# KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE AIMS OF GIVING STUDENTS "FEEDBACK" AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION: THE STUDY OF HONG KONG

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**Abstract:**
This study explores kindergarten teachers' understanding of, comments on their actual practice of giving feedback to children in Hong Kong. The research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, with data being collected through questionnaires and interviews. The sample was chosen from the in-service kindergarten teachers who were enrolled in the teacher certificate course offered at Hong Kong Institute of Education during the academic year 2015-2016. Questionnaires were sent to 150 in-service kindergarten teachers and six teachers were interviewed. Finding indicates that many teachers have the basic understanding of using feedback. They can analyze the aims of giving students feedback not only from the perspectives of students, but also the interaction between teachers and students. However, they seldom explore it through the views from teachers. Teachers' aims of giving students feedback are mostly for encouraging and it is mainly positive and appreciation. It is common for teachers to give motivational feedback in kindergartens, however, over-emphasize has its disadvantage. It is found that teachers encountered two problems. Firstly, teachers do not have adequate training about giving students feedback. Secondly, teachers lack follow-up work after giving feedback to students. Some suggestions for teachers' development are made at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** feedback, teachers, kindergarten, qualitative feedback, quantitative feedback

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Hong Kong educational reform emphasizes "Assessment for Learning" which combines teaching and assessment to enhance students' learning. During the

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process of teaching, teachers will identify and diagnose the difficulties which students have encountered, thus improving and assisting them in learning (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2002). However, a research indicates that less than 30% of teachers (26.3%) believe that the concept of "Assessment for Learning" can be put into practice (Liu, 2007). To put the concept of "Assessment for Learning" into practice, Black & William (1998a) propose that teachers should be attentive to give students feedback in daily teaching, which is one of the commonly used methods. Giving students concrete feedback in writing or orally can guide them to actively introspect their learning. In Hong Kong kindergartens, teachers always give feedback for children because it can encourage and motivate them to learn which is very important in child development. How much do Hong Kong kindergarten teachers know about the aims of giving students feedback? How do they put the concept of feedback into practice? This study aims to explore Hong Kong kindergarten teachers' understanding of the aims of giving children feedback and its implementation, to inspire teachers' understanding of feedback.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Aims of feedback

Gareis & Grant (2008) believe that the most important aim of assessment is to give feedback to students. From the perspective of assessment, feedback refers to the evaluation and response of students' learning progress given by teachers (Schen, 2000). Many students do not clearly understand what they have learnt. Teachers give students feedback which aims at telling them how they perform and encouraging them. Hence, the aim of feedback is to provide students with information for learning during their learning process, telling them their learning outcomes (Nightingale et al., 1996; Miller, 2002).

In recent years, assessment reform in Hong Kong attaches great importance to "Assessment for Learning". For the aim of giving students feedback, there has been a shift of emphasis from evaluating students' learning outcomes in the past to enhancing students' learning. Black & William (1998b) put forward the role of "formative feedback" in class. "Formative feedback" is the messages for learning which teachers give students in daily teaching activities, and it can help them to adjust the process of teaching and learning. Halverson (2010), from the view of Black & William (1998b), analyzes that the aims of feedback can be found in three perspectives: students, teachers, and the interaction between students and teachers.

From the perspective of students, the aim of feedback given by teachers is to provide specific suggestions, and to let students know what to improve (Berry, 2008; Brown & Ngan, 2010). Students will precisely know the messages for learning from teachers' feedback, improving themselves and self-assessing of what they have learnt. The aims of feedback are long-term and in-depth. Students can make use of the feedback given by teachers and have self-reflection (Gareis & Grant, 2008), self-monitoring and evaluating the quality of their performances (Sadler, 1989), and

eventually become independent (student) learners (Sutton & Clarke, 2006). Effective feedback can help students build their self-esteem and affirm their own achievements (Berry, 2008), and even provoke motivation to learn (Gareis & Grant, 2008). From the aspect of teachers, they have to obtain students' learning conditions from feedback and thus review their effective teaching practices (Ovando, 1994) and adjust their teaching strategies (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2002). From the aspect of interaction between teachers and students, teachers can ask questions to recognize students' learning gap which is the difference between students' learning conditions at present and teachers' expectations of students in achieving their learning outcomes. Teachers can give students feedback during interactions, reducing the learning differences (Black & William, 1998b), suggesting methods for improvement (Sadler, 1989).

