CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge Papers in English Language Education

Giving feedback on speaking



Philip Kerr



Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
The case for giving feedback	5
Key decisions about feedback	7
Including positive feedback	11
Conclusion	13
Recommendations for further reading	14
Bibliography	15
Author biography	17
Appendix	18

Introduction

In any typical language learning course, students will be presented with a variety of opportunities to speak. Teachers often divide these opportunities into two broad categories: (1) activities that are intended to develop accuracy (i.e. where the primary focus is on accurate production of language features, such as grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation), and (2) activities that are intended to develop fluency (i.e. where the primary focus is on communicating meanings to another person, and not on the accurate production of language forms).

This paper will focus on feedback in the second type of activity, examples of which include discussions, debates, presentations, role plays, and problem-solving tasks. In each of these activities, there will be:

- some sort of outcome that is non-linguistic (e.g. reaching a joint decision),
- some interaction between learners.

Learning outcomes for such activities cannot be reliably predicted in advance, but the potential benefits include:

- gains in self-confidence and motivation;
- gains in automatized language production;
- opportunities to experiment with the full range of linguistic resources at the learners' disposal (i.e. develop more complex language);
- opportunities to learn from the language of other learners;
- opportunities to obtain feedback from other learners through the processes of clarification, rephrasing and confirmation, which will drive language acquisition.

From the list above of potential learning benefits, it can be seen that fluency-based activities are concerned with more than just developing fluency. Researchers have found that fluency-based activities can lead to greater accuracy and complexity (Nation & Newton, 2009: 152).

At the same time, accuracy-based spoken work is generally believed to lead, ultimately, to greater fluency: otherwise, it would be a waste of time. Fluency and accuracy develop at the same time (Ellis & Shintani, 2013: 197).

The challenge, for teachers, is to ensure that the conditions under which communicative speaking activities take place allow for these benefits to be realised. At the very least, it is important that students should (1) speak a lot, and (2) push themselves to use language at the upper range of their ability level (Ur, 2012: 117). One of the conditions that teachers control – feedback – can impact on these potential benefits.

Feedback can also be about the performance of peers. In fact, some learners benefit more from hearing this kind of feedback than feedback which concerns them more directly.

Feedback is any kind of information that learners receive about their performance. This can be corrective feedback which focuses a learner's attention on errors, or it can be non-corrective, in the form of praise or encouragement, for example. However, the feedback can also be about the performance of peers. In fact, some learners benefit more from hearing this kind of feedback than feedback which concerns them more directly (Havranek, 2002: 259). It is also useful to bear in mind that feedback does not only go to the learner: it can also go to the teacher. A student's performance in a communicative speaking task is a rich source of information about the teacher's teaching (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In a fluency-based task, it is often the things that students did not say that provide the richest feedback to teachers. It is these gaps that can suggest the features of language that a teacher may wish to provide feedback on, especially in delayed feedback (see 'Should feedback be immediate or delayed?' section).

The case for giving feedback

To correct or not to correct at all: it is a question that researchers have debated for decades, but on which they have failed to reach clear agreement. Of course, not all feedback is corrective; it can also refer to praise and highlighting of successful language use, for example. This paper addresses both sides of giving feedback. First, we will consider correction.

Focusing on the correction of grammar (rather than vocabulary, pronunciation or discourse features), researchers such as Krashen (1982, 1985) and Truscott (1999) have argued that corrective feedback can be harmful to language acquisition, that it leads to no demonstrable gains in grammatical accuracy, that it can impact negatively on learners' feelings, and that teachers face overwhelmingly complex decisions when they attempt to make corrective feedback effective in the classroom. Teachers, they argue, should consider dropping such feedback altogether.

However, in recent years, examination of the effects of feedback has led most researchers to disagree with this idea. Drawing on a number of meta-analyses of corrective feedback, evidence is now pointing towards the idea that feedback can indeed promote language learning (Lyster et al., 2013; Ellis & Shintani, 2013: 257–268; Mackey et al., 2016). Learning gains may not be immediate or predictable, but they will take place. Teachers, argue these researchers, should not avoid corrective feedback, but should give more thought to the kinds of feedback they give. We will discuss the key decisions that teachers need to make about feedback below: when to give feedback, how to give feedback, and what kind of feedback to give.



