacher feedback literacy; peer feedback; cognitive scaffolding; social-affective support

### Introduction

The centrality of feedback to student learning is well established (Hattie and Timperley 2007; Nicol 2010). Against the backdrop of mass expansion of higher education coupled with resource constraints, feedback processes are difficult to implement effectively (Evans 2013), and may cause frustration for both teachers and students (Carless 2006).

Barriers to effective feedback processes have been well documented and solutions can, in part, be found in two interlocking trends of feedback research: one is a shift of focus from teacher delivery of feedback to student engagement (Boud and Molloy 2013; Price, Handley, and Millar 2011) to increase utilisation of feedback; and the other re-engineers a more dialogic orientation (Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2011; Nicol 2010; Yang and Carless 2013) to reduce the limitations of unidirectional written feedback.

While these two trends highlight an active student role, they are premised on an assumption that students possess both cognitive capacities, such as understandings of the nature of quality academic work (Nicol 2010; Sadler 2010), and affective and relational dispositions, such as intention to engage (Price, Handley, and Millar 2011) and trust for university tutors (Carless 2009). The reality, however, is that most first-year undergraduates are not well prepared for the transition to assessment in higher education and may expect detailed guidance from university tutors (Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2011).

There seems to exist a gap between student capabilities and tutor expectations, and to bridge it requires enhanced teacher competencies in feedback (i.e. teacher feedback literacy). Existing literature related to feedback literacy mainly focuses on students (Sutton 2012); teacher feedback literacy has not been researched in much detail, although it is generally acknowledged to be part of teacher assessment literacy (Xu and Brown 2016) and in short supply (O'Donovan, Rust, and Price 2016). This study contributes to filling this gap by exemplifying an 'enabling construct' of teacher feedback literacy based upon a Chinese university English teacher's practice.

Although this study emanates from a specific Chinese university setting, it contributes to international higher education due in large part to the ubiquitous presence of Chinese students in universities around the world. Our analysis of teacher feedback literacy carries pedagogical implications across disciplines and geographical contexts, by exemplifying effective feedback enabling strategies and proposing an enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy to connect with student feedback literacy.

## **Understanding feedback enabling processes**

We start our review of literature by defining teacher feedback literacy and its enabling construct. We then review dialogic feedback research to justify the centrality of the enabling construct in teacher feedback literacy, and elaborate how such a process can be carried out in practice. Following the 'why' and 'how' issues of the enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy, we provide a brief overview of peer feedback with a focus on oral presentations. We close this section by summarising the key issues that this study intends to address.

### ***Framing the enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy***

For the purposes of the paper, we define teacher feedback literacy as involving awareness and skills of three interconnected aspects: the role of feedback in developing student self-regulative capacities; strategies for supporting student cognitive development in understanding feedback and in generating useful feedback on one's own and others' work; and attentiveness to sociocultural, relational and affective aspects of feedback processes. The enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy is, therefore, the teacher's awareness and skills of developing students' cognitive and social-affective capacities necessary for effective feedback processes.

The advantages of dialogic feedback over traditional unidirectional feedback are premised upon a set of prerequisite student capabilities, involving cognitive, affective and relational dimensions. Developing these capabilities, however, is by no means straightforward. Rather, it requires some carefully planned teacher guidance and support (Sadler 2010). Yang and Carless (2013) conceptualise dialogic feedback processes as the interplay of the content (cognitive dimension), the interpersonal negotiation (social-affective dimension) and the organisation (structural dimension) of feedback. These three dimensions suggest the complexities of feedback enabling processes, yet how they are operationalised in the classroom has remained relatively underexplored.

Simply telling students relevant assessment concepts is rarely effective for developing their evaluative capabilities (Sadler 2010). Without active involvement through discussion and debate, developing student understanding of assessment criteria is problematic (Rust, Price, and O'Donovan 2003), not to mention the more complex process of comparing actual performance to the criteria.