## 2.2 Types of feedback

Feedback can be classified into two broad categories: function and form. Berry (2008) divides functional feedback into three categories: motivational feedback, evaluative feedback and learning feedback. Motivational feedback provides incentive for learning; Evaluative feedback has the function of assessing and examining; Learning feedback is to suggest methods for improvements on learning. From the aspect of form, Li (1999) believes that evaluation can be classified into "quantitative description" and "qualitative description"[ii]. In fact, feedback can also be classified into "quantitative feedback" and "qualitative feedback". "Quantitative feedback" refers to teachers presenting student's performance simply as scores, rankings and rewards. Its advantage is students will clearly know their scores, but its disadvantage is students are invisibly encouraged to learn for the sake of scores, rankings and rewards. If teachers rely solely on scores and rankings, they cannot really assist them in learning (Sadler, 1989; Taras, 2002) because scores and rankings cannot provide students with directions and methods for improvement on learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & William, 2003; Smith & Gorard, 2005; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), and it is solely superficial learning (Ramsden, 2003).

Teachers have to provide students with methods for improvement on learning, so qualitative feedback is necessary. Qualitative feedback means that teachers can verbalize students' performances orally and in writing, pointing out or suggesting what they can improve. Most of the written feedback refers to the comments which teachers write to students. Comment is a way to read and mark an assignment, which enables students to be clear about their learning strengths and weaknesses as well as strengthens the communication between teachers and students. A short paragraph or even a word can be a communication with learners (Xu, 2009). Good comments can stimulate students' interest in learning (Dai, 2005). On the contrary, students will lose

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[ii] Li Kun-chung (1999) *Multiple Teaching Evaluation*: "quantitative description" refers to teachers presenting students' performances with assessment of scores; "qualitative description" refers to teachers presenting students' performances with written description.

confidence in learning (Lu, 2009). The study of Butler (1998) finds that written comments can promote students to a high-level of learning. And, if teachers only give students grades, high-level learning outcomes will not be achieved. However, another study (Holmes & Papageorgiou, 2009) finds that if teachers do not give students grades but only written comments, students will not pay attention to the comments. Oral feedback means that teachers will orally tell students about their learning outcomes, and it is a constructive conversation between teachers and students (Callingham, 2008), and it can also be a feedback given to an individual or a group of students from teachers by asking questions (Johnson, 2004).

## 2.3 Feedback and Learning Theory

Feedback and learning theory are closely related. Teachers have different beliefs in how children learn, and this will affect the form of feedback which they give to students (Hargreaves, McCallum, & Gipps, 2000). Different learning theories have different interpretations of the concept of feedback. The two common concepts of learning: behaviorism and constructivism will affect the role of teachers in class and their ways of giving students feedbacks. Behaviourists believe that learning is to strengthen the relationship between stimulus and response, and learning is only regarded as a response which is provoked by an external stimulus. The role of a teacher is an expert, inculcating knowledge, concepts and skills into learners. Teachers give feedbacks on right and wrong performance, providing learners with messages for improvement. This way of feedback is mostly one-way. On the other hand, constructivists believe that knowledge is found and constructed through constantly experiencing and exploring. Since knowledge is not already established, then learning should be constructed by learners, and learners have to take initiative to explore new knowledge based on their existing knowledge. Learners are not simply receivers of messages. The role of a teacher is to help learners to construct knowledge, concepts and skills. Teachers have to create environments and conditions for learning in order to help them construct what they have learnt. Giving feedback is to provide students with relevant learning cues, for example, giving tips, asking questions and allowing students to take initiative to explore and learn from feedback in discussions. Teachers giving students feedback is the two-way bridge of communication between them. During the process of communication between teachers and students, teachers give feedback to students is the same as building scaffolds for them and assist them in learning (Gallavan, 2009).

Askew & Lodge (2000) think that feedback such as inculcating knowledge, concepts and skills to learners by teachers is solely considered as one-way feedback. It is just a "gift" which is given directly to a learner. Two-way feedback is similar to playing ping pong, and it is an interaction between teachers and students. The former one is based on "behaviourism" and the latter one is based on "constructivism". The ways of feedback of "behaviourism" and "constructivism" both have advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of one-way feedback is that teachers can directly tell the students their performance and it saves lots of time. Nevertheless, its disadvantage is that students cannot explore what they have learnt during interaction. The advantage of

two-way feedback is that learners can construct what they have learnt during the process of interaction with teachers, but teachers will have to spend more time and effort on that.

