

1986

Developing Awareness of Feedback in Teachers and Students (A Survey of Feedback in Education and Three Teacher-Training Workshops)

Paola Tomai
SIT Graduate Institute

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection

 Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tomai, Paola, "Developing Awareness of Feedback in Teachers and Students (A Survey of Feedback in Education and Three Teacher-Training Workshops)" (1986). *MA TESOL Collection*. 642.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ipp_collection/642

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in MA TESOL Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Developing Awareness of Feedback in Teachers and Students
(A Survey of Feedback in Education and Three Teacher-Training Workshops)

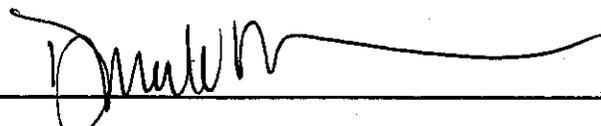
Paola Tomai

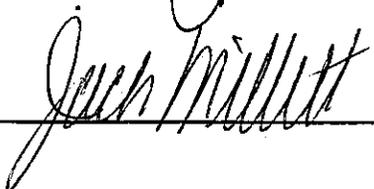
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters of Arts in Teaching degree at the School for International
Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

August 1986

This project by Paola Tomai is accepted in its present form.

Date: August 8, 1986

Project Advisor: 

Project Reader: 

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I would like to thank the following people who have helped me with this project: Donald Freeman, Jack Millet, Janet Goodwin, and Elisa Leigh. Donald who helped me clarify my ideas and sharpen my focus and whose patience, firmness and encouragement guided me through the laborious process by which this paper has finally taken shape. Jack for his assistance with the workshops: his questions, suggestions, and openness in sharing his experience were invaluable. Janet and Elisa for their help with the difficult task of proofreading that they accomplished with competence and friendship.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of feedback and three teacher-training workshops on how to obtain student feedback. It is designed to assist teacher trainers in raising awareness of feedback in trainees.

Chapter I explores the concept of feedback and its development, and its meaning in education. The focus is on student feedback as the message students give about their learning. Chapter II analyzes ongoing and structured feedback as the main features of student feedback. The importance of feedback in raising students' awareness of their learning process is also stressed. Further, the characteristics a teacher needs in order to work with feedback from the students are considered. Chapter III gives a brief presentation of the context in which the workshops are to be taught and the rationale for them. Chapter IV consists of a series of three workshops on structured feedback addressed to Italian teacher trainees. The workshops are respectively designed (1) to raise their awareness of structured feedback, (2) to have them experience how to work with questions in a structured feedback activity, (3) to propose other activities useful to get structured feedback.

ERIC Descriptors

FEEDBACK CIJE:1,374 RIE:1,204 GC:710

SN A response within a system that returns to the input a part of the output, thus influencing the continued activity or productivity of that system

VF Knowledge of Results

RT Cybernetics

Performance

Reinforcement

STUDENT TEACHER RELATIONSHIP CIJE:3,734 RIE:2,588 GC:310

VF Student Teacher Interaction

RT Teacher Response

SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING CIJE:4,387 RIE:4,258 GC:450

RT Error Analysis (Language)

English (Second Language)

LEARNING EXPERIENCE CIJE:963 RIE:704 GC:110

RT Experiential Learning

LEARNING PROCESSES CIJE:3,684 RIE:2,844 GC:110

RT Questioning Techniques

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I: FEEDBACK.....	3
From Cybernetics to Education.....	3
A Personal Definition.....	11
CHAPTER II: STUDENT FEEDBACK.....	14
How It Works.....	14
Ongoing and Structured Feedback.....	15
What Teachers Need to Obtain Student Feedback....	17
Attitudes.....	18
Awareness.....	19
Knowledge.....	20
Skills.....	22
CHAPTER III: THE CONTEXT FOR THE WORKSHOPS.....	25
Italian School System.....	25
The Teacher Training Course Structure.....	26
Teachers' Attitude.....	28
Rationale.....	29
CHAPTER IV: THE WORKSHOPS.....	31
Introduction to the Workshops.....	31
Workshop I: Awareness of Structured Feedback.....	32
Workshop II: Questions for Structured Feedback...	40
Workshop III: Ways to Get Feedback.....	46
CONCLUSION.....	51
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	53
Works Cited.....	53
References.....	54

APPENDIX A.....	Page 57
APPENDIX B.....	58
APPENDIX C.....	59

	Page
APPENDIX A: Zahorik, John A. "Classroom Feedback Behavior of Teachers." <u>The Journal of Education</u> , 62 (1968)....	57
APPENDIX B: Cortese, Giuseppina. "Enthusiastic Teacher Training Efforts Lend Aid to EFL Instructors in Italy." <u>TESOL Newsletter</u> , 18, No. 4 (August 1984).....:	58
APPENDIX C: Another Point of View. <u>Utne Reader</u> (June/July 1968).....	59

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is a field I have always wanted to explore. I wanted to analyze its meaning, its origin, and the reasons it has been applied to education. I knew that I was using it in my teaching, but I was not clear about when and how, and I wanted to be more aware of what I was doing.

I have chosen to focus my thesis on student feedback as the information the students give about their learning. The topic originated in the strong belief I have always had in a student-centered approach in teaching. My year at the School for International Training as a student in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program has strengthened this point of view, challenging me to look at it from the specific perspective of the subordination of teaching to learning (Gattegno 1970)¹ In fact, this project has moved from my teaching to my learning and from collecting materials through research to personal reflection.

My second concern was to produce something that could be useful in my teaching and teacher training in Italy. I wanted to prove to myself that I could move from theory to practice and arrive at a concrete proposal. My final decision was to design a series of workshops I could utilize in the teacher training course in which I will be working when I return to Italy. This choice is derived from my previous experience with the same course, which I taught with colleagues in 1983. The theme of that course was "Focus

¹The subordination of teaching to learning is the central theme of the Approaches Course in the MAT program at the School for International Training.

on the Learner." I thought that feedback would be a good sequel and would provide a context within which I could further explore this topic.

I soon realized that feedback was too vast a field to be considered in its entirety and decided to narrow my focus. Thus, after a brief survey of the meaning of feedback in education, this paper focuses on student feedback as the message students give about their learning. Ongoing and structured feedback are then analyzed as the main components of student feedback. The importance of feedback in raising students' awareness is also discussed and the characteristics which a teacher needs in order to obtain feedback from the students are considered.

The final chapter consists of a series of three workshops on structured feedback addressed to Italian teacher trainees. The workshops are designed to raise their awareness of structured feedback, to have them experience how to work with questions in a structured feedback activity, and to propose other activities useful for getting structured feedback.

The process I have gone through in writing this paper has been very useful to me. It has forced me to prepare something concrete, but supported by theory. It has pushed me to research but also to rely on my experience. In short, it has made clear that both theory and practice are necessary sources of information to draw on in research.

CHAPTER I

Today feedback is a very common word which has been given many different meanings and is used in many different fields. Curious about the origin of the word, especially about its meaning and use in education, I have looked for material in that discipline. Among the many articles and publications I have read, it has been difficult to choose the ones that best represent the results of my inquiry. However, the few definitions that follow do give an idea of the main meanings feedback has acquired in education since Norbert Wiener introduced the concept in the nineteen-fifties.

Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, is generally considered to be the father of feedback (1954, 1961). C. Kyle Packer and Tony Packer (1959) were then among the first who introduced feedback in education. Since that time, Zahorik and Gattegno have dealt with the two major aspects of feedback in this field: the feedback the teacher gives the students (Zahorik, 1968) and the feedback the students give the teacher (Gattegno, 1978). A suggestion from a military training situation helps me move from teaching to teacher training, the latter being the field I will focus on in my workshops. Finally, I give the definition I have chosen to use in this paper.

One has to go back more than a century to find the first people who wrote on feedback, namely control engineers and physicists. It was not until the early nineteen-fifties, however, that the first scientist connected feedback to the field of information, thus founding the science of cybernetics. Cybernetics, the study of messages, in particular the effective

messages of control, has gained great importance in recent decades.

Feedback is a term that Norbert Wiener borrowed from control engineers. Classical examples of feedback are the governor of a steam engine (Watt, 1788) and the thermostat. As Packer and Packer (1959:134) explain:

...including feedback in a system means that we use part of our output (the power of our steam engine or the heat of our furnace) to cause a change (in the flyballs of the governor or in the contacts of the thermostat) which, in turn, causes our system to stay within certain bounds.

Wiener gives us a clear model of feedback as part of the control system of an elevator. From this example, we can understand the principle of feedback in general:

...the release for opening the door [must] be dependent on the fact that the elevator is actually at the door; otherwise something might have detained it and the passengers might step into the empty shaft. This control of the machine on the basis of its actual performance rather than its expected performance is known as feedback and involves sensory members which are actuated by motor members and perform the function of tell-tales or monitor that is of elements which indicate a performance (Wiener 1954:24).

