Assessment to learning: Improving the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner through future actionable knowledge

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ABSTRACT: *There is no argument amongst educators that a teacher's feedback represents a significant contribution to a learner's in-class learning outcomes. However, while the contribution of a teacher's feedback is significant there are also challenges associated with the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback. These challenges, the authors suggest, centre mainly on the effectiveness of the discourse between the teacher and the leaner. To possibly assist in addressing some of the challenges associated with the effectives of a teacher's feedback this paper outlines that there needs to be an emphasis on Future Actionable Knowledge. Future Actionable Knowledge, the authors contend, is driven by Assessment To Learning, which highlights the use of interconnected formative assessment tasks within the teaching and learning space. By highlighting the use of interconnected formative assessment to drive Assessment To Learning, the authors believe, influences a teacher's feedback to the learner by providing the leaner and the teacher with Future Actionable Knowledge, facilitated through Multi-Dimensional Discourse, via Feedback-Feedforward Learning, whereby, the teaching and learning activities associated with the learning space focus on value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner.*

1. Introduction

Before commencing the reader should note where possible the authors have written this paper in future tense. This approach is taken by the authors because of a desire to emphasise feedforward, which focuses on future actions (Hirsch, 2017; Sambell, 2011; Walker, 2009). The authors suggest that a focus on future actions could be the genesis to having some possible impact on the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner.

The intention of this paper is to encourage a discussion around *Future Actionable Knowledge (FAK)*, which emphasises *Multi-Dimensional Discourse (M-DD)* and *Feedback-Feedforward Learning (FB-FFL)* through a focus on *Assessment To Learning (ATL)*. The authors believe that encouraging this discussion is appropriate for three reasons.

First, feedforward can play a very powerful role in the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback (Hirsch, 2017; Sambell, 2011; Schimmer, 2018; Walker, 2009). Second, while there is a plethora of research which advocates the significance of feedback there is further research that questions the educational acumen of some teachers to provide learners with effective feedback (Hattie, 2009; Hirsch, 2017; Sambell, 2011; Schimmer, 2018; Walker, 2009). Finally, given the significance of feedback, and the impact that feedback has on the quality of formative assessment (Black., & Wiliam, 1998), which is beginning to have greater role to play in educational settings, any discussions facilitating some further understanding of how feedback might be structured, to improve its effectiveness, is no doubt welcomed by educators.

Based on the three points above the authors present this paper as a possible catalyst to encourage a discussion around ATL. To encourage this discussion the authors will address three specific topics within the context of this paper.

First, provide the reader with a definition of ATL, and, in doing so, outline an understanding of FAK. Second, unpack the terms Multi-Dimensional Discourse (M-DD) and Feedback-Feedforward Learning (FB-FFL). Finally,

link FB-FFL link to M-DD and ATL.

The next section of this paper focuses on providing the reader with a definition of ATL, and then outlining an understanding for FAK.

2. Assessment To Learning (ATL) and Future Actionable Knowledge (FAK)

Richardson (2019) wrote about value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner. Richardson's focus on value-adding emphasises a learning process that does not simply focus on the 'education' of the learner rather the 'value-adding to the learners' in-class learning'. Richardson suggests that the difference between these two learning processes is a learner can be educated and still fail to be educated whereas, in Richardson's opinion, an emphasis on the value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner ensures a focus on the in-class learning outcomes of each learner.

This focus on value-adding to the in-class learning outcomes of the learner is the result of series of learning outcomes which are aligned to specific *interconnected formative assessment tasks* (Richardson & Curtis, 2018). Consequently, Richardson suggests, that a learner's in-class learning outcomes needs to reflect the intended learning outcomes from a *learning processes* and not just simply viewed as an outcome of *being educated*.

Utilizing Richardson's suggestion above, the authors contend, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the value-adding to the in-class learning outcomes of the learner. And this emphasis, the authors further contend, could have an impact on the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the leaner. Building on the work of Richardson and Curtis (2018), the authors believe, to facilitate a greater emphasis on the value-adding to the in-class learning outcomes of the learner, and therefore, hopefully impact on the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner, there needs to be a focus on the use of interconnected formative assessment tasks.