## 3. Related Studies

In recent years, most of the western studies related to feedback and teaching take university students as objects of study (Poulos & Mahony, 2008; Burke, 2009; Quinton & Smallbone, 2010). There are a good few of papers relevant to feedback and learning English as secondary language (e.g. Mackey, 2006). In Hong Kong, there are very few studies relevant to feedback, only Lee (2008) points out that Hong Kong English Language teachers predominate in most of the feedback given to students and the students are passive. As for study which explores the issue of giving students feedback from the perspective of Hong Kong kindergarten teachers has not been found yet. For this reason, this study attempts to explore in this regard.

## 4. Aims of the Study

Giving feedback to children plays an important role in the child development. This study aims at exploring Hong Kong Kindergarten teachers' understanding of the aims of giving students feedback and its implementation. The research questions include:
1. How much do Hong Kong Kindergarten teachers know about the aims of giving students feedback?
2. How do Hong Kong Kindergarten teachers implement the concept of feedback?
3. What problems do they encounter?

It is hoped that the findings of this study can strengthen the professional development of teachers in giving feedback to students, and help in the design of teachers' development courses in future.

## 5. Methodology

Quantitative approach and qualitative approach are adopted in this study. Quantitative approach is based on questionnaires, and qualitative approach is based on interviews with teachers. The objects of study are Hong Kong kindergarten teachers, and the samples are selected from teachers who studied from Higher Diploma of Early Childhood for Kindergarten Teachers of 2015-2016 organized by The Hong Kong Institute of Education. The questionnaire collects a comprehensive data of Hong Kong kindergartens teachers in their understanding of the aims of giving students feedback and its implementation, and explores this topic with teachers through interviews. Researchers first invited 3 teachers for an interview, aims at making the first draft of the questionnaire. Teachers were then invited to try to complete the questionnaire. According to the opinions of the teachers who had completed the questionnaires, researchers revised and confirmed the final draft, and distributed the questionnaires.

The questionnaire is divided into 4 parts: Part A is personal information, Part B is Teachers' understanding of giving students feedback and its implementation, Part C is the comments of teachers in regard to this topic, and Part D is where teachers can write down and share their thoughts.

Interviews are also taken with teachers in this study. It aims at having an in-depth understanding of data which cannot be obtained from the questionnaire and exploring how teachers give feedback to students in class. The sample of interviewees is taken by quota sampling. Six teachers from primary and secondary schools at basic rank were invited to take an in-depth interview (They will be represented as T1, T2 etc.), and they were required to complete the questionnaire. Based on the questionnaire, 3 researchers discussed and drew up the content of interview. The outline of the interview is as below:

- What is/are the aim(s) of giving "feedback" to students?
- How do you give "feedback" to students?
- What are the opinions of your approach in giving students "feedback"?

## 6. Result and Discussion

150 sets of questionnaire were distributed: 129 sets were collected, making up a total of 86% of the return rate. Teachers who filled in the questionnaires come from different schools with different teaching experience (Refer to Table 1).

**Table 1:** Teaching Experience

| Numbers of years | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 1-5 years | 2.4% |
| 6-10 years | 8.6% |
| 11-15 years | 41.4% |
| 16-20 years | 35.9% |
| 21 years or above | 11.7% |

The kindergarten teachers, who teach at nursery centre, account for 7% of the teachers who have completed the questionnaires. For those who teach at lower level (K1) account for 54.3%. Also, 14.7% of teachers who teach at medium level (K2). For those who teach at upper level (K3) account for 23.3%. It shows that there is an extensive range of levels which our objects of study are teaching at, so they are representative to a large extent.

### 6.1 Aims of giving students feedback
**A. Teachers can analyze the aims of giving students feedback not only from the perspectives of students, but also the interaction between teachers and students. However, they seldom explore it through the views from teachers.**

Most of the teachers have certain knowledge of the aims of feedback. Table 2 shows that many teachers understand the aims of feedback from the perspectives of students, 34.9%of teachers think that feedback can enhance students to reflect their

learning, and 42.6% of teachers think that feedback can encourage children's learning. Most teachers (75.5%) think that giving feedback can have more interaction between teachers and children. It can also improve the learning atmosphere (76%). However, teachers seldom explore it through the views from teachers. Teachers (30.2%) seldom use feedback to evaluate their teaching and only 17.1% of teachers point out specific follow-up methods to students. Only few teachers (2.3%) agree that feedback can point out the merits and mistakes of students' learning.