Involving students in feedback dialogue is essentially an enabling process which has potential benefits and challenges. It can promote student assessment literacy (Price et al. 2010), which mitigates challenges such as student difficulty in judging the quality of academic work and in using feedback to improve future work (Boud and Molloy 2013). It is also a complex social process because the transfer of both explicit and tacit knowledge mainly depends on a well-nurtured relationship between teacher and students (Ajajawi and Boud 2015). The embedded relationships and arising emotions may

present multiple influences on students' ways of learning (Price, Handley, and Millar 2011). Students may reject feedback if they do not perceive its provider as being trustworthy and credible (Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling 2005). Managing student emotional responses to feedback is increasingly an important consideration.

Notwithstanding the complexity of feedback enabling processes, little is known about how such processes can be enacted. Strategies for achieving the enabling goal are hinted at in a number of studies. Cognitively, teachers need to provide guidance on assessment requirements (Evans 2013), to help students generate or use criteria (Rust, Price, and O'Donovan 2003), to teach them how to analyse and use exemplars (Hendry, Armstrong, and Bromberger 2012) and to clarify the student role as an active participant (Evans 2013). In the emotional and relational aspects, teachers ought to show care (Sutton 2012), develop trust (Carless 2009), create a psychologically safe environment (Price, Handley, and Millar 2011) and encourage positive motivation and self-esteem (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006).

### **Peer feedback on oral presentations**

One of the strategies for developing feedback enabling processes is to provide students with assessment experiences similar to their teacher's, such as peer feedback, which is widely recognised as a fertile context for enhancing engagement and developing evaluative competencies (Cartney 2010; Sadler 2010). While peer feedback is often used interchangeably with peer assessment or peer review, it is denoted as a formative assessment activity that focuses on qualitative comments (Liu and Carless 2006).

Compared to a plethora of research conducted in the form of written feedback on writing (e.g. Cartney 2010; Yang, Badger, and Yu 2006), studies of verbal peer feedback on oral presentations are much less common. Despite the contextual differences, we draw three themes from the former research to shed some light on the latter.

First, engaging students in peer feedback has a number of cognitive benefits, including closing the gap between 'feedback given' and 'feedback acted upon' (Cartney 2010), developing student abilities to make complex judgments about quality (Sadler 2010) and stimulating self-regulative learning (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006). Second, for peer feedback to work effectively, it is of vital importance for teachers to understand the psychology of giving and receiving feedback (Yorke 2003). This is because students may have both positive emotions, such as solidarity or a sense of belonging (Boud, Cohen, and Sampson 2001), and negative emotions, such as anxiety about the process or disappointment in lack of commitment of peers (Hu 2005). Third, Chinese undergraduates, who have received conventional patterns of pedagogy in high schools, may prefer authoritative teacher feedback over peer feedback (Yang, Badger, and Yu 2006). Concerns for face-saving and harmony may also discourage them from offering critical comments (Hu 2005).

Given that developing oral presentation competence is an essential objective of higher education (Ginkel et al. 2016) and that oral presentations as a common assessment item have been identified as a major cause of student anxiety (Nash, Crimmins, and Oprescu 2016), conducting peer feedback in oral presentations needs enhanced teacher guidance and support. Although most of the scholarly writing on this topic have focused on reliability and fairness (e.g. Cheng and Warren 1999; Magin and Helmore 2001; Suñol et al. 2016), the real reasons for the deviation of grades may lie in a lack of assessment experience and observation skills (Suñol et al., 2016).

Three important messages could be gleaned from the limited studies of peer feedback on oral presentations. First, peer feedback with firmly-set assessment criteria enables students to judge the performance of their peers comparable to their teachers' judgments (Patri 2002). Second, it is particularly helpful in developing students' oral presentation competence and attitudes towards presenting (Ginkel et al. 2015). Third, tutor guidance plays a vital role in enhancing peer feedback quality (Ginkel et al. 2016). These studies suggest that peer feedback on oral presentations is potentially fruitful, although it requires teacher expertise to bring that potential into play.