This definition provides very clear details about how feedback works in a machine, how the function of feedback is to control a process, how actual performance as opposed to intended performance is the focus. "Control," according to Wiener, "...is nothing but the sending of messages which effectively change the behavior of the recipient" (1954:8).

Wiener further defines feedback in a way which is closer to education and fills the gap between machines and men: "...feedback is the property of

being able to adjust future conduct by past performance" (1954:33). He goes on to explain that we may have a higher order of feedback in which past experience regulates whole policies of behavior and not only specific movements. One of the areas in which this "policy-feedback" may manifest itself is learning, in particular the learning of languages.

This concept can be related to recent language acquisition theories which hold that good learners are the ones who work through trial-and-error, who guess, make inferences, and so on (Richards 1971, 1974, Rubin 1975). Language learners are engaged in the task of discovering the system of the target language. They formulate hypotheses on how the language works, basing them on their present knowledge of the target language. They then try out these hypotheses; the new data they obtain from feedback on their mistakes helps them formulate subsequent hypotheses which are closer to the target language. Some language learners are eager to guess because they recognize that there are patterns they already know which may be helpful in expressing new situations. Others use the knowledge of their native language as a reference point for the target language. These examples show that learners rely on the fact that languages have an underlying pattern one can refer to and that they can use the information that feedback gives them to adjust to those patterns.

The following statement by Wiener addresses the way feedback works and can again be applied to language learning:

When we desire a motion to follow a given pattern, the difference between this pattern and the actually performed motion is used as a new input to cause the part regulated to move in such a way as to bring its motion closer to that given pattern (1961:6).

If the "given pattern" is seen as the structure of the target language, and the "actually performed motion" as the actual performance of the student, the "difference" Wiener is talking about is the gap the student has to fill in order to improve his performance. It may be, for instance, a mistake that can be turned into a new input if the teacher knows how to work with it, so that the student's performance can more closely approach the target language, in Wiener's terms, "given pattern."¹ Every time the student learns something, the gap gets smaller; to achieve this result, the teacher works with the student's "performed motion," the feedback she gets from him.

Having considered the origin of feedback, the next step is to examine its application in the field of education. One of the first relevant articles to link feedback and education was one by C. Kyle Packer and Tony Packer. In "Cybernetics, Information Theory, and Educative Process" (1959), the two authors ask themselves if cybernetics has any relevance to education. In their speculations on the different aspects of cybernetics, and especially in feedback, they discover very stimulating analogies to the teaching-learning process. Speaking of feedback, they say that it can be a concept useful to the teaching-learning process (1959:134). In fact the learner continually acts on the information he is given on his actual performance, therefore, he needs to know how he actually performs. In fact, they write:

¹ From this point on I will refer to the student as "he" and to the teacher and the teacher trainer as "she."

Not only the correctness or incorrectness, but the deviation, the amount and direction of error, is essential to the system involving feedback (....) It is thus clear that marking, grading, testing, and so on are rather poor feedback design in the teaching-learning system (1959:135-36).

The Packers stress the link between teacher and learner and relate it to feedback stating that: "...it should be emphasized that the teacher is often the 'mechanism' by which the feedback loop is completed" (1959:136). The authors also underline the need for feedback messages or "return messages," as they call them, in the teaching-learning relationship. In fact, in a communicative situation such as the one between teacher and student, feedback is essential since effective control necessitates the acknowledgment our orders have been received, understood, and obeyed (Wiener 1954:16). They consider different forms of feedback, from the very simplest "right" and "wrong," "do" and "don't" to more complex ones and suggest that we could contrast these with the more complex feedback on how the performance could be improved.

The Packers have inspired many teachers and researchers to work on cybernetics and education and specifically on feedback. However, they only supply examples of feedback from the teacher's point of view. They do not deal with the kind of information which comes from the learners, even recognize that some information is provided. Is the learner's performance the only feedback they give us? What does performance mean? How does the teacher read it? They speak of teacher's information, or feedback: grading, testing, simple or complex forms. The more I analyze the concept of feedback in education, the more I believe that both teacher and student feedback should be studied very carefully.

The Packers may be considered among the pioneers of the use of the term "feedback" in education. Many other researchers and teachers have followed their work with two main aspects of feedback emerging in the next two decades: the feedback the teacher gives the students, and the feedback the students give the teacher. The following two definitions represent the two different points of view. Zahorik (1968) represents the huge number of researchers and teachers who have studied teacher feedback, whereas Gattegno (1978) represents a smaller number who have been working in the area of student feedback.

In Zahorik's articles, feedback is clearly defined as teacher feedback. While in the first one (1968) the focus is definitely on the feedback the teachers give their students, in the second (1970), there is a shift to the students' interpretation of the teacher message. That is a first shift from teacher feedback to student feedback.

John A. Zahorik in his article, "Classroom Feedback Behavior of Teachers" (1968), explores the nature of teacher-verbal feedback during the teaching-learning act. In this study, "teacher-verbal feedback" means teachers' oral remarks about the adequacy or the correctness of a pupil's statement solicited or initiated in the development of subject matter (1968:147). He strongly believes that teacher verbal feedback can have a considerable effect on the pupil's learning process.

After analyzing different types of feedback (see Appendix 1), the author questions their meaning to students. In a further study: "Pupil's Perception of Teachers' Verbal Feedback" (1970), pupils were asked about the responses that teachers made to them. The results show that the types of feedback frequently used are not the ones that provide the most

reinforcement-motivation and cognitive information. As a consequence, the author suggests that teachers use a wide variety of feedback techniques rather than only a limited range.

Both of Zahorik's articles are important contributions to the study of feedback. The first, because he gives us a specific description and categorization of different types of teacher feedback. These have been a reference point for other researchers and a further step in the study of feedback: The second article is useful because he considers the students' responses to the teacher feedback to be an essential part of feedback. In fact, student feedback is the other side of the issue. One of the most representative researchers in this view is Caleb Gattegno.

In his contribution to the Educational Solutions Newsletter "On Feedback" (April 1978), Gattegno describes how he worked on feedback with a group of British teachers and, among other things, he clearly points out:

- that to be responsible to our students we have to be 'capable of processing more and more of the feedback we receive from them.'
- that 'among the visible items of feedback are the mistakes students are making' and that '...mistakes could be perceived as an essential part of the feedback' and gain positive meaning.
- ...that it is possible to work in such a way that, while the students work on the challenge offered by the teacher, the teacher works on what the students are doing, hence getting feedback all the time...(1978:3).

"What the students are doing" may here be interpreted as the "actual performance" which Wiener defines as the focus of feedback (1954:24).

Gattegno considers the learning process of the students to be a primary concern of the teacher. He is very adamant on this point: "...to teach

without any concern for what students experience is bad teaching; even crazy!" (1978:2). He doesn't even hint at teacher feedback, he simply speaks of "teaching": good teaching and bad teaching. Good teaching is characterized "by the teacher responding exactly to what the students are in need of in the here and now, when facing some challenge put to them by the teacher or the curriculum, or a test" (1978:3). The simplicity and at the same time, the complexity of the above statements bring me back to the difficulty I had in focusing on what feedback meant to me. They also show that working with student feedback is essential if we want to be good teachers.

The final reference is to a training situation where student feedback is used. The source of the following quotation, a military research institute, may be unusual, but it is captivating because of its clarity. Billy L. Burnside, et al., in their Training Feedback Handbook (1983:1-2) write:

In the context of Army training, feedback is any information about the results of test administered to personnel enrolled in a training program, observations of training exercises, or opinions of participants in the training process....

Feedback is crucial to the training process: without it there is no way of determining when training is effective and when and what changes are needed....

Feedback should also be objective or based on observable evidence, rather than subjective or based just on opinion.

The authors point out a few by now well-known characteristics of feedback: that feedback should provide input necessary for evaluation of the effectiveness of training and that feedback should indicate the changes that are needed to improve the programs. Intriguing, however, is the emphasis on the objectivity such feedback should have. Do not rely on personal,

subjective opinions, try to be as objective as you can, observe, and report evidence say the authors. This sounds sensible but not easy. However, to go back to Wiener's definition of feedback, to be objective is nothing more than to look at the actual performance, not at the expected one, and to build from there. This objectivity can also be related to Gattegno's concern about focusing the teaching on what the students are doing not on what they should be doing (1978:3). There is, of course, still some subjectivity left, which may refer mainly to how people personally carry on these interactions and work with the two-way feedback.

Having introduced other people's ideas on feedback, I feel ready to say something on the same topic myself. Reading many authors' works has been useful and enlightening. It made me realize that the term "feedback" needs to be defined very clearly since it has been given so many meanings already.