Formative assessment, according to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) (2007), is any assessment task designed to promote a learners' learning and provide the leaner with teacher feedback so that teaching and learning activities can be altered accordingly. The NCTM (2007) further highlights that the use of effective formative assessment has resulted in increases to learner achievement. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam (2003), Black and Wiliam (2003) and Bloom, Hasting, and Madaus (1971), add to the NCTM's statement above by indicating that formative assessment reflects assessment for learning (AfL) which focuses on promoting learner's study through adjustments to the teaching and learning activities.

Reilly (2018) outlines that there are four types of assessment used in schools. These four types of assessment are diagnostic, summative and formative assessment, in addition to, benchmark or interim assessment. Reilly highlights that formative assessment is used to gauge a student's learning during the lesson.

However, as Richardson and Curtis (2018) suggest, the authors highlight, based on the comments provided above by the NCTM, Black et al. (2003) and others, for a teacher's feedback to be possibly effective there needs to be an association with a *learning process* linked to assessment, for example, similar to AfL. This learning process, that the authors outline, based on Richardson and Curtis' (2018) work, is reflected in Assessment To Learning (ATL). ATL, the authors continue, represents *interconnected formative assessment* tasks designed to demonstrate a specific summative assessment outcome, which is viewed by the learner, and the teacher, as a learning tool to assist the learner in *value-adding to their in-class learning outcomes*. The authors contend, building on Richardson and Curtis' work, for ATL to occur a summative assessment task needs to be broken down into individual interconnected formative assessment tasks, whereby, each formative assessment task reflects specific intended learning outcomes that are linked to a learner's in-class learning outcomes.

The authors believe, reflecting on Richardson and Curtis's work, a demonstrated coalescence of each formative assessment's intended learning outcomes provides the teacher and the learner with 1) a learning platform highlighting a *journey* to 2) demonstrate a *mastery* of the summative assessment task, that 3) *outlines* the learning process. However, the authors highlight, focusing on Richardson and Curtis' work, it is via the teaching and learning that occurs within, and between, these interconnected formative assessment tasks, reflected in Multi-Dimensional Discourse (this term is explored in more detail later in this paper), where the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner is of paramount importance.

To assist in possibly addressing the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner, the authors believe, based on Richardson and Curtis' work, both the teacher and the learner when applying ATL need to focus on, what the authors refer to as, 'Future Actionable Knowledge' (FAK). FAK, the authors suggest, represents the new knowledge that a teacher and learner acquire after completing each interconnected formative task's intended learning outcomes, and this new knowledge is linked to future *demonstrable* intended learning outcomes.

By applying Richardson and Curtis' (2018) focus on the use of interconnected formative assessment tasks, the authors believe, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2003; Black & Wiliam, 2003; Bloom, Hasting, & Madaus, 1971).

This greater emphasis on the use of a teacher's feedback to the learner is reflected, the authors suggest, in an increased use of formative assessment tasks, in some educational settings, and therefore, the impact that the quality of a teacher's feedback has on the quality of summative assessment (Hattie, 2009).

Consequently, based on Richardson and Curtis' (2018) work, the authors contend, for a teacher's feedback to the learner to be effective this feedback needs to be 'Future Actionable Knowledge' (FAK). FAK impacts on the learning process because the interconnected formative assessment tasks, the authors outline, are connected to specific demonstrable intended learning outcomes that when completed, as previously mentioned by the authors, demonstrates a learner's mastery of specific intended learning outcomes. It is the coalescence of these specific learning outcomes, the authors suggest, which provides a demonstration of the summative assessment task.

By taking the learning approach above, and by building on the work of Richardson and Curtis (2018), the authors argue, a learner's in-class learning is being impacted upon due to the value-adding that occurs to the learner's learning as they move from one formative assessment task to the next. The learner's learning is predicated on the attainment of specific demonstrated intended learning outcomes, which are FAK orientated, due to an alignment with each interconnected formative assessment artefact. This learning process is different to the current processes used in some schools, as Heitin (2012) suggests, which emphasise the significance of summative assessment, over formative assessment, and a greater focus on, what the authors refer to as, *just-in-time-drafting*.