## Summary

From the literature reviewed, we infer two main issues which this paper seeks to analyse. First, feedback enabling processes require a judicious balance between teacher orchestration of feedback processes and a more proactive student role in which peer feedback is central. Second, teachers need careful planning and execution to prepare students cognitively and psychologically for peer feedback on oral presentations.

## Method

This case study is framed by the following two research questions:

- RQ1: How did the teacher enable her students to generate and respond to peer feedback?
- RQ2: What is the product of the teacher's feedback enabling practice?

## Context and participants

Linda (pseudonym) has taught English at a well-respected foreign language teaching university in Southern China for 10 years. English language assessment within Chinese universities involves the coexistence of two competing discourses: one is the dominant high-stakes standardised testing; and the other is an increased emphasis on formative assessment. This form of 'double duty' (Boud 2000) presents considerable challenges for university English teachers in China, such as preparing students for College English Test Band 4/6 (CET4/6), and designing and implementing assessment for learning (AfL) tasks to enhance student learning.

The rationale for selecting Linda was twofold: she was a high performer in a national survey of teacher assessment literacy, scoring two standard deviations higher than average; and she is recognised for teaching excellence in her university, having won numerous awards both locally and nationally.

The *General English* course that Linda taught aims to enhance students' overall English language proficiency. Its assessments include a final examination (50%), a group oral presentation (20%), attendance and participation (15%), writing assignments (10%) and an oral test (5%). We chose the group oral presentations as the site for analysis mainly because they were conducted throughout the whole semester and allowed us to explore classroom processes over a period of time. This activity requires students to deliver a 15–20 minute group presentation based upon thematic topics of the textbook. The class consisted of 57 first-year undergraduates who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Their assessments in high schools were mainly competitive tests, and they had limited experiences with both oral presentations and peer feedback.

## Data collection

Two sources of data were collected. The first and primary set consists of classroom observations, including 35 hours of video recordings of Linda's classroom practice and the first author's field notes. A total of 23 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes, were observed and video-recorded throughout an entire academic semester. Such 'prolonged engagement' in the field (Creswell and Miller 2000) enabled us to capture possible connections between feedback on presentations and other general assessment practice.

The second source of data is seven teacher interviews, varying in duration between 30 and 60 minutes. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews focused mainly on Linda's conception of pedagogy, the rationale for her feedback practices, and discussion of issues arising from the observations. Interviews were conducted mainly in English, and the accuracy of the final transcriptions were verified by Linda.

## Data analysis

NVivo 9.0 was used to facilitate the data analysis (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2014). A key initial step was data reduction of observational data: among the 23 sessions observed, seven were particularly relevant for current purposes. These were the first session, which included important information about the course objectives and the assessment plan, and six subsequent sessions, which focused on oral presentations. The video recordings were viewed twice and the field notes were revised, updated and enriched accordingly. Throughout this process, the field notes were transformed into ‘research texts’ (Denzin 2014) for further analysis guided by the research questions.

With the general goal of making sense of the teacher’s feedback enabling process, the observational and interview data were initially coded by the first author to assign meanings to the data. We triangulated between the two data-sets and identified social-affective support and cognitive scaffolding of the feedback enabling processes as particularly salient in these data, which became focal points for our analysis. Peer feedback from the observational data was also first categorised and manually calculated by the first author based upon the teacher’s assessment criteria. The second author verified the classification and challenged some of the initial interpretations. Through negotiation, we strived to develop balanced and trustworthy analyses of the data.

## Limitations

The study carries some limitations. First, it took place in a single setting in China. Whilst we cannot generalise findings from this specific context, we hope to raise salient issues regarding feedback enabling processes for consideration by researchers and practitioners across contexts. Second, our data focused on the teacher and therefore limited our understanding of the student response. For example, although we observed how students generated and responded to peer feedback, we do not know the extent to which they might build on these comments to enhance future oral presentations.