I see the teaching/learning processes as closely intertwined; they are form of teamwork between the teacher and the student. Each helps the other articulate what is going on. What happens, in fact, is that the student works by himself and sends a message to the teacher. This message has to be decoded. The teacher, as the receiver of the message, has to look for the key of that code. Sometimes the message is clear and linear and its interpretation is easy. Other times the message is more complicated and can even be hidden, and the receiver needs considerable skills to decode it. Once she has interpreted the student's message, the teacher sends her response which has in turn to be decoded by the student.

This interdependence between teacher and student is also what Wiener calls "coupling": teacher and student "...become part of a communication

system which entails reciprocity, dependence, and continual interaction" (1961:163). Furthermore, Vivian Zamel puts it very clearly when she writes that "while the teacher instructs, the teacher learns about what must be done next, and while the student learns, the student gives instruction about what information is lacking" (1981:148).

Both teacher and student feedback are necessary in this view of the teaching-learning process. Therefore, these two kinds of feedback need to be explored in depth. If I look at the two of them separately, I can see that the feedback the teacher gives covers a vast area; in fact, it covers the whole teaching process. Student feedback, on the other hand, complex though it is, may still be more easily channeled and categorized both from a theoretical and methodological point of view. In fact, language learning theories provide specific hypotheses about the information the students give in the process of their learning. As a consequence, teachers can be prompted to think of different ways of getting that information. Another consideration is even more important. There is substantial literature on teacher feedback and very little on student feedback. This is evidence of the fact that it is still rare to find teachers who focus on the learners and not on their own teaching.

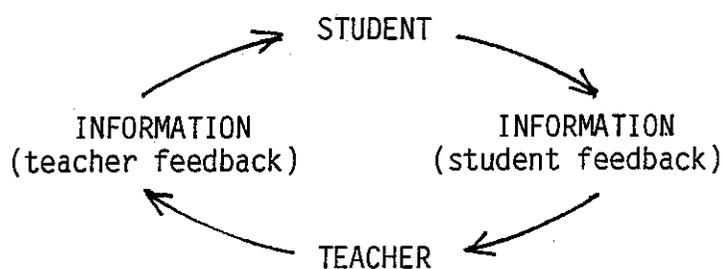
If she believes in a student centered approach, a teacher must consider her students' needs a priority; the feedback the students give her is an essential step towards that goal. Moreover, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher to give feedback if she does not first analyze the feedback she receives. Therefore, though aware of the importance of teacher feedback, the definition of feedback I will work with in this paper is the following: feedback is the message the students give regarding their

learning. The students may or may not be aware of the messages they give. The feedback students give may depend a great deal on their personality, on their role in class, and on their relationship with the teacher. In addition, feedback may depend on sociological factors such as the varying cultures that students and teachers may come from. Student feedback as defined above, and its implications in the teaching/learning process, will be considered and explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

In this chapter, I will analyze my definition of feedback and its implications in the teaching-learning process. I will point out the difference between ongoing and structured feedback (Freeman and Graves in Broderick 1981:14), how feedback works, and what information it gives. I will stress the importance of feedback in raising students' awareness of the learning process. Finally, since this paper is addressed to teachers, I will consider the characteristics teachers need in order to work with feedback from their students.

Let me begin by reexamining my definition of feedback as the message students give about their learning. Its constituents are: the sender of the message, the message or information, and the receiver of the message. If we call the sender the student, and the receiver, the teacher, feedback is the information the student gives which the teacher can use to modify her own message. The pattern here is a cycle which can be represented graphically in the following manner:



Students provide two distinct types of feedback: ongoing and structured.² Ongoing feedback is the continuous behavior of students in class, including their target language utterances. A correct sentence, a mistake, a question, a sensible answer, even silence, are very important clues for a teacher. Teachers are bombarded with this kind of information every classroom minute. How do they use it? How much time and energy do they actually spend in observing and listening to their students? These are important questions teachers must ask themselves. By developing skills in observing and decoding their students' messages, teachers can become more focused on their teaching and therefore more efficient.

On occasion, however, even the best observer and listener needs well-articulated, explicit feedback in order to be effective. In these cases, a teacher has to provoke the information she needs. She has to find the key to unlock specific information in her students about their learning. This is called structured feedback. It is "structured" because it is a specific activity to cause the students to reflect on their learning. The activities or exercises can be many, but the aim is the same: for the teacher to get information about the students' learning.

The information teachers obtain from feedback may refer to different aspects of the learning process. On the one hand, it can be information about the conditions of learning. For example, a student expresses his need for silence or his preference for group as opposed to individual work.

²I am indebted to Donald Freeman and Kathleen Graves for the distinction between ongoing and structured feedback. I was first exposed to this definition when they were my teachers at SIT. The core of their ideas on feedback is described in Broderick 1981.

He may get frustrated because he needs to see the words written or need more time to work with a given structure. He may also be afraid of the teacher's judgement. These conditions are more often revealed by structured feedback. On the other hand, there is also information about the student's performance. A wrong tense, a mispronunciation, an incorrect use of a vocabulary item, can all be good clues for the teacher to make use of. This behavior is revealed by ongoing feedback. Both kinds of information are invaluable resources in helping the teacher focus her teaching on the students' needs.

The importance of both the teacher's and the student's awareness of this process must be stressed. Awareness is an intrinsic part of the teaching-learning process. It involves using the whole self, mind and body, to be alert, critical, and receptive in order to realize what is going on while one learns or teaches. Feedback is no doubt a powerful tool for moving towards awareness. Feedback, especially structured feedback, uses questions or activities that force the student to reflect on the process of his learning. More specifically, he can recognize how physical and environmental conditions may affect with his learning, what his reaction is to different techniques, what kind of exercises are more useful to him, in short, what his best learning conditions are and how his mind functions when involved in different activities. A student has to develop the ability to observe himself and to listen to himself while he learns. Observing others and finding out differences and similarities may also help.

The more a student is aware of his own way of learning, the better he learns and the sooner he acquires the personal skills necessary to become autonomous in his learning (Freeman and Graves in Broderick 1981:15). This

is a very slow, never-ending process which takes both students and teachers deeper and deeper into the exploration of themselves as learners. Being aware of the learning process is also part of a teacher's competence.

So far the way student feedback works and the kind of information it provides have been explored. Further, I have taken into consideration students' awareness of their learning and the integral role of feedback as an essential aspect of the learning process.

The next step will be to describe the characteristics that a teacher should possess in order to read and trigger student feedback. They reflect a belief in a student-centered approach; I see it as the teacher's responsibility to acquire them. A teacher needs both personal and professional qualities to be up to this task when, together with a series of skills, need to be learned, developed, practiced, and refined through experience. In analyzing the above-mentioned qualities, four aspects present in the teacher persona will be considered: knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness.³ These four elements are a way of viewing not only feedback, but teaching as a whole. They will be discussed only in relation to the teacher working with student feedback, without separating ongoing and structured feedback at this point.

Knowledge of the subject matter and skills in dealing with methods, techniques, and materials are an essential part of teaching. Yet the attitude and awareness a teacher needs in her teaching are also essential and represent a kind of glue which permeates the whole act of teaching and

³ This paradigm has been elaborated by the MAT faculty and it is used at SIT. I personally found it very useful (MAT Handbook 1984:2).

without which knowledge and skills may be of very little use. The process of the teacher working on these four elements is a never-ending and very personal one. It makes teaching a challenging profession. Even if these elements are listed separately, I want to stress the fact that they are really intertwined and support each other, awareness being the one that unifies the other three.

Attitudes

First of all, a teacher needs to be open and ready to observe and listen to her students. This is a major shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom. Often the teacher need not do anything special to obtain feedback from her students. In fact, students give us feedback in class every day, every minute, through their behavior. But in a teacher-centered class, student feedback may be there without the teacher being able to hear or see it. Listening and observing also require a special skill which has to be learned. I will deal with it later on in this chapter. If she wants her students to give her verbal feedback, a teacher may have to be silent and let them express themselves, or better yet, she has to create that special situation where they feel comfortable enough to talk and take risks.

She should avoid preconceptions or prejudices about her students and their ways of learning. Students' learning styles are often a result of how they have been taught and often linked to their cultural backgrounds. Cultural sensitivity not only means being open to different cultures, but also to local cultures, and to different social classes, different sexes, different ages. Finally, a teacher needs to be sensitive and responsive to each student, to the class as a group, and to trying to balance these two aspects.

Awareness

The above-mentioned attitudes may become almost natural if the teacher is aware that the students have something to tell her which is useful in her teaching and for their learning. Awareness of the different learning styles of her students has to be a primary concern of a teacher together with an awareness of their cultural differences. Giving verbal feedback to the teacher, for example, may be considered impolite by students from certain cultures. The teacher should also be aware of the environmental and physical conditions students need to be better learners and should suggest ways to improve them.