Just-in-time drafting, the authors highlight, represents the actions of the learner being required to submit a draft of a summative assessment task, usually two weeks before the due date of the assessment task. In this situation the draft is normally checked by the teacher, whereby, the teacher provides the learner with feedback. The challenge with just-in-time-drafting, the authors argue, is a focus on assessment that does not 1) reflect FAK, which emphasises the learner's learning process, and 2) based on Richardson's (2019) work, represents value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner.

Instead the just-in-time-drafting approach, the authors suggest, simply reflects the outcome of an educational process designed to highlight what may, or may not, have been learned by the learner. Therefore, the authors advocate that assessment when applied to a value-adding context, as described above, needs to emphasise Assessment To Learn as viewed through ATL. In addition, the authors also suggest that ATL is predicated on a focus reflecting FAK. This focus is necessary because FAK assists the teacher and the learner to move *towards* the attainment of future intended learning outcomes, which in turn, are based on

interconnected future demonstrable actions.

ATL, the authors suggest, infers that summative assessment needs to be viewed as the outcome of the value-adding to the in-class learning of the leaner and not simply the outcome of the learner being 'educated' (Richardson, 2019). This approach to summative assessment impacts, as Richardson (2019) argues, on the mid-set of the teacher and the learner, whereby, the teacher and the learner must focus on '*where* they are going to?' and '*how* they intended to get there?'. By taking this approach, the authors believe, a possible outcome to the learning process might see an impact on summative assessment, via the enhanced use of formative assessment, and therefore, maybe have a positive impact on the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner?

Based on the work above the authors define ATL within the context of two areas. The first context is as a mind-set, while the second context is as a learning process that emphasises the use of formative assessment to determine the value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner. With respect to the first area, a mind-set, ATL focuses on the teacher and the learner *thinking* of a learning process that looks to the future, and that this future outlook is developed around the leaner's demonstration of intended learning outcomes that are derived from FAK.

In relation to the second area, formative assessment, ATL emphasises the need to view the learning process as the acquisition of knowledge by both the learner and the teacher. This acquisition of knowledge, which the authors refer to as FAK, is based on the need, as the authors have previously suggested, for the teacher and the learner to focus on '*where* this knowledge is taking them?' and '*how* this knowledge value-adds to the in-class learning of the learner?'. Therefore, value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner, the authors argue, is determined by the learner demonstrating all of the intended learning outcomes, though the completion of each formative assessment artefact, which are interconnected and aligned with the production of the summative assessment task.

With a definition of Assessment To Learning, and an understanding of Future Actionable Knowledge, provided the next section focuses on exploring Multi-Dimensional Discourse (M-DD) and Feedback-Feedforward Learning (FB-FFL).

Multi-Dimensional Discourse (M-DD) and Feedback-Feedforward Learning (FB-FFL)

Based on the research and work of Dann and Richardson (2014; 2015; 2017), Richardson, Nguyen, Thi, and Nguyen (2019), Richardson and Curtis (2018), and Richardson (2019) the authors suggest, one possible strategy that could be applied to assist teachers in the use of feedback maybe through the addition of feedforward. The inclusion of feedforward, the authors continue,

creates a learning relationship between feedback and feedforward. This relationship, which will be discussed in the next section of this paper, the authors highlight, is reflected in Feedback-Feedforward learning (FB-FFL). FB-FFL, the authors contend, based on the work and research of Dann and Richardson, Nguyen, Thi, Nguyen and Richardson, Richardson and Curtis, and Richardson encourages Multi-Dimensional Discourse (M-DD) between the learner and the teacher that is future orientated. The authors contend that M-DD encourages a future orientated view because it is comprised of two types of knowledge '*old knowledge*' and '*future knowledge*'. These two types of knowledge, the authors suggest, are derived from the various learning experiences of the teacher and the learner, which are the result of FB-FFL.

M-DD, the authors argue, occurs first through feedback, which is the exchange of past learning experiences or old knowledge, and then second, feedforward when the teacher and the learner work together in *applying* future knowledge to new demonstrable actions. The authors advocate that learning is facilitated through the exchange of the learner's and teacher's learning experiences and *demonstrated* by the application of new knowledge.

It is through the exchange of the learning experiences of the learner and the teacher that old knowledge is transformed into new knowledge, with a focus on future actions. However, one of the key components of future actions, the authors argue, is to ensure that this new knowledge has a futurist perspective. The authors believe that learning occurs between the learner and the teacher as a result of an exchange of learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). It is via the exchange of these learning experiences, the authors continue, that M-DD projects a futurist perspective. This statement is explored in more detail below.

