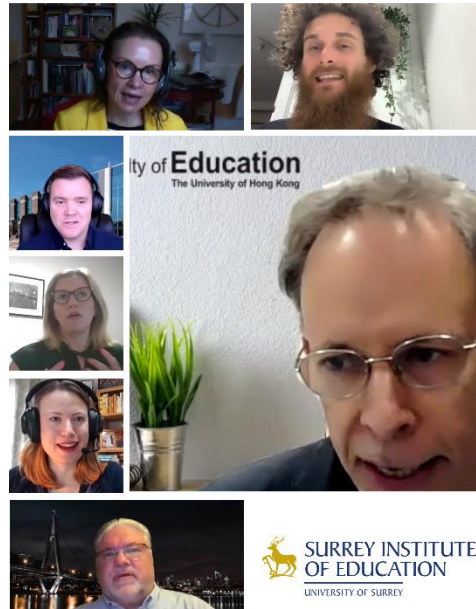**Feedback Literacy: From Education to Professional Practice**
12th and 13th January 2021

Symposium Report
Dr Naomi Winstone

Originally planned as a two-day in-person symposium and workshop in Guildford, the event was adapted into an online symposium held over two consecutive mornings. The event was co-organised by Dr Naomi Winstone (Director of the Surrey Institute of Education) and Dr Edd Pitt (University of Kent). The event was attended by 290 delegates from 20 different countries, including academic researchers as well as practitioners in diverse fields such as education, the NHS, and the police. The symposium consisted of keynotes, parallel sessions, a panel discussion, and networking sessions.

Symposium aims

Feedback literacy is an emerging concept representing the understandings, capacities and dispositions supporting effective use of feedback information. Despite decades of research on how best to deliver feedback in education, healthcare, and the workplace, it is only in recent years that attention has shifted towards understanding how feedback is received and used. There are clear educational implications in supporting students to use feedback effectively. However, there are as-yet unexplored implications in terms of professional practice across disciplines. The aims of the symposium were to facilitate conceptual, empirical, and practical developments in the field of feedback literacy research, by stimulating discussion around the following questions:

1. How do teachers/lecturers develop 'feedback literacy' to design and facilitate effective feedback processes for their students?
2. How do effective feedback processes in healthcare and behaviour change depend upon feedback literacy?
3. What is the function of feedback literacy in workplace appraisal and professional development?

Event themes

Keynotes

Day one was structured around three keynote talks, each of which addressed a different dimension of feedback literacy. First, Professor David Carless from the University of Hong Kong set the scene and tone for the Symposium outlining developments in our understanding of teacher feedback literacy and how learning environments can be designed to initiate change. Providing insights from the healthcare setting, our second keynote from Associate Professor Rola Ajjawi (Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning, Deakin University, Australia) discussed feedback as a sociocultural practice. For many at the symposium this offered a new perspective from long-established feedback practices within healthcare settings. Our final keynote outlined feedback within organisational workplace settings. In this keynote Professor Almuth McDowall (Birkbeck University of London, UK) discussed the transition from education to work and how the coaching model of feedback can be utilised to support employee development. All three keynotes highlighted gaps within our collective understanding of feedback and emphasised that we all had much to learn from these different settings for our own contexts. Key themes emerging from the keynotes included:

- How does the terminology we use to describe feedback processes shape practice? Is it time to rethink our use of language, and can terms used in healthcare and the workplace (e.g., coaching, learning conversations) be effectively applied to educational contexts?

- Is it time for a blurring of the boundaries between who acts as feedback givers, receivers, and generators? Instead, can we recognise a broader range of actors in feedback processes and refocus on the fluidity of roles and responsibilities?

- How can we recognise the micro-interactions that support feedback processes, and feedback exchanges beyond formal settings and mechanisms?

- How can we support teachers, employers, students and employees to recognise the 'gestation period' needed for the impacts of feedback to be realised?

Parallel sessions

The second day of the symposium started with a series of parallel sessions featuring 23 individual presentations which reflected multiple lenses on the topic of feedback literacy. The main focus of the sessions fell into three categories: Designing for the development of feedback literacies; Feedback literacies and professional/workplace practice; and Feedback literacies in teaching practices. The diverse range of contributions offered fresh perspectives on feedback literacy and stimulated much discussion about how contrasting ideas applied in delegates' own contexts.

Panel Discussion

The event closed with a panel discussion featuring the three keynote speakers and two further eminent feedback researchers: Professor David Boud and Professor Phillip Dawson from Deakin University, Australia. David and Phill began the panel discussion with a short summary of their reflections from the event, and then delegates posed questions to the panel. These questions challenged the panellists to consider why there has been such a focus on feedback literacy in recent years, the interaction between humans and technology in feedback processes, and how those in leadership positions can foster the cultural change necessary to reimagine feedback processes.

The detailed debate over such complex topics left delegates with lots to think about, as these evaluations from delegates illustrate:

> *My goodness, my head is reeling - in a positive way! Why can this not be a weekly event?! One of the most useful, interesting, well-organised conferences I've ever attended.*

> *it was a great opportunity to learn about the new trends in feedback research from experts around the world. The fact that the symposium was online is very special in that anyone around the world can attend. Thank you so much!*

> *Attending the symposium made me feel enthusiastic about teaching again in a way that has slightly been beaten out of me by the trials of moving teaching and assessment online.*

> *This seemed like a very friendly, supportive, and innovative symposium, that at the same time supported rigorous discussion of ideas. The range of different ideas and approaches discussed was*

> *impressive and I learned a huge amount even as someone not directly working in a traditional HE assessment feedback field.*

Research and Practice Networking Spaces

Often online events cannot replicate the opportunities for informal discussions and serendipitous meetings that are afforded by a face-to-face event. One of the opportunities we put in place for this event was to offer delegates a space for networking and further informal discussion so they could build new connections. At the end of each day, we facilitated two networking spaces. One breakout room discussed research and the sharing of ideas around potential research projects and collaborations. The second room focused on practice and facilitated conversations about how to translate research into concrete ideas for practice across a variety of domains. We noticed that these online spaces, facilitated by one of the symposium organisers, allowed for doctoral students and early career researchers to pitch their ideas to some of the most well-known researchers in the field. This approach seemed to be particularly effective in enabling newer researchers to feel part of the broader feedback research community:

> *It's been a really wonderful symposium. As a novel researcher I have never been to a more relevant or inspiring event. Thank you for organising.*

> *As a new person in the field and this being my first symposium, I loved how strong the community of feedback researchers is and how welcoming as well. It generated a lot of new ideas while making me question some of my previous thoughts and beliefs.*

Next steps – Outcomes

Contributions from the symposium will be published as a special issue of the journal *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* in late 2021.

The symposium stimulated many discussions around shared interests, and this has already facilitated activities beyond the symposium itself. From one of the parallel sessions, there was a clear synergy in the interests of the group around notions of care in feedback, and a group of 13 researchers from Australia and Europe have forged a collaboration which has already led to a podcast with future research plans in progress.

As an outcome of the symposium, we were able to synthesise the discussions to distil a set of key future research directions, including:

- Capturing longitudinal feedback impacts
- Feedback 'cultures' and international contexts
- Internally-generated feedback
- Connecting the cognitive and sociomaterial in feedback processes
- Bridging the divide between planned and organic feedback exchanges
- What characterises feedback-rich environments?

Acknowledgements