**Table 2:** The aims of feedback
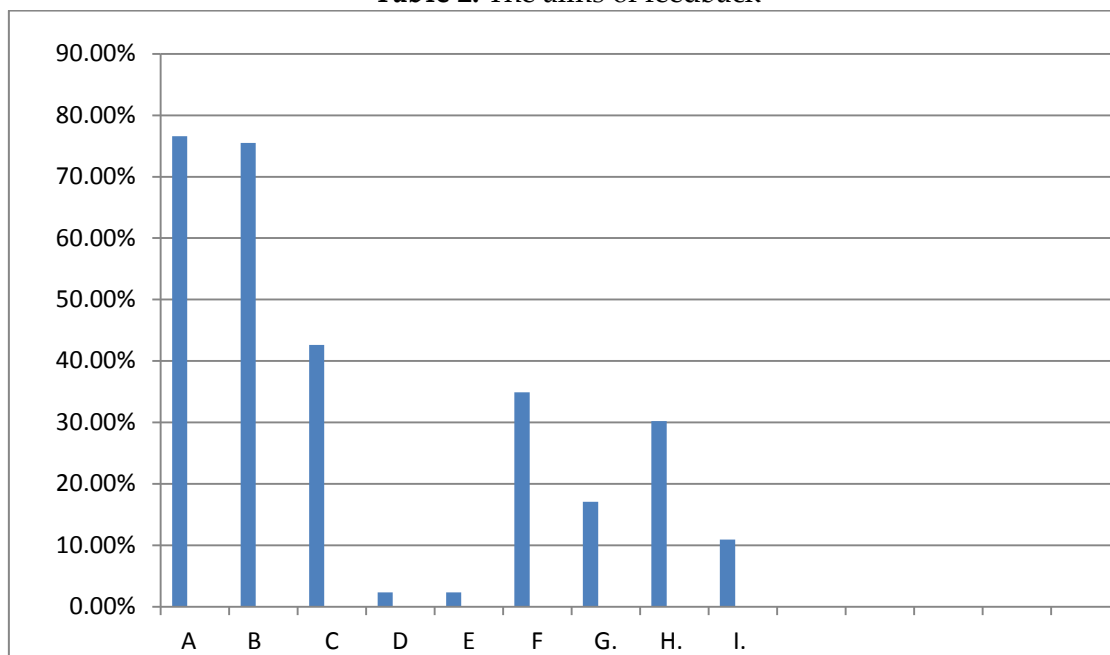


`       Remarks:
A. Improve the learning atmosphere;
B. Increase the interaction between teacher and children;
C. Encourage individual child's learning;
D. Give children scores;
E. Point out gain and loss;
F. Enhance children's self-reflection;
G. Point out follow up work to children;
H. Evaluate teachers' teaching;
I. Let children understand teachers' requirement.

Data gathered from interviews is similar to the data obtained in the questionnaire. Four teachers (two-third) can have a profound analysis of the aim of giving students feedback: Provide teachers with opportunities to interact with students and to increase the learning atmosphere in the classroom. The explanation from one of the teachers is as follows:

> *"The aim of giving kindergarten children feedback is to increase the learning atmosphere and to give more encouragement for children."* (T2)

The quintessence of feedback is to establish a learning atmosphere and a good relationship between teachers and students from the interaction of giving feedback to students. When there is communication between teachers and students, teachers can have a profound understanding of students' learning.

Meanwhile, two teachers (one-third) analyze feedback by taking a profound aim into consideration, which is to enable student to introspect their learning outcomes. A teacher said,

*"I think that the main reason of giving feedback to kindergarten children is to encourage their learning, enabling them to have the opportunity to introspect their commendations and inadequacies."* (T5)

Teachers attach great importance to giving students feedback, and it is hoped that they can have self-reflection. It is same as what Gareis & Grant (2008) say, and this is a profound understanding of the aim of feedback. Feedback given by teachers should be able to help students introspect what they have learnt.

It is noteworthy that the findings indicate that many teachers explore the aims of feedback from the perspectives of students, and interaction between teachers and students. However, only one interviewed teacher analyzes the aims of giving students feedback from the aspect of teachers, and he expresses:

*"Children's answer can help me to think more about what they have learnt and what they haven't learnt, so I (teacher) can think more to improve my teaching."* (T6)

**B. Teachers' aims of giving students feedback are mostly for encouraging and it is mainly positive and appreciation.**

Many teachers (64.6%) think that feedback can stimulate students to learn. It is the motivational feedback which Berry (2008) points out, and it provides incentive to students. The explanation of one interviewed teacher is shown as below:

*"A more important aim of feedback is that students are willing to take the first step to learn. They need recognition and valuable approval from teachers in order to speed up the effectiveness of learning."* (T5)

The aim of feedback is to praise students and to strengthen their confidence in learning. A teacher says:

*"Many students are lack of confidence in learning, so the feedback which I give them is praising… No matter his answer is good or not, we can still praise him."* (T8)