Feedforward, the authors outline, based on Archer's (2010) research on feedback, is grounded in socio-constructivistism. Socio-constructivists' view learning as a process whereby learners engage with their teacher in continuous discourse to gain new understandings (Archer, 2010). Askew and Lodge (2001) highlight this continuous discourse needs to be multi-dimensional whereby, the teacher and the learner exchange knowledge to achieve intended learning outcomes. This exchange of knowledge, Parry and Bamber (2010) add, focuses on providing assistance for future actions.

Schimmer (2018) reinforces Parry and Bamber's (2010) comment above by outlining that this knowledge is actionable so the learner is provided with the opportunity to move forward to the next step. However, it is important to acknowledge, the authors contend, as Ferrara and Butcher (2012) highlight, when focusing on the exchange of knowledge between the learner and the teacher that learners prefer to engage in the learning process and

not be simply "passive recipients" (p. 66). Therefore, for knowledge to be actionable, the authors advocate, it needs be based on, as Askew and Lodge (2001) outline, discourse which is multi-dimensional. Whereby, this discourse, which is multi-dimensional, represents the interaction, via an exchange of learning experiences, between the teacher and the learner. However, for these learning experiences to be effective, through a capacity to influence future actions, the authors believe, it is important that these learning experiences are initially clearly understood by the learner and the teacher.

M-DD, the authors argue, provides knowledge through the exchange of learning experiences, however, this knowledge is first required to be understood by the learner and the teacher and then second, based on that understanding, is actionable and forward moving. Therefore, the authors suggest that M-DD emphasises a gaining of an understanding of knowledge, which is based on active participation in the learning of that knowledge, and a demonstration of that understanding through actionable knowledge that is focused on moving forward.

The authors, based on the research and work outlined above, define M-DD as a three layered learning process. This process is described below by unpacking, what the authors refer to as, the Building, Applying and Reviewing of Contextual Knowledge. To assist in clarifying this three layered process the next sections of this paper focus on explaining the Building, Applying and Reviewing of Contextual Knowledge and then follow on by outlining how these terms signify a three layered process.

The first layer of M-DD reflects the teacher and the learner engaging in the *Building of Contextual Knowledge*, via the sharing of learning experiences, which are linked to intended learning outcomes. This Building of Contextual Knowledge, from these shared learning experiences, creates both 'old' and 'new' knowledge'. 'Old knowledge' is the knowledge that the learner and the teacher acquire *initially* from the sharing of their learning experiences. While 'new knowledge', represents the *Application of Contextual Knowledge* through a learner's demonstration of *Future Actionable Knowledge (FAK)*. FAK is based on discussions focusing on 'old knowledge', "*what* was learnt from the sharing of learning experiences?", and 'new knowledge', "*where* this knowledge is taking them?" and "*how* the teacher and the learner *will apply* this new knowledge in the future?" Finally, after the demonstration of FAK the teacher and the learner engage in a *Review of Contextual Knowledge*.

A Review of Contextual Knowledge focuses on the teacher and learner addressing the intended learning outcomes, as outlined in the Building of Contextual Knowledge. However, this focus on a Review of Contextual Knowledge emphasises discussions, again based on the learning experiences of the teacher and

the learner, which look to FAK. Therefore, the learning process is repeated through the continued use of the Building, Applying and Reviewing of Contextual Knowledge, which is FAK orientated.

By taking the approach outlined above, the authors believe that the teacher and the learner engage in M-DD via three layers of learning. First, through the Building of Contextual Knowledge where contextual knowledge is built from the experiences of the learner and the teacher. These learning experiences are derived from the strategies that the teacher applies within the learning space to ascertain a learner's 'old knowledge'. Once armed with this 'old knowledge' the teacher and the learner focus on "how this 'old knowledge' could be transformed in to 'new knowledge'?" This action highlights the second layer of M-DD, through the teacher and the learner then Applying the Contextual Knowledge, 'new knowledge', to reflect FAK. Finally, at the third layer, the teacher and the learner 'Review the Contextual Knowledge' to see if it reflects the intended learning outcomes originally discussed in the Building of Contextual Knowledge.

