The Nature of Feedback: Investigating How Different Types of Feedback Affect Writing Performance

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Introduction

Although giving feedback is a generally accepted practice in educational settings, specific features of effective feedback have been largely disputed (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Bangert-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991). Moreover, for a complex task such as writing, the conditions that influence feedback effectiveness are likely to be correspondingly complex. The need to understand conditions that encourage writers to implement the feedback they receive is critical to promote improved writing. The goal of the present study is to identify some of these conditions, based on the hypothesis that a small number of mediating causal pathways allows external features to influence the writer's implementation of feedback implementation.

Method

To empirically test the proposed feedback model, feedback given by peers as part of an undergraduate writing assignment was analyzed. An online peer review system, SWoRD, managed the peer review process (Cho & Schunn, 2007).

One hundred and forty pieces of feedback from 24 papers were collected and divided based on differing idea units into 1074 segments. Each segment was coded for each of the following variables:

- Whether praise was included.
- Whether a compliment, a question, or downplay was used as mitigating language.
- Whether a summary was included.
- Whether a problem was described.
- Whether a solution was offered.
- Whether explanations were provided.
- Whether the location of the problem was identified.
- Whether the feedback focused on global or specific issues.
- Whether the author understood the feedback.
- Whether the author agreed with the feedback.
- Whether the feedback was implemented in revision.

Results & Discussion

Two internal mediators were found to significantly effect implementation. Feedback was more likely to be implemented if the problem described was understood and the writer agreed with the solution provided. Six types of feedback were found to effect implementation. Feedback was more likely to be implemented if a solution was provided and if the feedback was at a local level. The writer was more likely to understand the problem if a solution was offered, the location of the problem/solution was given, an explanation to the problem was not provided, or the feedback included a summary. The writer was more likely to agree with the solution if a summary was included or an explanation of the solution was provided.

These findings provide a useful model of how feedback is implemented (see Figure 1). Future work will involve examining these factors more closely by manipulating them in experiments.

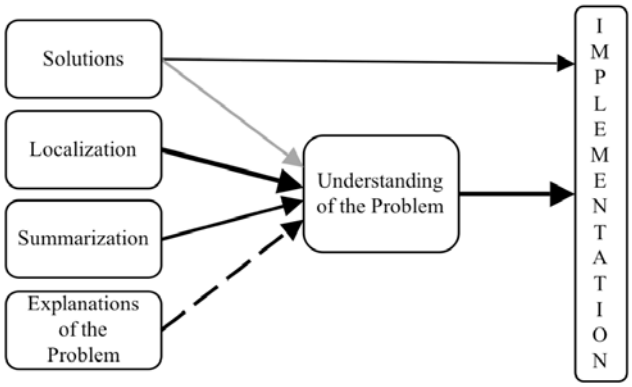

Figure 1: Feedback Model.
Gray line indicates marginal significance (p = .06)
Dotted line indicates negative relationship

References

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