The teacher needs to be aware of the students' real message and of the fact that the message may also be false or that she may have misinterpreted it. What about those students who do not participate in class? They may have psychological problems such as being shy, or cultural ones such as not being used to interrupting the teacher. The teacher may feel they do not want to participate and may decide not to force them. Yet a teacher has to wonder if this is always the right response.

What about those students who tell the teacher that they have learned something, but make the same mistake over and over again? This is a typical example where the teacher receives two conflicting messages. In fact, when she works with structured feedback, the students tell her that they have learned, yet when she listens to ongoing feedback, the students repeat the same mistake. In this case, they may have understood a particular feature of the language, but understanding is not learning. In fact, they have not assimilated it yet, and they need more practice to get to the point when they use that feature correctly.

Thus the teacher has to be aware of what the students need in terms of their own knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills, so that she can find out how to help them. In addition, the teacher should be aware of the fact that feedback is a very complex act that depends on many factors and variables and that she cannot do everything. One thing she can do is to deepen her personal work with awareness, to find out what skills she needs most in dealing with it, and to enlarge her knowledge of the field.

Knowledge

Since the student-teacher relationship has always existed, feedback has also always existed, although teachers and students have often been unaware of its potential. When teachers use feedback, they may draw on different sources: their linguistic studies, their personal experience in learning a foreign language, the way they were taught, or their knowledge of what is most effective for them as learners.

Among the large number of linguistic studies, there are always a few which because of their importance, stand out as landmarks in the field; these are common heritage. Then there are others which are chosen and used by the different schools as representative of their own philosophy; these are the heritage of the teachers who attended or gravitated to those schools. Finally, there are some readings which appeal particularly to individual teachers; these are their personal sources of inspiration. A teacher's cultural baggage is very often the result of all the sources mentioned filtered through personal experience.

Her experience as a student, or more importantly, as a student of a foreign language, may have changed her perspective of the learning process. Her positive and negative learning experiences may have influenced her

teaching and pushed her to try a different approach with her students. Observing colleagues may have offered further insights.

Therefore, both theoretical and personal knowledge and experience are to be considered when looking at a teacher's background; in fact, when working with feedback a teacher draws more or less consciously on all the aspects mentioned above. Her knowledge is there, it has been built up year after year, and it is a whole which is difficult to dissect.

All the same, we may want to see what a teacher really needs to know about the learning process in general and learning a language in particular, if she wants to work with feedback in an effective way. She need not be familiar with all the research in the field. She certainly needs to keep up with the main findings and their implications for teaching. This will help her recognize her students' learning styles and arrive at appropriate solutions.

Two examples of research are very useful for providing insights on feedback: one deals with the different learning styles, and the other with mistakes. The first stresses the importance of the studies of the brain when considering different learning styles. In teaching this implies the use of techniques compatible with left or right hemisphere learning styles of the students (Lenneberg 1967, Krashen 1973, Seliger 1982). The second very interesting example concerns error analysis and its implications for teaching. Pit Corder (1981:54) explains how students work with the trial and error strategy, making hypotheses which are closer to the target language every time they get feedback from the teacher. He then concludes, speaking from the teacher's point of view, that at any given point we give feedback:

...by comparing the learner's code as we have found it with the standard description of the target language's code and identifying the differences. It is the account of the precise nature of these differences which gives us the information which enables us to 'correct' the language learner's errors in a systematic fashion in our remedial teaching.

What a teacher can do at this point is to be a researcher herself and to work with the hypotheses her students present her. This can be productive both for her and her students. In fact, if she is familiar with the theories which explain what is behind the students' linguistic behavior a teacher can be very specific in identifying what their problems are and in setting tasks for them.

Skills

Having considered attitudes, awareness, and knowledge, we now move onto the skills a teacher needs in order to deal with student feedback keeping in mind that they are strictly related to these three areas. Two skills that predominate in ongoing feedback are observing and listening. It is very difficult for a teacher to listen and observe carefully while she is involved in an activity with the students. Therefore it is useful if she gives students a task which frees her to observe their performance (Gattegno, 1978:3).

A good observer may single out non-verbal feedback as a precious piece of information. A teacher may take notes and utilize them afterwards herself or share her findings with the students, both individually and as a group. She may focus on one or two points she thinks need to be checked with her students: for example, pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, use of vocabulary. This can also help isolate problems that need to be dealt with

and focus on them one at a time. A teacher can use her observations to recognize where the priority lies remedial teaching, for example.

Cybernetics states that the information people give and receive through feedback has to be very precise, and very unambiguous if it is to succeed. For this reason, another skill the teacher needs is to be able to elicit feedback from the students if they cannot supply it by themselves; in other words, she needs to provoke structured feedback. To do so, one technique is to ask questions in such a way that the students are slowly guided to give the needed information. Again this is something which has to be learned; it is a skill which is focused on in the second workshop of the last chapter. A teacher needs to work with feedback in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and this means that she has to look for specific techniques for each of these activities.

However, the most important skill a teacher needs when dealing with student feedback is how to work with mistakes. In fact, the principal messages teachers receive from students are their mistakes. Here the teacher's task is to decide which ones to correct, and when and how to correct them. Again this implies a knowledge of how learners use the language and the awareness that mistakes may be attempts the students make to expand their own knowledge of the language.

Other issues may arise according to different teaching situations. The teacher has to decide when and how often to use feedback. This depends on frequency and length of class meetings, on the students' level of proficiency, on their age, and, above all, on how much the teacher wants to focus on feedback in her teaching. The teacher has to decide whether the native language or the target language is to be used while doing a feedback

activity. This depends both on the students' proficiency in English and on the complexity of the activity. The teacher has to decide whether to work with the whole class, with small groups or individually. This again depends on the situation.⁴

It is understood that feedback may be an ongoing activity in the teacher-student relationship, but that there are also moments when it must be elicited through use of structured activities, as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter. It is also clear that certain attitudes, awareness, knowledge, and skills that have been considered above grow and become refined if the teacher is open to reflect on them. The more a teacher works with feedback, the more she is able to give and receive it from her students in an effective way.

⁴The listed issues are a result of my experience as a teacher and teacher trainer. I acknowledge that most of them are also considered by Freeman and Graves in their presentation of feedback in Broderick, 1981.

CHAPTER III

Before introducing the workshops I have prepared, I think it is appropriate to include a few words on the context in which they are to be taught and the reasons why they may be useful in this situation. The Italian school system is presented, with specific attention to the types of schools and the teachers to whom the workshops are addressed. Then the features of the teacher training course within which the workshops will be given are outlined. Trainees and trainers are introduced and an explanation of the syllabus is provided. The Italian language teachers' attitude is described in both its positive and negative aspects. Finally the rationale for the workshops is presented as a possible answer to some of the teachers' most relevant problems.

Italian School System.

A teacher of languages in Italian secondary schools teaches 18 hours per week and has four to six classes with 25 to 34 students per class. Students are taught a foreign language, not necessarily English, three hours per week in their junior school years: 11 to 13. Junior school is compulsory and has the same syllabus all over the country. The foreign language syllabus can be generally defined as national-functional. At the end of the junior school years, students have a rather easy written and oral exam with their own teachers and an inspector in which their functional ability in the language is tested.

Students are taught a foreign language two to five hours per week in their junior and senior high school years: 14 to 18. High school is not compulsory but most of the school age population attend. There are three major types of high schools: vocational, technical, and academically oriented. Vocational schools usually have fewer foreign language classes than technical schools, but both use syllabi which are English for Special Purposes (ESP) oriented. Licei, the third type of school, focus almost exclusively on grammar and literature. High school students must pass a nationwide exam specifically designed for each type of school and administered by state teachers.

A teacher is relatively free to adapt the syllabus and to select textbooks to best suit her students' needs. Good teaching material and equipment are often available to her. She can keep the same class for three years in junior schools, and for five years in high schools.

Teachers must have a Masters degree from an Italian university in the language and literature they teach. To obtain tenure, they have to pass a state written and oral exam where their knowledge of the language, literature, methodology and pedagogical theories is tested. Teachers are not supervised and do not have any methodological or pedagogical training.

The Teacher Training Course Structure⁵

Progetto Speciale Per le Lingue Straniere (PSLS) is the teacher training course I will be working for. It is an experimental inservice

⁵ See Appendix B. It consists of an article by G. Cortese from TESOL Newsletter (August 1984). It describes the teaching and teacher training situation in Italy, with special reference to EFL.

project in existence for seven years (for teachers) organized by the Ministry of Public Instruction, addressed, thus far to English, French, and German teachers in Italian public schools.

The trainees are recruited through local Boards of Education. They are offered a voluntary one hundred hour course which is held after school and is free. It is a three hour once a week course which also includes a week of all day intensive classes. It is held in many cities and towns all over the country.