## Findings

The findings are organised in relation to the two research questions. First, we discuss two dimensions of Linda’s feedback enabling processes: social-affective support and cognitive scaffolding. Second, we explore products of the enabling process: skill development of generating peer feedback and awareness enhancement in accepting critical feedback positively.

### *Linda’s feedback enabling process*

Enabling student capabilities of generating and responding to feedback, as Linda admitted, is ‘very challenging’. Table 1 categorises the teacher’s feedback enabling process in two dimensions (social-affective support and cognitive scaffolding) across three stages (introduction, preparation and implementation). Due to space limitations, we cannot provide every detail of the process, but instead highlight moves that emerged as most salient through our data analysis procedures.

### *Social-affective support*

When the teacher introduced group oral presentations in the introduction stage, the students appeared quite anxious. Considering that these students had limited prior experiences with presentations and peer feedback, Linda reassured them of her timely assistance:

Don’t worry. This is just the beginning, the general idea. We will talk about it in detail later. I am here to assist you fulfil the goals.

This assurance did not entirely erase student anxiety, and so Linda resolved to try to reduce the power distance between herself and the students. To achieve this, she often used humour in her teaching. Indeed, our field notes identify 85 occasions of ‘whole class laughter’. Her humour was often self-deprecating

**Table 1.** Linda's feedback enabling process.

Stages	Social-affective support	Cognitive scaffolding
Introduction	Reassurance of timely support	Introducing generic learning goals Explaining rationale & requirements
Preparation	Teacher self-deprecating humour	Showing an exemplar and facilitating discussion of strengths and weaknesses Presenting and explaining criteria Giving interim feedback on presentation outlines
Implementation	Putting students randomly into groups;  Grading based on group performance;  Creating a trusting & supportive atmosphere	Questions and answers (a) Teacher modelling of questioning (b) Peer questions (c) Teacher rephrasing (d) Presenter responses Structuring feedback sections (a) Peer feedback from each group (b) Teacher rephrasing (c) Teacher feedback

when, for example, she made fun of her own name. She projected an approachable teacher image, and her students started greeting her by her given name, which is quite rare in the Chinese university setting where a strict hierarchy between professors and students is usually maintained. Students approached her for advice after class and added her as a 'friend' on popular social media platforms. In one of the interviews, Linda explained why she was aware of student emotions:

Some students have positive self-images, and some tend to be shy and self-conscious. If they realise that I am approachable, they may feel less pressure when speaking in class.

With such an awareness of student emotions, Linda managed to create social-affective support by toning down competition and increasing mutual co-operation among students. Since the students' pre-university experiences were intense competition through high-stakes entrance examinations (i.e. *gaokao*), their mindsets for achieving excellence remained competitive. Considering that such an atmosphere might be a barrier to peer feedback, Linda tried to reduce competitiveness through two strategies. First, she placed students in randomly allocated groups which meant that self-selected groups of stronger students were less likely to occur. Some students protested against this strategy because they preferred to work with their friends, but Linda explained that she wanted to develop their abilities to work with different people. Second, she resolved to award group members the same grades based upon the overall group performance as she wanted to emphasise group cooperation.

I think cooperative learning is very important. Most of the students are fine with it. I told them some people have to take leading roles, and some have to sacrifice if they are more capable.

Although awarding group members the same grade does not address issues of potential freeriding, it was part of Linda's attempts to develop an atmosphere of teamwork.