The interviewed teachers above are well-intentioned, but as long as teachers politely point out the inadequacies of students, they are willing to accept criticism. For feedback which is mainly positive, provides incentive for students to learn. However, a

study (Burnett & Mandel, 2010) points out that teachers always praise students without any purpose, and this approach is not effective. If teachers can focus on a target and give feedback to students, it is still necessary even though the feedback is criticism or teachers point out their mistakes. Koopmans (2009) believes that feedback for students can consist of positive praise and negative criticism. Teachers should not only give them appreciation, but also appropriate criticism. Unfortunately, only one interviewed teacher from this study will give students criticism, and will truthfully point out their mistakes. Why teachers do not like to criticize students' performance? There are two reasons: first, they do not want to hurt their students because negative criticism might result in students losing confidence and interest in learning; second, teachers are worried that they do not know how to give negative comments to students. Indeed, it is difficult to give negative comments to students. On the one hand, teachers have to truthfully tell students about their inadequacies, but on the other, they have to be polite and sincere, and it is hoped that the students will accept the comment and improve.

## 7. Implementation

### A. Qualitative feedback is emphasized.

"Quantitative feedback" refers to scores or grades which teachers give to students; "qualitative feedback" refers to oral or written feedback. Qualitative feedback is commonly found in Chinese language, English, Mathematics and Visual Arts lessons.

**Table 3:** Feedback in English, Chinese language, Mathematics and Visual Arts

| No. of respondents (Percentage) \ Scope | Scores/ Grades | Written comments | Oral comments | Scores/Grades + Written comments | Scores/Grades + Oral comments | Written comments + Oral comments | Scores/Grades + Written comments + Oral comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 5 (4.5%) | 13 (11.6%) | 42 (37.5%) | 1 (0.9%) | 4 (3.6%) | 42 (37.4%) | 5 (4.5%) |
| Chinese Language | 5 (4.5%) | 3 (2.7%) | 59 (53.6%) | 1 (0.9%) | 2 (1.8%) | 33 (30%) | 5 (4.5%) |
| Mathematics | 13 (11.5%) | 17 (15%) | 28 (24.8%) | 3 (2.7%) | 5 (4.4%) | 42 (37.1%) | 5 (4.4%) |
| Visual Arts | 9 (8%) | 15 (13.3%) | 36 (31.9%) | 1 (0.9%) | 6 (5.3%) | 42 (37.1%) | 4 (3.5%) |

In Chinese language lessons, as seen in Table 3, exceed half of the teachers (53.6%) give students oral feedback for children performance and only 4.5% of teachers give students' scores or grades. Most of the interviewed teachers (five-sixth) mention that they would not like to give grades or scores for children because it avoid competitions from students.

In English lessons, over 35% of teachers (37.4%) give both written and oral feedback to students, and only 4.5% of teachers give grades to students (Table 3). The majority of the interviewed teachers (five-sixth) mention that they design English

activities and observe students' performance. They give them feedback for their immediate performance which includes praising what they have done well and point out what is yet to be improved.

In Mathematics lessons, 37.4% of teachers give written and oral feedback, and almost only few of teachers (4.5%) give grades to children (See in Table 3). Most of the interviewed teachers (five-sixth) point out that they give exercises to students. During the process of teaching, half of the interviewed teachers constantly ask students questions, to give them oral feedback. This kind of questioning is the guidance given to students during the interaction between teachers and students, and it is one kind of oral feedback which helps students to learn.

In Visual Arts lessons, 37.1% of the teachers give oral and written comments, (Refer to Table 3). This is similar to the data obtained from interviews. One of the teachers mentions that:

*"I shall not give scores but write down comments. Although score is practical as students will know their performance, but comment has great significance as it represents the meaning behind the score and what teachers want the students to improve."* (T1)

To sum up, there is a great diversity of ways of feedback which they give to students including both oral and written comments in Chinese language, English, Mathematics and Visual Art lessons. It is appropriate that teachers should not give grade or scores for children because it avoids children to compare between each other. Oral and written comments are commonly used in Hong Kong kindergartens because it can encourage children to improve their learning.

**B. Giving feedback to students is sufficient, and most of the students like the feedback given by teachers.**

In Table 4, most of the teachers (87.6%) indicate that giving written feedback to students is sufficient and many teachers (81.4%) realized that giving oral feedback to students is sufficient. Most teachers think that many children (83.8%) feel happy to receive oral comments from teachers, but only 41.9% of children feel happy when they receive teachers' written comments. The reason is that children cannot read many words, it is better to receive the oral comments directly.