The trainers are tenured public school teachers who teach a PSLS course in addition to their regular classes. They have been trained abroad and keep up to date in Italy through regional and national meetings. The English trainers receive preparatory training from the Commission of Educational and Cultural Exchange between Italy and the United States. A group of American Fulbright teachers assists them once a month. Each trainer usually works with fifteen to twenty trainees. I taught a course in Milan in 1983-1984 to junior high school teachers. Both planning the activities with my colleagues and working with the trainees gave me valuable insights which have been of great use in my teaching.

The syllabus is very similar nationwide. It is prepared by the trainers in the teacher training seminars and adapted to the needs of the trainees each year. It is oriented toward a communicative syllabus with special sessions on text analysis and ESP for high school teachers. There is an introductory section where the language programs of the school system are studied and discussed. Most of it, however, is focused on teaching material prepared in such a way as to stimulate the trainees to be active, to have them evaluate their teaching experience, have them prepare and adapt

materials.

The content is very often organized by the four skill areas which are taught in an integrated way. The material is designed to develop a gradual awareness in the trainees of the various strategies, theories, ideas, textbooks related to it. Readings and guided discussions and activities also help the trainees have clearer ideas of the theoretical background of language teaching and of the status of the research in the field.

The novelty of the course is its emphasis on experiential learning. The trainees try an activity themselves as learners, discuss it, adapt it to their types of school and students, try it as teachers and report the results to the group. The group becomes a support for the trainees, a place where theory and practice can finally co-exist and be discussed because they are both necessary to the teacher. The trainees come to this conclusion through personal experience which makes it even more valid.

The main problems with courses like these are bureaucracy, which may slow the recruiting process, and scheduling because the trainees must make time for the course in addition to school and family responsibilities. However, the situation is encouraging because most of the trainees, trainers and Fulbright teachers are very motivated and a real help to each other. The demand for such courses is also still very high.

Teachers' Attitude

Language teachers, more than others, are usually open to change and improve their teaching. Proof of this is the great number of teachers who have taken part in the many conventions, courses, and meetings for teachers of languages that have been held in Italy in the last few years. Italian

teachers do not like lectures where they must be passive audience. On the contrary, they are eager to receive and discuss practical suggestions for their teaching. This is so strong that sometimes even interesting and enlightening theoretical lectures are criticized because they cannot be used the next day in the classroom.

Looking a little closer at the daily activities of those teachers, most of their time and energy is spent in preparing, planning, teaching, and correcting their students' papers. One of their worries is to find new ready-made techniques for the next day. Teachers are also very often frustrated with the unsatisfactory results of their teaching and blame the students. At this point, teachers feel the need to change something because their activities do not work, but they do not know what has to be changed.

Rationale for the Workshops

As one can see from what I have described so far, teachers do not spend much time and energy in observing their students and listening to them while they are learning. They also do not spend much time and energy in figuring out what can be changed after they get information from the students.

My experience as a teacher tells me that the information students give me is one of the most valuable resources for my teaching. Spending time and energy acquiring the skill of interpreting that information can be very valuable. It can make teaching easier. In fact, one can recycle one's material instead of always looking for new solutions. Reflection on one's own teaching may lead the trainees to new insights and to a more focused way of looking at the job. This is why I would like to take advantage of the situation I have described and use those teachers' attitudes to trigger

their awareness of the teaching-learning process.

Feedback is definitely one of the tools to work toward that objective. Looking for information from their students and adjusting their teaching to it will help them be much clearer and less frustrated in what they teach and how they do that. They will also develop a personal view on teaching that will grow within themselves along with their experience.

CHAPTER IV

The following three workshops focus on structured feedback. They will be given in Italy within the Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere inservice teacher training course, addressed to Italian junior and senior high school teachers of English.

Each workshop is three hours long. The first session opens with a mini-lecture which introduces the trainees to the concept of feedback and narrows the focus of the workshops to structured feedback. The teacher trainer then explains that the workshops will specifically deal with structured feedback. She presents structured feedback as a concrete activity often neglected by teachers. She introduces the goals of the three workshops:

- I. to raise awareness of structured feedback in trainees.
- II. to provide trainees with a personal experience in developing questions for a structured feedback activity.
- III. to propose other useful ways to work with structured feedback.

The teacher trainer explains that the specific activities presented in the workshops will help trainees refine their skills in interpreting their students' needs and in responding to them. She finally suggests that analyzing structured feedback can also be an indirect help to improve trainees' ability to deal with ongoing feedback in their everyday teaching.

Workshop I

Awareness of Structured Feedback

GOAL: To raise awareness of structured feedback in trainees.

I. Mini-lecture on Feedback

Objective

To give the trainees an idea of the main features of feedback.

Procedure (10 min.)

The teacher trainer gives a mini-lecture on feedback focusing on its definition, the distinction between ongoing and structured feedback, and their main characteristics. Her talk is based on the first pages of Chapter II, pages 14-17.

II. The Origami Class

Objective

To present a teaching activity as a basis for a structured feedback session.

Procedure (20 min.)

The teacher trainer teaches a small group of ten to twelve students from among the trainees.

--Teacher shows them the final product.

--She distributes paper to the students so that they can fold it, following her directions.

--She teaches the folds step-by-step with verbal explanation, while demonstrating.

--She asks them to practice in twos.

--And to practice alone.

The other trainees are given the following questions to focus on while observing trainer and students working with structured feedback on the lesson.

- 1) What information did the teacher get from the student feedback?
- 2) How did she get that information?
- 3) Why did she want that information?

III. Feedback on the Lesson

Objective

To get information from the students about their learning during the lesson.

To give observers an example of structured feedback.

Procedure (15 min.)

As soon as she finishes with her teaching, the teacher asks the following questions to the students while the observers take notes.

- 1) Is there anything that struck you about your learning? Why?
- 2) What was too easy or difficult in the lesson?
- 3) What helped or hindered your learning in the lesson?

The teacher trainer works with the students' answers and helps them to clarify their thoughts. She reformulates their answers to check if

she has understood them correctly. She asks them to rephrase their thoughts if they are not clear. She keeps them focused on the topic.

IV. Discussion With Observers on the Feedback Activity

Objective

To analyze how the trainer used structured feedback and what kinds of information she got from the students.

Procedure (15 min.)

The trainer asks the observers the questions focused on structured feedback she gave them before the origami class started.

- 1) What information did I get from the students' feedback?
- 2) How did I get that information?
- 3) Why did she want that information?

The trainer may want to use additional questions if necessary:

- 4) What was I trying to accomplish when I asked the students those three questions?
- 5) Did I succeed? Why? Why not?
- 6) Any other relevant observations?

Four, five and six are sub-questions to clarify the trainees' thoughts. The trainer will work with the observers in the same way she did with the students in the Procedure III.

V. Brainstorming on Structured Feedback (for all the trainees).

Objective

To help the trainees be aware of what structured feedback is, why it is important, and how to get it.

Procedure

The teacher proposes a series of steps through which the trainees will be guided to share their insights to gain an overview of the components of structured feedback.

A. Write (10 min.)

The trainer asks the trainees to write for ten minutes about the three following questions. She writes them on the blackboard.

- 1) What information from your students can be useful for your teaching?
- 2) How can that information help your teaching?
- 3) What kind of exercises and activities can you use to help the students to give you that information about their learning?

B. Small Group Discussions (20 min.)

After writing, the trainees are invited to discuss in small groups of four to five people what they have written in small groups of four to five people.

They also have to decide who is going to report their ideas to the whole class.

C. Reporting to Whole Group (20 min.)

Trainees

At this point, one person per group reports the main findings and problems of the group to everybody. The other members of the group may step in if they feel they can contribute more to the discussion or if they want to clarify something. It is the responsibility of the teacher trainer to set the time limits for the speakers of each group and to keep the discussion on target and within that limit.

Trainer

While the trainees are speaking, the trainer writes what they say on the blackboard so that a schema for structured feedback can emerge as clearly as possible. This may be done by keeping the three questions on the blackboard and listing all the possible suggestions under each one so that the trainees can visualize the entire process. Then trainer and trainees comment on the results.

VI. Feedback Session on Workshop I.

Objective

To get feedback on the workshop from the trainees.

Procedure (10 min.)

The teacher trainer asks the trainees for feedback on the workshop. She explains that their information can be very valuable in her

teaching.

She encourages them to speak their minds; she asks them to focus on what they got out of the workshop, on their problems with it, and not on the content of it. Possible questions for the trainees are the following:

- 1) How did the workshop go for you?
- 2) What helped or hindered your learning? Why?
- 3) Which activity did you get the most from? Why?

This and the other feedback sessions on the workshops are especially designed for the trainer who needs feedback on the whole workshop. They can also help trainees to get a clearer idea of the whole process they have gone through and to offer them other examples of feedback questions. However, a session totally open without specific questions can also be very helpful. Asking questions on one specific activity which was either positively or negatively received can also clarify both the trainees' and the trainer's ideas. Therefore, flexibility should be used in preparing questions for these sessions.