A further key element of support was peer feedback which she mentioned in interviews as an important supplement to teacher feedback for several reasons. First, it increases engagement; Linda believes that the students are 'more observant and attentive' when required to give feedback on others' work. Second, it may appear more amenable than teacher feedback, as critical comments from her might seem 'too traditional and harsh'. Third, Linda perceives that peer feedback enhances students' awareness of audience and cultivates their sense of empathy. During interviews, she also showed understanding of the challenges in the peer feedback process:

Sometimes it's awkward. For weak presentations, students refuse to talk actively. They don't want to hurt each other's feelings. It's the Chinese culture; people refuse to be the bad guys. I have to tell them that only true friends could be cruelly honest. It's something I often say. So help each other and people help you out. So I teach students to give each other suggestions, rather than just criticise them. I encourage them to be straightforward but not too harsh. It is difficult and it takes time.

Linda's attribution of some students' initial non-participation to the Chinese culture can be seen in terms of her understanding of deeply rooted face-saving concerns. Yet, this only provides a partial

explanation as reasons for their reluctance may be multiple, including limited English proficiency and modest levels of motivation for a particular class or subject. Linda repeatedly used the phrase ‘Only true friends could be cruelly honest’, implying both an affective element of sincerity and a cognitive dimension of providing critique. This interplay between social-affective support and cognitive scaffolding is a central theme in our findings.

### **Cognitive scaffolding**

In the introduction and preparation stages, cognitive scaffolding began with Linda’s efforts to close the gap between the students’ conceptions of learning goals and assessment criteria, and her own conceptions. She first asked them to brainstorm generic learning goals of higher education, most of which were short-term ones focusing on accumulating more knowledge and skills. She then proposed goals of ‘learning to know, learning to do, learning to think and learning to be’, highlighting the idea of becoming ‘intellectually independent to think critically’. Linda explained her intention in the following interview excerpt:

I wanted to guide them towards the direction that I intended. Usually they rejected it as a cliché. They didn’t realize that it is a serious question. I hope at the end of the semester they will realize that the question deserves their attention and all have their own decent answers.

Closing the gap between the goals set by the students and teacher in this way prepared the ground for developing student self-regulation.

In addition, Linda used a video-taped presentation from a previous student cohort as an exemplar for students’ discussions of its strengths and weaknesses. Linda then observed ‘how students with different backgrounds understand the concept of presentations’, and used the information to inform her ongoing guidance. She followed up the discussion by introducing the assessment criteria which was comprised of content, organisation, audience awareness, presentation skills, pacing, language use and teamwork. Although she might have done more to activate student views on the nature of good oral presentations, she instead explained these criteria herself. This timely guidance gave students a preliminary sense of what was expected from peer feedback.

At the outset of the implementation stage, Linda was trying to teach students how to give peer feedback. The following classroom extract is an illustration:

I understand that this is the first presentation so it is not easy to give comments. Please be detailed and offer something concrete. Don’t offer anything too personal, try to be objective. Try to be friendly, but honest. Try not to be destructive, but offer some constructive opinions that can help them. They don’t know how their presentation goes, so they want some honest opinions about it. Only true friends could be cruelly honest, so let’s be honest with each other.

Linda hoped that the students would provide frank comments and that the recipients of their feedback would not take the criticism too personally. In the interviews, she also shared an aim of providing some generic feedback that would help the entire class, not just those who have just presented. However, generating quality feedback on oral presentations is cognitively demanding. Being first-year undergraduates with limited experience of peer feedback, the students obviously did not develop these skills quickly and automatically. So when Linda invited questions from the audience after the first presentation, the students remained reticent and unsure about what to contribute:

Any questions? Do we understand everything about their presentations? Do you have any questions or doubts about the content? (A short pause) Sometimes, if you don’t have questions, it means you are not interested. Ok, I have a question for you. What did you think your audience would benefit from your presentation? What can we learn from your presentation?

In this excerpt, Linda suggests a number of elements which could provoke questions, such as clarity of content or what can be learnt from the presentation. The lack of student response also suggests that they needed some further scaffolding to develop the confidence and competence to raise questions. In the following excerpt, Linda made comments on the content of a presentation:

These slides are not authoritative enough. You need something more convincing, more powerful. You need to do some serious research and offer people some authoritative evidence. You seemed to be offering some superficial

opinions. If you want to be profound, add some depth. Do more reading and then integrate it with your own thinking to develop some deeper ideas.