**Table 4:** Teachers' comments

| Items | No. of respondents (Percentage) | | | | Standard deviation (S.D.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | |
| I give sufficient written feedback to students | 38 (29.5%) | 75 (58.1%) | 14 (10.9%) | 2 (1.6%) | 1.84 (0.66) |
| I give sufficient oral feedback to students | 18 (14%) | 87 (67.4%) | 22 (17.1%) | 1 (0.8%) | 2.07 (0.64) |
| I think giving students feedback is not very important | 57 (44.2%) | 44 (34.1%) | 21 (16.3%) | 7 (5.3%) | 1.83 (0.89) |
| I receive adequate training of "giving students feedback" | 8 (6.2%) | 28 (21.7%) | 48 (37.2%) | 45 (34.9%) | 3.01 (0.90) |
| Students feel happy when they receive oral feedback | 106 (82.2%) | 2 (1.6%) | 19 (14.7%) | 2 (1.6%) | 1.36 (0.78) |
| Students feel happy when they receive written feedback | 52 (40.3%) | 2 (1.6%) | 48 (37.2%) | 27 (20.9%) | 2.39 (1.21) |
| I seldom follow up after giving students feedback | 23 (17.8%) | 62 (48.1%) | 40 (31%) | 4 (3.1%) | 2.19 (0.76) |
| I have enough time to give students feedback | 7 (5.5%) | 27 (21.1%) | 80 62.5% | 14 (10.9%) | 3.16 (0.61) |

(1: Strongly agree   2: Agree   3: Disagree   4: Strongly disagree)

Five out of sixth interviewed teachers think that children are very happy when they receive oral feedback. One of the interviewees mentions that:

> *"During the lessons, I always praise their (students) performance and they will have a sense of superiority in front of the class. They are very delighted! If they cannot answer my questions, I will give more guidelines and try to assist them in answering the questions so as to increase their sense of success."* (T3)

Thus, if teachers can increase students' sense of success and superiority by giving them praise and suggestion, students will definitely be willing to accept the feedback given by teachers.

**C. It is common for teachers to give motivational feedback in kindergartens, however, over-emphasize has its disadvantage.**

Data from the questionnaires indicates that all kindergarten teachers always praise their students and most of the teachers (98.5%) point out the merits of the students' performance, however, not many teachers (65.1%) point out the mistakes of students. Examples of giving feedback are shown in Table 5:

**Table 5:** Examples of feedback used by teachers

| Items | No. of respondents (Percentage) | | | | Standard deviation (S.D.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Well done! | 0(0%) | 1(0.8%) | 26(20.5%) | 101(78.7%) | 3.78(0.43) |
| You are a smart boy. | 2(1.6%) | 19(14.8%) | 37(28.9%) | 70(54.7%) | 3.37(0.79) |
| You are clever. | 1(0.8%) | 26(20.5%) | 53(41.7%) | 47(37%) | 3.15(0.76) |
| Thank you. | 2(1.6%) | 3(2.4%) | 31(24.4%) | 91(71.7%) | 3.66(0.61) |
| You have made progress than before. | 1(0.8%) | 6(4.8%) | 61(48.4%) | 57(45.2%) | 3.4(0.63) |
| I (Teacher) feel very happy because you (student) perform well. | 3(2.3%) | 39(31%) | 60(47.6%) | 24(19.0%) | 2.83(0.75) |
| It is wrong. | 26 (20.6%) | 71(56.3%) | 22(17.5%) | 7(5.6%) | 2.08(0.77) |
| You better pay attention to improve... | 0(0%) | 24(18.8%) | 55(43%) | 49(38.3%) | 3.2(0.73) |
| You better talk politely | 3(2.3%) | 33(25.8) | 59(46.1%) | 33(25.8%) | 2.95(0.78) |
| Don't playing! | 8(6.3%) | 56(43.4%) | 47(36.7%) | 17(13.3%) | 2.57(0.80) |
| Pay attention. | 15(11.8%) | 62(48.8%) | 42(33.1%) | 8(6.3%) | 2.34(0.76) |
| You are not so attentive. | 27(21.9%) | 65(51.2%) | 31(24.4%) | 4(3.1%) | 2.09(0.76) |
| Have you paid attention? | 3(2.3%) | 44(34.6%) | 56(44.1%) | 24(18.9%) | 2.8(0.77) |
| Do you agree with ....? | 0(0%) | 28 (22%) | 71(55.9%) | 28(22%) | 3.00(0.66) |

(1: Not use   2: Seldom use   3: Use   4: Always use)

Most of the teachers use praising such as "Well done" (98.5%), "You are a smart boy." (83.6%), "You are clever." (78.7%), "Thank you." (96.1%), "You have made progress than before" (93.6%), "I (Teacher) feel very happy because you (student) perform well (66.6%). However, only two interviewed teachers (one-third) further explained clearly tell how well students have done such as "Well done, you can draw tidy." and "You are clever because you can think of the solution." It is worried that if teachers just use praising to their students without any examples or concrete comments, students do not know why they are praised by teachers.