NOTES: Notes the trainer can refer to when leading the brainstorming session.

Objective

To convey more ideas on structured feedback to the trainees.

Content

List of useful ideas on structured feedback organized as possible answers to the questions that were asked in the brainstorming session.

1) What information from your students can be useful for your teaching?

A teacher may need information about:

A) What they actually learned (actual performance)

--At what stage of their learning process are they?

--Have they figured out what the teacher is trying to teach them?

--Have they understood but still need practice?

--Are they confused? Is there too much input at one time?

--Are they ready to go a step forward?

--Are they interested and motivated in what they are doing?

--Are they offered activities at their own level, that is not too difficult, not too easy?

--Do they have problems?

B) How they learn

--Do they need more time and practice?

- Is the range of exercises wide enough to meet everybody's needs?
- Do they need more oral or written activities?
- Do they need individual work?

2) How can that information help your teaching?

It can help to develop awareness of what the needs in a student centered class are and to focus teaching by:

- Preparing more focused material on their objectives
 - Checking the pace
 - Changing the structure of a lesson plan to meet specific needs
 - Preparing individualized work for a few students
 - Spending more or less time with a certain activity

3. How can you get that information?

- Asking specific questions
- Having the students fill in monthly reports on what they have learned
- Having special meetings for feedback
- Having the students write a list of doubts and problems with the language and the class
- Using video: videotape the students while performing a short activity and then work with them on their performance
- Inviting the students to keep a journal of what and how they learn

Workshop II

Questions for Structured Feedback

GOAL: To provide trainees with a personal experience in developing questions for a structured feedback activity.

I. Preparation of Lessons and Structured Feedback on Lessons

Objective

To emphasize the importance of questions in working with structured feedback.

Procedure

A. Background (10 min.)

The teacher trainer explains that this workshop will focus on feedback questions: what, why, how, when to ask these questions. She points out that:

--Learning how to ask the right questions is a very useful skill for teachers who want to use structured feedback.

--Questions are important to direct the students' attention to the specific topics the teacher wants to address.

--When we ask questions, especially in a teaching-learning situation, we are pushing people to do something: to trigger their memory and knowledge so that they can build on what they already

have, and make a further step from there.

B. Guidelines for Teaching/Feedback Exercise (10 min.)

The trainer explains that:

--The trainees will work in groups of four.

--They will be teaching one lesson: a game, a song, a yoga position, a language that their students in the group do not know, and so forth.

--They will also have to prepare a feedback activity to be given soon after their lesson. It will ask questions of their students about their learning. In preparing the questions, they will have to keep in mind that:

- (1) they want information about the students' learning.
- (2) a few clear questions are more effective than a long list.

--At the end they will have to write down the rationale for their questions.

--The teaching time will be 15 minutes; the feedback time will be 10 minutes.

--Only one trainee in the group will be teaching and asking for feedback.

--The role of the three other members of the group will be to introduce the lesson, and take notes.

--The four people in the group have to work as a real team, to help each other, and to have a clear idea of what they want to do and why.

--The trainees have to decide which group is going to teach in front of the whole class at the next session.

--The other groups will be peer teaching.

C. Group Work (40 min.)

The trainees now work on their task, divided into small groups.

They decide what they want to teach, who is going to teach it, what the feedback questions and the rationale for them will be.

II. Small Group Lesson in Front of Everybody

Objective

To have the trainees present a lesson and a feedback session based on it.

Procedure (25 min.)

The chosen group presents its lesson and feedback session to a few students, the other trainees are observers.

Before the group begins its lesson, the observers are given a few questions to focus on:

- 1) What did the teacher do that helped or hindered the students during the feedback session?
- 2) What information did the students give?
- 3) How was the information useful?

III. Feedback Session on the Lesson with the Trainer.

(Trainer and the group who taught)

Procedure (10 min.)

The trainer works with the small group with the following questions:

- 1) How did it go?
- 2) Are you happy with the questions you asked?
- 3) What information did you get from your students?
- 4) Was the information useful? Why? Why not?

The trainer should remember that providing the trainees with what she saw is her way of helping them. Positive points should be underlined

before dealing with problems. The focus should remain on the feedback session not on the lesson itself.

IV. Discussion with the Observers on the Feedback Activity

Objective

To give a chance to everybody to express themselves about the feedback activity and to help trainees realize how much better they can observe when they are not directly involved in a teaching activity.

Procedure (10 min.)

The trainer now works with the observers and their questions to get additional comments that might be useful to the presenters focusing on:

- 1) how the teacher helped or hindered the students during the feedback session.
- 2) the kind of information that came out
- 3) usefulness of that information

V. Group Work: The Small Groups Teach Their Lessons

Objective

To give everybody the opportunity of experiencing structured feedback in the form of questions, both as students and as teachers.

Procedure (50 min.)

Two groups of four will work together. In turn they will be the

students and the teaching team.

- Each group has 25 minutes to teach, ask feedback questions, and jot down a few notes on the feedback they got.
- The group that has already taught in front of the class will be the students for another group.

VI. General Discussion on Structured Feedback in the Form of Questions

(For everybody)

Objective

To give everybody the chance to talk about their experience and to clarify their thoughts.

Procedure (10/15 min.)

The trainer now works with the whole class with the following questions:

- 1) Did the questions you prepared help you get the feedback you needed from the students? Why? Why not?
- 2) What problems did you have in preparing the questions?
- 3) What helped or hindered you in preparing the questions?
- 4) What did you learn?
- 5) What will you keep in mind from now on to focus on structured feedback?

Four and five are alternative questions if needed.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITY

A follow-up activity may be proposed. The trainees are asked to

prepare feedback questions for an activity they are going to do with their students at school and to report the results at the next meeting.

VII. Feedback Session on Workshop II

Objective

To get feedback on the workshop from the trainees.

Procedure (10 min.)

Same as in Workshop I

Workshop III

Ways to Get Feedback

GOAL: To provide a brief wrap-up session on structured feedback and the problems connected with it.

To familiarize the trainees with a variety of activities that may help them work with structured feedback.

PART I:

I. General Discussion on Structured Feedback and Possible Problems Connected With It.

Objective

To help trainees (1) to be aware of the practical problems that a consistent use of structured feedback in their classes may raise, and (2) to deal with those problems.

Procedure (10 min.)

A. Wrap-up questions on structured feedback

The trainer asks the following questions that will help wrap up what the trainees now know about structured feedback.

- 1) What is structured feedback?
- 2) When would you use it?
- 3) Why?

B. Problems teachers can come across when working with structured feedback and their possible solutions. (20 min.)

The trainer asks a few specific questions focused on the practical problems the trainees could have to face in their classes, and lists them on the blackboard. The following and other questions may help.

- 1) How often would you use structured feedback?
- 2) Which language, English or Italian, would you use with your students? Why?
- 3) Would you explain the reasons of the feedback activity to your students?
- 4) Why? Why not?
- 5) Would you work with the whole class, small groups, individuals?

A discussion follows in which the trainees share their thoughts about the above issues.

PART II:

Objective

To help trainees work on their own on useful techniques to get structured feedback from the students.

Procedure

A. Projects proposal (5 min.)

The trainer proposes the following projects that had emerged during the brainstorming session of the first workshop and that are listed

in the Notes on page

--Monthly Report: devise an outline of a monthly report for your students on their learning. If the report is prepared with the students, the procedure should be described.

--Journal: design a way of guiding the students to keep a journal on what and how they learn.

--Video: prepare an outline on how to videotape the students while they perform a short activity, e.g., dialogue, role play, and then work with them on their performance.

--Final evaluation: describe the procedure to prepare a final evaluation form with the students.

B. Group work (60 min.)

The trainees choose one project and work in groups.

--Each group prepares an outline of their proposal and the rationale for it.

--While working on the project, the trainees will keep in mind the following questions:
(1) what information do I want to get from my students?
(2) why do I want it?

C. Pair work (45 min.)

The groups work in pairs and present their outlines to the members of the other group, asking for feedback.

D. Revision of project (15 min.)

The groups now have some time to rewrite their outline or modify it, if necessary, to photocopy it, and to hand it out to the other

trainees.

II. Final Activity

Objective

To give trainees a chance to reflect on their work.

Procedure (5 min.)

A. Writing (5 min.)

The trainer invites the trainees to write for five minutes about the following questions:

- 1) What did you get out of working on the project?
- 2) Did you develop new ideas in your group?
- 3) How are you going to use these projects in your class?
- 4) Any other problems?

B. Pair Work (10 min.)

The trainees are invited to share and discuss in pairs what they have written.

III. Feedback Session on Workshop III and on the Three Workshops in General.

Objective

To get feedback on Workshop III and on the entire series of workshops from the trainees.

Procedure (10 min.)

Same as in Workshop I.

