60-Second SoTL

Episode 8 – Challenges to Providing Effective Feedback

(Piano Music)

00:03

Jessie L. Moore:
What challenges do instructors experience in providing effective feedback? That's the focus of this week's **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning**. I'm Jessie Moore.

00:13

(Piano Music)

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In "Instructors' Perspectives of Challenges and Barriers to Providing Effective Feedback," published in *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*, Brit M. Paris explores instructors' perspectives on feedback at a large research-intensive university in western Canada, extending a scholarly conversation often centered around Australian and United Kingdom contexts.

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As part of a larger study, Paris conducted six, one-hour focus groups with five instructors from four disciplines. Each instructor identified a single course – and one formative feedback process from that course – to reflect on during the focus groups. Instructors' class sizes ranged from 14 to 82 students, and their feedback processes included audio feedback, scaffolded feedback on a research paper with deadlines for different sections, peer feedback that was reviewed and graded by the instructor, instructor and peer feedback on drafts, and reflection on feedback, which was submitted with the next assignment.

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Although their formative feedback processes varied, participants identified shared challenges, which Paris discusses in three broad categories. First, workload was a recurring challenge, not only because of the time required to offer meaningful feedback but also because classes carried high administrative loads associated with email exchanges with students. These workloads increased significantly for instructors with larger class sizes.

Second, instructors' perceptions of student inaction complicated providing effective feedback. Instructors noted that students didn't submit drafts for feedback, didn't take up feedback when offered, and didn't trust the peer feedback they received.

Third, this inaction impacted instructors' affect and mindset, leaving them frustrated – and sometimes prompting them to reduce the feedback they offered.

02:01

Paris's study occurred in early 2020, when universities shifted to online learning in response to COVID-19, so she also highlights challenges created or amplified by the pandemic. For example, instructors encountered technical issues like inconsistent home internet connections, constraints with the campus learning management system, and challenges sharing home resources and spaces with other family members. Of course, students' also encountered pandemic-related challenges, which sometimes highlighted assumptions instructors made about students' prior knowledge. For instance, one instructor was surprised that students did not have prior experience with track changes and commenting tools that were needed to adapt feedback processes in light of remote learning.

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Paris notes that these types of challenges to providing effective feedback can break the feedback cycle in a class, and her research reiterates that designing effective feedback processes necessitates both teacher feedback literacy and student feedback literacy. Teacher feedback literacy enables instructors to design feedback processes that encourage student engagement with feedback, but students also need practice using peer and instructor feedback and a framework for understanding feedback's value to their ongoing learning process.

03:14

Paris's article offers a helpful and concise literature review on feedback research, and the show notes for this episode link to additional resources.

03:22

To learn more about this study of instructors' perspectives of challenges to providing effective feedback, follow the link in our show notes to read the open-access article.

03:30

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Join us next week for another snapshot of recent scholarship of teaching and learning on **60-second SoTL from Elon University's Center for Engaged Learning.** Learn more about the Center at www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org.

03:46

(Piano Music)