In Table 5, not many teachers criticize students directly/ tell students directly their mistakes such as "It is wrong" (23.1%). "Don't playing!" (50%), "Pay attention" (39.4%), "You are not so attentive" (27.5%). The two interviewed has explained that they were afraid that students would get hurt and resist in learning. Thus, many teachers encourage the students to reflect or think more instead of telling them directly their performance such as "Have you paid attention?" (63%) and "Do you agree with ....?" (77.9%).

Also, four (two-third) interviewed teachers said that they also wrote the good comments on children, avoiding criticizing them. It is because teachers avoid the complaints from parents. One of the interviewee said,

> *"Parents like to listen to how their children perform in kindergartens, but they quite resist the bad comments written in their portfolios because it may affect their children to go to the primary schools."* (T5)

If all the comments used in the portfolio are good, how can parents know their children's learning progress? It may create the misunderstanding of parents of how their children learn. Also, it is worried that if teachers only emphasis on praising students, but neglect to tell students about their mistakes and performance, it may not be good for students. If they accustom to listen to the praise, students will not be easily to accept criticism in their growth. Perhaps, they may just grow up in the warm garden without listening to the comments that they dislike. Once they encounter problem, they may not know how to handle. Thus, feedback should not only emphasize on appreciation, but also on how to let students know their inadequate performance and how to improve.

## D. Problems encountered

There are two problems encountered by teachers: inadequate training and time constraints. In Table 4, many teachers (72.1%) disagree that there is adequate training which is relevant to "giving students feedback". One of the interviewed teachers says that:

*"I studied in The Hong Kong Institution of Education 2 years ago… It seemed that no one taught me how to give students feedback in lessons… I could only have the opportunity to participate in workshops organized by schools when I started teaching. I learnt it when I sat in on my colleague's class and attended activities of lesson evaluation and lesson discussion. I think to observe how the experience teachers gave feedback for students and discuss with them can help me in improving the techniques of giving feedback."* (T2)

There is a lack of adequate trainings for teachers, however they learn a lot from lesson observation. It illustrates the inadequacy of professional development trainings for teachers.

Moreover, a lot of teachers (41.1%) agreed that they do not have enough time to follow up after students have received feedback. Half of the interviewees (Three-sixths) think that they do not have enough time to give feedback, and one interviewed teacher explains that:

*"The curriculum is too tight. Teachers' workload is heavy. Although I have given the feedback for students, there is basically not enough time to follow up. Indeed, I also want to follow up. Unfortunately, there is no time."* (T5)

The interviewed teachers point out that the lack of follow-up after giving feedback is not what they want. However, as the schedule of the courses is tight, the teachers are afraid that they cannot keep up with the scheme. Some teachers would rather spend time on teaching, so the follow-up work for students relatively decreases. If teachers do not have enough time to follow up the performance of students, it will greatly affect the learning effectiveness of students. If teachers do not follow up after

giving students feedback, then how can teachers review their teaching (Ovando, 1994) and evaluate their teaching strategies (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Council, 2002)?

Finding also indicates that after students receive oral feedback from teachers, the teachers think that 82.9% of students will partly follow up on it; 12.4% of students will have a complete follow-up; 3.1% of students will not follow up on it. Only a small number of teachers (1.6%) think that it is unclear whether students have follow up.

Similarly, after students receive written feedback from teachers, the teachers think that many students (82.9%) will partly follow up on it; 12.6% of students will have complete follow-up; 3.1% of the students will not follow up on it. Only a few teachers (7.8%.) are not sure. Why the majority of students can only partly follow up on it? This problem is related to the desire of students to follow up the feedback given by teachers. If teachers do not follow up students' learning performance after students receive the feedback, the students will also be sloppy at feedback and only partly follow up on it. If teachers follow up the feedback seriously which they give to students, the students will follow up on it as both teachers and students can interact and influence each other.

The finding indicates that teachers are lack of following up students' reaction to feedback. It is only a kind of one-way feedback. If teachers ask questions or give comments how to improve, students can follow up on it. Then teachers and students are like playing ping pong, interacting with each other. Teachers should base on student follow up action and give further praise or relevant clues as feedback, such as giving hints, asking questions and holding discussions which can help them learn.