CONCLUSION

It has been exciting, after looking for information about feedback in literature and in my own experience, to feel that I was ready to prepare something concrete which could be useful for myself and my colleagues. Preparing the workshops has been a great opportunity for me to internalize what I have been writing about. It has also been a challenge to work with material which came from my personal reflection rather than from books. Finally, it has helped me design a workshop format I feel comfortable with. The process has been long and time consuming; the workshops have taken shape through the clarification of my own ideas.

From exposure to the many facets of feedback, I have assimilated its features into my way of thinking. I have often found myself observing people and thinking of how to ask for and give them feedback not only in the classroom but in other situations as well. I feel that I have been enriched by my research and writing, and that I will take what I have learned into the classroom with me. I am also curious to see if this new dimension will change the way I interact with my students.

Writing this paper has also meant working with feedback from my advisor and my reader. This has been invaluable for me because I experienced feedback from the student point of view and observed how the teacher worked with it. I realized that I could not expect them to understand my problems if my way of expressing them was not specific. Therefore, giving them information was my responsibility. It was harder than I had expected.

I also realized that the most effective way to work with feedback is to adapt it to one's own teaching and learning style so that one can be confident when using it.

I am now looking forward to trying out what I have designed. I know that I may be disappointed by the reaction of a few teachers who are not used to patiently building up skills like feedback. On the other hand, I feel that I have given shape to a concept which is based on valuable theories and in which I believe. I am therefore confident that what I have prepared will be worth trying and that I will eventually be able to modify it to suit the different audiences with whom I will be working with.

The result of this process has been the recognition that although research and reading are valuable, they must be blended with personal experience to be meaningful. I have learned that starting from my experience can even be more effective in the long run. In short, I have learned that I am a great resource for my teaching.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited:

- Broderick, Vincent. "Looking at Learning." JALT Newsletter, (July 1981), pp. 14-15.
- Burnside, Bill L. et al. Training Feedback Handbook. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. Alexandria, VA, 1983, pp. 1-2.
- Corder, S. Pit. Error Analysis and Interlanguage. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Cortese, Giuseppina. "Enthusiastic Teacher Training Efforts Lend Aid to EFL Instructors in Italy." TESOL Newsletter, 18, No. 4 (August 1984), p. 27.
- Gattegno, Caleb. What We Owe Children: The Subordination of Teaching to Learning. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970.
- _____. "On Feedback." Educational Solutions Newsletter, 7, No. 4 (April 1978), pp. 2-4.
- Krashen, Stephen D. "Lateralization, Language Learning, and the Critical Period: Some New Evidence." Language Learning, 23, No. 1 (1973), pp. 63-74.
- Lenneberg, E. Biological Foundations of Language. New York: Wiley and Son, 1967.
- Packer, C. Kyle and Toni Packer. "Cybernetics, Information Theory and the Educative Process." Teachers College Record, 61 (1959), pp. 134-142.

- Richards, Jack. "A Non-contrastive Approach to Error Analysis." English Language Teaching, 25, No. 3 (1971), pp. 204-219.
- _____ (ed.). Error Analysis. London: Longman, 1974.
- Rubin, Joan. "What the 'Good Language Learner' Can Teach Us." TESOL Quarterly, 9, No. 1 (March 1975).
- Seliger, Herbert W. "On the Possible Role of the Right Hemisphere in Second Language Acquisition." TESOL Quarterly, 16, No. 3 (September 1982), pp. 307-314.
- Wiener, Norbert. The Human Use of Human Beings. 2nd ed. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954.
- _____. Cybernetics; or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1961.
- Zahorik, John A. "Classroom Feedback Behavior of Teachers." The Journal of Education, 62 (1968), pp. 147-150.
- _____. "Pupils' Perception of Teachers' Verbal Feedback." Elementary School Journal, 71, pp. 105-114.
- Zamel, Vivian. "Cybernetics: A Model for Feedback in the ESL Classroom." TESOL Quarterly, 15, No. 2 (June 1981), pp. 139-150.

References:

- Baller, William and Earl Lower. "Informative Feedback: An Educational Controversy." School and Society, (November 1971).
- Benesch, Sarah. "Improving Peer Response: Collaboration between Teachers and Students." Journal of Teaching Writing, (Spring 1985), pp. 87-94.

- Bognar, Carl J. "Dissonant Feedback about Achievement and Teachers' Expectations." Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 23, No. 3 (September 1982), pp. 277-287.
- Blum Cohen, Vicki. "A Reexamination of Feedback in Computer-Based Instruction: Implication for Instructional Design." Educational Technology, 25, No. 1 (January 1985), pp. 33-37.
- Farrar, Mary Thomas. "Why Do We Ask Comprehensive Questions? A New Conception of Comprehension Instruction." The Reading Teacher, 37, No. 6 (February 1984), pp. 452-456.
- Garrison, Sue. "Video as a Tool for Student Feedback." TESL Talk, 15, No. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1984), pp. 42-48.
- Gattegno, Caleb. The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages. New York: Educational Solutions, 1976.
- Italy. Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere. Seminario interazione su: aggiornamento in servizio degli insegnanti di lingue straniere. Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1983.
- Langer, Philip. "Instruction and the Feedback Dilemma." 21 p. Paper presented at the meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association. Salt Lake City, (1983). ERIC ED 230 547.
- Lowery, Lawrence F. and Hermine H. Marshall. Learning About Instruction: Teacher-Initiated Verbal Directions and Eliciting Questions. A Personal Workshop. University of California, Berkeley. School of Education. (1980).

- Montalvo, Evelyn. "How to Develop the Ability to Assess Students' Learning Styles." Unpublished MAT Thesis. School for International Training. 1982.
- Nishikawa, Sue. Feedback: Implications for Further Research and Study. 28 p. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Anaheim, CA. (January 1985). ERIC ED IR 011 648
- Sommers, Jeffrey. "Enlisting the Writer's Participation in the Evaluation Process." Journal of Teaching Writing, 4, No. 1 (Spring 1985), pp. 95-103.
- Strawn, D.J. "Teacher Feedback to Students in Selected English as a Second Language Classes." Ed. D. Thesis. Teachers College, Columbia University. 1976.
- Turpin, Leslie Maria. "Developing Awareness of Individuals in a Group Learning Context: A Self-Lesson Plan. Unpublished MAT Thesis. School for International Training. 1985.
- Werdmann, Anne and James King. "Teaching Teachers to Question Questions." Reading World, 23, No. 3 (March 1984), pp. 218-225.

Categories	Examples
1.0 Praise-confirmation	
1.1 Simple praise-confirmation	"Good," "Yes," "All right!"
1.2 Elaborate praise	"That's very good thinking, Tom."
1.3 Elaborate confirmation	"O.K., that's what the truck is used for."
2.0 Reproof-denial	
2.1 Simple reproof-denial	"No," "Uh uh"
2.2 Elaborate reproof	"You aren't using your head!"
2.3 Elaborate denial	"That couldn't possibly be the correct answer."
3.0 Praise-confirmation and reproof-denial	"Yes and no," "Maybe"
4.0 Positive answer	
4.1 Positive answer	"South America" (after pupil responds with "South America" to question concerning the location of Peru)
4.2 Positive answer	"Central America?" (after pupil responds with "Central America" to question concerning the location of Peru)
4.3 Positive answer	"Peru is in South America" (after pupil responds with "Central America" to question concerning the location of Peru)
5.0 Negative answer	
5.1 Negative answer repetition	"So, you think that they're developing a civilization."
5.2 Statement of correct answer	"Thailand is correct because the 'h' is silent." (after pupil responds with "Thailand" to question concerning pronunciation of Thailand)
6.0 Positive answer and negative answer	"... the 'h' is silent and so is the 'a.'" (after pupil responds with "Thailand" to question concerning pronunciation of Thailand)
7.0 Positive explanation	"Why is he named that?" (after pupil responds with "Lord Snowdon" to question concerning the name of Princess Margaret's husband)
8.0 Negative explanation	"... and what happens to that beak after he catches lots of fish?" (after pupil responds with "long and big" to question concerning the unusuality of a pelican's beak)
9.0 Response extension: development	
9.1 Response development solicitation without clues	"... and in Washington they'll stop at President Kennedy's grave." (after pupil responds with "Washington, D.C." to question concerning where some visitors plan to spend time in our country)
9.2 Response development solicitation with clues	"Great what?" (after pupil responds with "Great" to question concerning what country Princess Margaret is from)
9.3 Response development statement	
10.0 Response extension: improvement	
10.1 Response improvement solicitation without clues	