With a definition of M-DD provided above the next section of this paper unpacks the link between FB-FFL and M-DD and ATL.

Linking FB-FFL to M-DD and ATL

Based on the research of Hirsch (2017), Sambell (2011), Schimmer (2018), and Walker (2009), the authors believe, actionable knowledge is the link between feedback and feedforward. It is this link, the authors continue, which facilitates Feedback-Feedforward learning (FB-FFL).

The research above indicates that feedback plays a significant role in impacting on a learner's learning outcomes, however, the literature also suggests that feedback has some challenges. These challenges, the authors contend based on the research above, generally centres on the lack of a *futurist perspective*. A futurist perspective, the authors suggest, reflects the addition of a feedforward viewpoint. A feedforward viewpoint, the authors continue, highlights a focus on intended learning outcomes, and "how actionable knowledge can demonstrate future intended learning outcomes?".

The authors believe that by focusing on a futurist perspective possibly some of the challenges with feedback could be ameliorated. A futurist perspective, the authors add, could assist in possibly addressing some of the challenges with feedback through an emphasis on FB-FFL. This emphasis on FB-FFL, the authors argue, creates M-DD that facilitates a link between FB-FFL through a multi-dimensional exchange of knowledge or M-DD. Whereby, FB-FFL represents the use of *old* and *new* knowledge to focus and guide future learning experiences, via M-DD, as opposed to, a single dimensional discourse. Single dimensional discourse

represents the use of old knowledge and does not reflect the futurist perspective associated with the application of new knowledge, via a FAK lens.

For example, the teacher uses a learner's demonstration of the proposed intended learning outcomes to determine if the learner has demonstrated the intended learning outcomes. This demonstration of the intended learning outcomes by the learner reflects the learner's understanding of the intended learning outcomes and highlights *old knowledge*. After a review of the old knowledge the teacher is then able to provide the learner with *new knowledge*, which focuses and guides the learner's knowledge to demonstrate their learning of *future* intended learning outcomes. However, this exchange of knowledge impacts on the learning of both the learner and the teacher.

The teacher's learning is impacted upon by the old and new knowledge gleaned from the learner's demonstration of the intended learning outcomes. While, the learner's learning is impacted upon by the old and new knowledge derived from their demonstration of intended learning outcomes, and how this demonstration influences future intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the authors believe that a FB-FFL could assist in meeting some of the challenges with teacher feedback to learners by providing an avenue for the exchange of M-DD, which targets future positive actions and not only past errors, through FAK.

The authors suggest that the old and new knowledge obtained, via FB-FFL, represents an association between *what* has been learnt and *how* what has been learnt will be *applied* in the future, through a focus on *where* this new knowledge takes both the teacher and the learner? Therefore, the authors highlight that the application of FB-FFL could assist in addressing some of the challenges associated with teacher feedback by providing 1) "actionable information" (Schartel, 2012: p. 79), which is 2) capable of addressing learner complaints about feedback not focusing on after-the event outcomes, which come too late to provide any benefit (Sambell, 2011), so finally, 3) the learner can apply actionable information to future tasks (Walker, 2009) with the assistance of the teacher.

By engaging in FB-FFL, the authors argue, there is a link to M-DD and ATL through a number of applications. First, the learner and the teacher engage in three layers of discourse, which facilitates M-DD through a focus on FB-FFL. Second, a focus on FB-FFL encourages an emphasis on FAK that finally, impacts on the teacher's and learner's mindset whereby, there is a focus on "where is this new knowledge taking us (teacher and learner)?", and "how this new knowledge will be applied and demonstrated in future actions?"

With an outline of the link between FB-FFL, M-DD and ATL presented the final section of this paper highlights a conclusion.

3. Conclusion

The authors originally set out to encourage some discussion around Assessment To Learning through the lens of addressing the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner. The authors have attempted to encourage this discussion by focusing on three key terms; M-DD, FB-FFL and FAK. It is not the intent of this paper to provide a panacea to the effectiveness of a teacher's feedback to the learner. However, it is the intention of this paper to encourage teachers and learners to review the use of summative assessment, and to understand the significant role that effective teacher feedback to the learner plays in assisting learners and teachers in value-adding to the in-class learning of the learner.

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