## 8. Summary and Suggestion

This study finds that most of the teachers in Hong Kong can analyze the aim of feedback from the perspective of students. The aim of feedback is to stimulate students to learn, allowing students to understand their performance. Teachers also think that feedback can provoke self-reflection of students. However, they comparatively lack understanding of the aims of giving students feedback with the perspective of teachers. Some teachers do not review their teaching from feedback. The study also finds that teachers equally emphasize "qualitative" feedback which they give to students. Most students like teachers giving them feedback and the teachers have already done pretty good; however, they encountered two problems. Firstly, teachers do not have adequate training about giving students feedback. Secondly, teachers lack follow-up work after giving feedback to students. To solve the above phenomena, it is necessary to strengthen professional development trainings for teachers.

### A. Centralized training
The Hong Kong Education Bureau and universities can organize relevant teacher training courses and workshops on topics such as:

### a. Aims of feedback

The study points out that teachers lack insight in analyzing the significance of feedback from the perspective of students and the aspect of interaction between teacher and students. It should provide the training for teachers to look at the aim of feedback at the perspective of teachers. Besides pointing out the students' performance and bringing up learning directions for improvement, the aim of feedback is to have an in-depth understanding of students' inadequacies in learning, to evaluate teachers' teaching. Thus, teachers can review and adjust their teaching strategies which enhance the effectiveness of students' learning.

### b. Feedback and learning theory

In recent years, the education reform is based on constructivism which emphasizes student-centered. Learners have to take initiative to explore, and the role of teachers is to assist learners in constructing knowledge. However, the feedback given by some teachers still inculcates knowledge to students by one-way. The teachers directly give students feedback, but lack of following up how students improve which violates the theory of constructivism. Teachers should have a profound understanding of the relationship between feedback and learning theory. With the foundation of learning theory, teachers can have a profound understanding of aims of feedback.

### c. The skills of criticism and praise

Feedback given from teachers to students includes both positive praise and criticism, however, this study finds that the feedback which teachers give to students is mainly praise; however, giving appropriate criticism is necessary. Although negative criticism might result in students losing confidence, it would not be a problem as long as it is skillfully used. For example, Hyland, Fiona & Ken Hyland (2001) suggest that teachers can use Paired Act Pattern to write criticism such as reminding students in the form of praise-criticism-suggestion triad. Teachers can use terms such as "can", "please", "if you can…", "maybe", "if" to criticize students politely, and it would be easier for them to accept and understand what they should improve.

### d. Enhance follow-up work after giving feedback

Since teachers have heavy workloads, they do not have time to follow up after giving students feedbacks. It also exerts an influence on students of not attaching great importance to the feedback and they will not follow up on it. Black et al., (2003) believe that follow-up activity is an important part in the process of learning after giving feedback. Follow-up activity is to provide students with opportunities to show their learning outcomes after receiving feedback. Follow-up activity can offer students opportunities to rework and revise, and it also allows students to have a chance to raise questions (Gareis & Grant, 2008). If teachers do not have time to discuss with individual students, they can design "feedback form" for students. The form should be very simple for kindergarten children such as it may be a kind of drawing which helps them can express how they feel and understand the feedback. Then teachers can find out students' feeling and opinions about feedback and whether they have followed up on it so as to strengthen the interaction between teachers and students.

## B. School-based training

Besides the centralized training of The Hong Kong Education Bureau, school-based training is also important. Teachers give students feedback in daily teaching, so teacher training can also be started off with school-based. Schools can cooperate with universities, inviting university teachers to schools for lesson observation and exchange. In the meantime, school teachers can draw on the experiences of quality feedback which other colleagues give to students and derive others' strengths. Teachers have always been lacking opportunities to share the feedback given to students with their colleagues, for example, few teachers will take initiative to share the written comments and oral feedback which given to students in classes. Therefore, giving teachers more chances to exchange and have lesson observation can actually help them to understand the quality of feedback which they give to students. Moreover, universities can also cooperate with teachers in the teaching and research of this aspect so that teachers have more in-depth understanding of how to give feedback to students.

This study is preliminary in nature and has its limitations. It lacks data of lesson observation and analysis of written feedback collected from teachers. It is hoped that further studies can collect data of lesson observation, having an in-depth analysis of oral feedback which teachers give to students in class. In the meantime, it can also collect comments which teachers give students in their portfolios and explore the features of the written feedback. Moreover, this study is to collect data from the perspective of teachers, and researcher also hopes that it can explore the effectiveness of feedback given by teachers from the perspective of students.

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