Linda's feedback here was quite direct and critical, orienting students to deepen the presentation content which she perceived as being the most important criterion. The role of her own feedback was to develop student understanding of assessment criteria, as shown by the following interview excerpt:

When I organised the information, I wanted to make the implicit rule explicit for them. Some students largely remained confused. I think they learn little by little, listening to my feedback and watching others' performance ... Some students are heading for the wrong direction. I just pulled them back, making sure they are doing the right thing.

The implicit rule that Linda referred to was assessment criteria which were oftentimes abstract to students. Linda's feedback was purposefully organised to provide a model for students to follow in terms of both 'what to comment on' (content) and 'how to comment' (language).

A further complication is that the students are EFL learners with relatively limited confidence and competence, and so their comments are sometimes not fully audible or easily understood by others. Linda rephrased or elaborated on some of the peer feedback as exemplified below (T stands for teacher, S for student):

S: They had enough preparation.

T: They looked very prepared.

S: We like the role play. Their English is excellent.

T: So you appreciate their fluency.

S: The disadvantage is that their roles are a little too much for us to understand.

T: (to the presenters) Do you understand? You shifted your roles too fast, and it seemed confusing, right?

S: We feel that we didn't get too much from their presentation because what they conveyed are commonly known facts. It is not a mystery.

T: The topic itself is not innovative.

By rephrasing peer feedback, she hoped to enhance student comprehension and model appropriate strategies and language use. She also tried to phrase her comments in a sufficiently general way for the whole class to be able to benefit, including wider messages for university study, such as reading, thinking and depth. Such rephrasing bridges possible comprehension gaps between the audience and presenters. This teacher orchestration may be contextually suitable, although it may minimise student autonomy and voice.

### ***Products of the teacher's feedback enabling process***

Turning now to RQ2, products of the teacher's feedback enabling process can be seen in two ways: skill development in generating peer feedback; and awareness enhancement in accepting critical peer feedback positively. Table 2 provides sample peer feedback, the number of occurrences and percentages for each assessment criterion.

As Table 2 shows, the largest proportion of peer feedback focuses on content, which was prioritised in Linda's assessment criteria. In addition, the students seemed to be able to generate feedback evenly across other criteria, particularly in the criterion of 'audience awareness' of which they had less knowledge. Linda expressed her appreciation over one sample peer feedback indicated in Table 2.

They seemed to pick up both my vocabulary and central idea of giving feedback. When they said, 'Their entertainment overshadowed their analysis', I know they started to think deeply about what is the most important thing in a presentation.

The following excerpts from two of the later classes show evidence of student development in providing feedback:



**Table 2.** Types of peer feedback, sample excerpts, number and percentage.

Feedback types	Excerpts of peer feedback	No. (%)
Content	They don't analyse the phenomenon; they should dig deeper They repeated themselves by giving too much information	56 (22.4)
Organisation	We can learn all the details ... The logical flow is quite vague You need to structure your presentation in a logical way	39 (15.6)
Audience awareness	They are audience-friendly. We can easily follow them We were bored with too little information	28 (11.2)
Presentation	I like that they used new forms to tell traditional moral stories Their entertainment overshadowed their analysis	30 (12)
Pacing	They played the powerpoint too fast; we can't follow	32 (12.8)
Language use	Nice accent. Some grammar errors	24 (9.6)
Teamwork	You need more preparation and rehearsal	17 (6.8)
Overall comments	Your presentation is very impressive	22 (8.8)

S: We appreciate that you tried your best to impress us. You used some familiar examples.

T: Yeah, we feel related somehow.