TABLE 1.—Continued

Categories	Examples
10.2 Response improvement solicitation with clues	"Great what? It's another name for England." (after pupil responds with "Great" to question concerning what country Princess Margaret is from)
10.3 Response improvement statement	"... probably 80 to 90 per cent of all the people of Southeast Asia are farming in some way." (after pupil responds with "a few are farmers" to question concerning occupations in Vietnam)
11.0 Solicitation repetition: several answers	
11.1 Several-answers solicitation without clues	"... another one, Alice?" (after pupil responds with "zinc" to question concerning resources of Vietnam)
11.2 Several-answers solicitation with clues	"... another one, Bob? One that aluminum is made from." (after pupil responds with "zinc, coal, and iron" to question concerning resources of Vietnam)
12.0 Solicitation repetition: one answer	
12.1 One-answer solicitation without clues	"... Betty?" (after pupil responds with "Russia" to question concerning which country is aiding South Vietnam)
12.2 One-answer solicitation with clues	"... think of who has soldiers over there, Jim?" (after pupil responds with "France" to question concerning which country is aiding South Vietnam)
13.0 Lesson progression: different topic	"What is the chief source of food in Vietnam, Susan?" (after pupil responds with "Me-kong" to question concerning the name of the Vietnamese river on which dams are being built)
14.0 Miscellaneous feedback	

ENTHUSIASTIC TEACHER TRAINING EFFORTS LEND AID TO EFL INSTRUCTORS IN ITALY

by Giuseppina Cortese
Università di Torino

Italian teachers of foreign languages, and teachers of English in particular, have been very active over the past ten years. Teacher associations like LEND (Lingue e Nuova Didattica) have been working with unswerving determination to set up for themselves the teacher training resources, as well as other kinds of incentives which the government was not providing. And they have been successful in all of their undertakings. New LEND groups are being started every year, so that more and more teachers, whether from large towns or small districts, can meet on a regular basis and set up a full agenda of lectures and seminars. A number of teachers have been trained at British institutions through British Council bursaries, and have then used their expertise in writing textbooks, contributing to the LEND review and participating in voluntary teacher training. The LEND conference is attended by thousands of teachers; the conference papers are published in a regular series, which also envisages volumes containing the results of study-groups on specific methodological issues.

ANILS (Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Lingue Straniere) and ATESI (Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Italian), the latter having lately developed into TESOL-Italy, are other examples of this active interest in the methodology of foreign language teaching. The annual TESOL conference in Rome is attended by a large crowd of teachers, and the TESOL-Italy journal, *Perspectives*, has a wide readership. Both initiatives were set up and developed by that indefatigable leader of the profession, Mary Finocchiaro, whose accomplishments and charisma also attract crowds of teachers in TESOL-Italy regional seminars.

The British Council and USIS (United States Information Service) have been of great assistance to EFL teachers. The language officers of the British Council have traveled all over Italy and offered seminars and training sessions to local groups; through the services of the Council, a number of British scholars come to Italy every year to take part in various conferences, including the Bologna symposium now offered by the British Council on a yearly basis. [See page 24 of this *TN* for a review of the 1983 Bologna proceedings.] Readers of *MET* (*The Modern English Teacher*, published at Oxford) may be aware of the distance training module for Italian teachers of EFL, which was described in the winter 1983 issue. This very interesting and highly innovative project has been designed to cope with the increasing demand for improvement of language teaching methodology amongst Italian state school teachers, and is implemented on a self-access basis. Local voluntary groups work with course materials devised to suit the needs of Italian teachers, while British Council staff offer support as consultants and advisers. Specially selected and trained Italian teachers act as course coordinators, in cooperation with the IRRSAEs, i.e., regional institutes for educational research, training and experimentation.

The PSLS (Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere) is another successful teacher training project, and the fact that it is supported by the Ministry of Education shows that the Ministry is well on its way to developing teacher training. The EFL section of PSLS now involves a total of 1038 teachers in all Italian regions. The coordinators are Italian state teachers who at-

tend a specially designed six-week intensive summer course in a U.S. university and prepare a syllabus for the in-service training course they will then hold for practising teachers from various school districts. Ten junior Fulbrighters from the U.S. acting as native informants cooperate with the trainers in the teaching of language and American culture. Participation in the program, which is organized in weekly sessions of three hours each, up to now has not involved any release from teaching duties for either trainers or trainees. Another problem is that no formal evaluation procedures are envisaged, as participants are merely requested to hand in a balance-sheet at the end of the course. The success of the program, which has reached 5000 teachers, is indicated by the request for follow-up courses coming from participants.

Educational visits and exchanges is an area of interest to FL teachers in which new schemes are being implemented through the cooperation of the Ministry of Education with local educational authorities. Initiatives such as "cultural immersion" programs for British teachers of Italian are indeed helpful in fostering intercultural education, which ought to be the inseparable companion of language education, as pointed out by EFL teacher and Ministry officer M. Grazia Calasso (*Lend*, 1984, 1:20-28).

The situation of EFL has also improved in the universities, where the teaching of foreign language is no longer intended as a mere vehicle for the study of literary texts. English language courses are now offered in many non-literary curricula, and this has brought about considerable interest in ESP. Hundreds of native speakers have been hired as "lettori" to teach the language, and a remarkable amount of research in language and linguistics is underway. What is more important, some of these research projects are aimed at developing teacher training curricula, so that it may be possible for the universities to provide adequate pre-service training in the future. Research in language/linguistics is also encouraged through A.I.A. (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica), whose annual conference features both language and literature sessions. The conference is paralleled by smaller seminars held at various places during the year, of which the English language and linguistics seminar in Arezzo has been particularly successful. This residential seminar is organized by A.I.A. in conjunction with the British Council, and is attended by a fairly large number of EFL teachers from various universities, whose work sessions are both stimulated and supervised by a British scholar. Last year's seminar, assisted by Michael Hoey of Birmingham University, was on discourse analysis; this year the topic will be contrastive pragmatics.

The energy, dedication and enthusiasm which have been invested towards professional improvement in both school and university by Italian teachers of EFL was best described by Dr. Harley Brookes of the British Council in his address to the participants of the 1983 TESOL-Italy Convention: "In no other country in the world that I know of is there such a sustained and genuine enthusiasm for voluntary teacher training at such great personal cost for teachers" (*Perspectives*, 1984, VII, 1:4).

The results of this work are tangible and have led to the foundation of a journal entitled *Problems and Experiences in the Teaching of English*, which is written entirely in English. The

journal is published jointly by Nuova Italia and Oxford University Press and it will serve a two-fold aim: to reach those Italian teachers who have not been able to become involved in professional activities, and to make the Italian contribution to the EFL debate accessible on an international level.

It may be interesting to conclude this brief overview by mentioning the major current concerns of FL teacher associations in their efforts for constant updating and qualification of FLT methodology in Italy. Teacher training is of course a major issue; as the Ministry, the local educational authorities and the unions are growing interested in the question of *aggiornamento*, it is important to produce constructive opinions on the aims of training programs, their contents and modes of implementation. Emphasis is being placed on the necessity to involve the universities in pre-service preparation of teachers, as well as on the need to provide permanent resource centers for teachers to update themselves on a self-access basis.

Another important issue is the scheme for the teaching of foreign languages in primary schools, which has been put forth in its draft-form by the Ministry of Education. The teachers who have been participating in the ILSSE (Insegnamento Lingua Straniera Scuola Elementare) pilot scheme, as well as a number of methodologists, are vigorously pointing out that the draft-program is inadequate in its methodological formulation, far too vague on the very delicate issue of the resources for specific teacher training, and most definitely wrong in its totally utilitarian-based recommendations to give priority to the teaching of EFL. The plan would not only damage cultural pluralism; it would be a major disservice to FL teaching, which, particularly at primary school age-levels, cannot be geared exclusively to instrumental motivation and would thus be in open contrast with the formative and cultural aims envisaged by a correct methodology of early FL acquisition.

Finally, a third problem which deserves mention is the lack of both vertical and horizontal continuity of language education in the Italian school system. FL teachers are actively involved in the debate over the reform of secondary schools. Their major interest lies with the establishing of close interdisciplinary ties with other subjects, primarily with Italian as L1; at the same time, they are aiming at a better "vertical" coordination of FLT in its subsequent stages in the school system.

Although FL teachers in Italy have done their best to compensate for the lack of institutional schemes for systematic pre-service and inservice training, they are fully aware that much work still needs to be done. As far as EFL teachers are concerned, the most pressing professional needs can be identified as follows: improving language competence, both in terms of fluency/accuracy and the ability to describe the language; getting a firmer grasp of the theoretical implications underlying language teaching methodology.

The overall objective of education, and particularly of FL education as defined by the Council of Europe Project No. 12, is to make learners self-reliant. The prerequisite for this is to have self-reliant language teachers. This—couched in Emersonian language—is, I think, what we are working for in Italy.

About the author: Giuseppina Cortese teaches in the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio e Letterature, Università di Torino, Via s. Ottavio n. 20, 10124 Torino, Italia. She is the current vice president of TESOL-Italy.

WAY OUT WEST.