S: The logical flow is quite vague. We don't learn the details. They had too many keywords ... Another thing is, I don't think they had persuasive materials. For example, they showed us the phenomenon but didn't show clear conclusions.

T: Sharp observation. Very good.

S: What is your point? (Whole class laughter).

S: I would like you to conclude your presentation within a sentence. Also, we would like to know, what can we learn from your presentations? (Whole class laughter).

In the first excerpt, the student gave positive feedback, and then offered some more critical suggestions about the logic and supporting evidence. He seems to have picked up on Linda's position that it is the content which is the most important element of a presentation. In the second excerpt, the student started to challenge the group by asking them to summarise their presentation and to elaborate on its relevance to the audience. The students laughed mainly because the two questions raised by peers were Linda's favourite questions, which seemed to have become internalised knowledge. In comparison with the silence which met Linda's first attempt at eliciting peer feedback, students are now starting to provide some comments for the presenters' consideration. Having witnessed student progress, Linda expressed her satisfaction in the last interview.

Everyone is improving, but some improved more. They now have some sense of what to ask and comment on after listening to an oral presentation. Some really have developed some insights. I am quite content. Yesterday the whole class laughed when one student commented, 'Our point is that you don't have points'. I should say, 'Ouch! But, Yeah!'

The peer feedback in this situation seems sharp but abrupt, which may have provoked some discomfort for the presenters. While displaying sympathy by uttering 'Ouch', Linda was actually quite satisfied with student skill and awareness development: peer feedback pinpointed the problem, and the receivers seemed to accept these 'cruelly honest' comments from 'true friends' with good humour. Overall, we infer that Linda was making progress in enabling student abilities to generate and respond to feedback.

## Discussion

Our findings address the research questions by revealing social-affective support and cognitive scaffolding as two interdependent dimensions for the teacher's feedback enabling process. Products derived from the enabling process include students' skill development of generating peer feedback and awareness enhancement in positively accepting critical feedback. Our classroom data have brought Yang and Carless (2013) abstract conceptual terms of 'cognitive' and 'social-affective' dimensions to concrete, manageable classroom strategies. We propose that teacher feedback enabling processes need to be co-driven by two interrelated dimensions: cognitive scaffolding that involves strategies to promote students' disciplinary understanding, self-regulated capacities and conceptions of feedback content and use; and social-affective support involving acts that build up students' trust in teacher and peers,

whilst cultivating their rational attitudes towards critical feedback. We infer that this enabling process serves as the bridge between teacher and student feedback literacy.

Our findings reveal both generic strategies of cognitive scaffolding consistent with existing literature and contextually grounded strategies that emerged from this particular study. The teacher developed a shared understanding of criteria by using exemplars and illustrating how criteria were operationalised (cf. Hendry, Armstrong, and Bromberger 2012). She also oriented learners to the aims of feedback and provided learners with opportunities to practice giving and receiving it, echoing important features of the dialogic feedback model (Boud and Molloy 2013). Her closing conception gaps clarified expectations and oriented students from passive receivers to a more active role in generating peer feedback, supporting Nicol's (2010) view that the closer the teacher's and students' conceptions, the better is the student performance.

Our findings also reveal some contextually grounded means of cognitive scaffolding that are little discussed in prior feedback research: rephrasing and modelling. To these EFL students who may have difficulty in clearly articulating and precisely comprehending English, the teacher's rephrasing eased communication, facilitated shared interpretations and supported meaning negotiation. The form of feedback was also modelled in various ways: encouragement; critical feedback; specific and generic feedback. These strategies, when adapted to suit contextual conditions, can be considered as part of student induction into assessment processes as they transition from school to university (cf. Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2011).

The enabling goal is unlikely to be achieved unless there is some recognition of the interplay between cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support. Our analysis of the teacher's awareness of student emotions resonates with points made by Price, Handley, and Millar (2011) with respect to the centrality of relational aspects of feedback, including reciprocity and staff showing genuine concern for students' progress. Our data also corroborate those of Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon's (2011) regarding the importance of approachable tutors in feedback processes, and the reassurance that tutors can provide to alleviate student anxiety presented by the transition to university modes of assessment.

In addition, our findings highlight a need for taking into account student backgrounds and cultural nuances in social-affective support, expanding the view of teacher understanding of student psychology of giving and receiving feedback (Yorke 2003). For example, the teacher's idea that 'only true friends could be cruelly honest' reflected her insights of student concern that critical comments may harm friendship (cf. Hu 2005). Trust was then developed by reducing the impact of power relations, toning down competition and scaling up mutual support, which adequately addressed issues that are salient in the Chinese context: namely, the hierarchical relationship between teacher and students, face-saving concerns and peer competition caused by high-stakes testing. As a result, the students seemed to appreciate peer feedback and considered it a safe and supportive space for learning.

While echoing earlier studies concerning the value of peer feedback in providing students assessment experiences as close in scope and kind as their teacher's (Boud, Cohen, and Sampson 2001; Sadler 2010), our findings suggest two additional functions of peer feedback based upon some necessary conditions. First, peer feedback can be utilised as a feedback enabling activity (Cartney 2010; Liu and Carless 2006) only when implemented with sufficient and appropriate cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support. Second, peer feedback offers a solution to mitigate challenges of increasing student feedback engagement in the resource-constrained higher education context (Beaumont, O'Doherty, and Shannon 2011). Indeed, if well facilitated, peer feedback plays a key role in enabling student feedback literacy and engaging students in effective feedback processes.

Our data related to verbal peer feedback on oral presentations suggest that its effectiveness largely depends on skillful teacher intervention in terms of timing, amount and function. Unlike written peer feedback, which is paralleled with teacher feedback, verbal peer feedback is an immediate response to peer performance, which requires 'teacher feedback on peer feedback'. Our data suggest that such teacher intervention has a wide range of functions including rephrasing, modelling and inviting peer feedback on peer feedback. The timing and amount of intervention is also critical; teacher modelling

in this study was prominent at the beginning for student imitation, but gradually gave way to a more active student role. The situated nature of teacher feedback on peer feedback warrants more research to uncover its complexity.

## Conclusion

As one of the first studies to use in-depth classroom data to analyse the interplay between teacher and student feedback literacy, our central finding was the generic and contextually grounded strategies of both cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support in feedback enabling processes. Based on this finding, we propose an enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy, driven by the interplay of cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support. These two dimensions highlight enhanced teacher responsibilities, as well as connections between teacher and student feedback literacy.

The study contributes to feedback research in two ways. It exemplifies through classroom data the concept of teacher feedback literacy as involving both providing quality feedback and preparing students to be cognitively and social-affectively ready for feedback processes. It also clarifies the interaction and mutual dependence between cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support in feedback enabling processes.

The generic and contextually grounded strategies in cognitive scaffolding and social-affective support highlight a need for differentiated methods for promoting the enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy. Generic strategies are suggested to be summarised as assessment principles and disseminated through formal assessment training, while contextually grounded strategies need to be accumulated based upon research evidence and practitioner experiences across contexts.

Thus, relevant policy is needed to support teachers as they develop their cognitive understanding of assessment, sociocultural awareness for student backgrounds and affective dispositions such as care and trust for students, all of which are essential components for devising their own contextually grounded strategies. The enabling construct of teacher feedback literacy needs to become part of teacher education programmes, and feedback enabling processes need to be facilitated by university administrators and middle managers.

Future research needs to be directed towards the complex connections between teacher and student feedback literacy, and how their interplay contributes to developing effective feedback processes. Comparative and longitudinal studies are particularly vital for a fuller understanding of generic and contextually grounded strategies, as well as how feedback enabling processes may help students develop a cumulative sense of the feedback they have received and act on it in future assessments.

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