Evidence is now pointing towards the idea that feedback can indeed promote language learning.

Research also suggests that students want and expect to be corrected. In fact, they want to be corrected more than their teachers feel ready to do so (Roothooft & Breeze, 2016). This finding from research is uncontroversial: most adult learners in most educational contexts expect their errors to be corrected. They appreciate it when this takes place, believe that the teacher (as opposed to a classmate) is the best person to provide it, and prefer explicit kinds of feedback (Lyster et al., 2013: 7; Ellis & Shintani, 2013: 274; Zhang & Rahimi, 2014: 433).

If students believe that their learning will be more effective when their errors are corrected clearly and immediately, there may be a strong case for providing more feedback of this kind. If teachers do not meet the expectations of their learners, we may also expect to find negative emotional responses which will be detrimental to learning. Learners will only respond positively, however, if they believe that the feedback is something that will help them to improve. If they feel that the feedback concerns language that is above their level of competence, it is unlikely to be motivating.

In addition, the preference of most adult learners for a particular approach to corrective feedback does not mean that all adult learners share this view. Even among those who state that they want plenty of correction, there will be variations in the amount of correction that is seen as helpful. What one student perceives as helpful feedback, another may perceive as criticism. Furthermore, the fact that a learner expresses a preference for a particular approach does not necessarily mean that they will respond well to it (Mackey et al., 2016: 503). Finally, we should not automatically assume that learners know what is best for them (Truscott, 1996: 359) and there is a danger that some learners may become too dependent on feedback from the teacher. They may not think enough about accuracy if they assume that the teacher will correct everything for them.

The most useful advice that can be given is that teachers simply need to be sensitive to the individual differences and preferences of their students. Rather than relying on their intuitive understanding, however, teachers may consider carrying out a survey with their classes in which students discuss their attitudes towards feedback. A good example of such a survey can be found in the Appendix section of this paper.

Key decisions about feedback

Should feedback be immediate or delayed?

It is not uncommon for teachers to delay all or most feedback until the end of a fluency-based activity, and such an approach is often supported by the advice in the guides for teachers that accompany coursebooks. A frequent procedure is described below:

Teachers keep a note of language items which they wish to focus on while the students are speaking. They later select from this record a limited number of items. They write these on the board or read them aloud and invite students to identify and correct problems. They are more likely to discuss the problems in open class than to direct questions at an individual student. Teachers may choose to give positive, non-corrective feedback on the content of the students' discussion, as well as highlighting examples of accurate and appropriate language use, before focusing on errors (Thornbury, 2005: 93; Harmer, 2007: 131).

As an alternative to this approach, audio or video recordings are made, and these are used as the basis for later feedback. Teachers may also provide feedback sheets to individual students.

Despite the widespread use of delayed feedback, there has, until recently, been little research that has investigated its effectiveness. However, Hunter (2011) found that delayed feedback could be beneficial in promoting both accuracy and complexity. Quinn (2014) also found that delayed feedback led to gains in accuracy, but did not find that delayed feedback was any more effective than immediate feedback. More research is needed.

From a theoretical perspective, researchers have usually argued that immediate feedback (rather than delayed feedback) is likely to result in greater learning gains (Doughty, 2001). As a counter to the argument that immediate feedback may break up the flow of communication, it has been suggested that it may provide a brief, but positive timeout from the speaking (Li, 2014: 197). For the time being, there is simply not enough evidence to claim that either delayed or immediate feedback is more effective than the other (Ellis, 2009: 11).

If research cannot tell us much about the timing of feedback, can it help inform teaching practices by considering learners' preferences? As we saw above in the section on 'The case for giving feedback', learners generally prefer feedback to be immediate (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014: 433), although one study (Kaivanpanah et al., 2015) found that there was no clear preference.

There is, then, little research consensus about the timing of feedback (Ellis & Shintani, 2013: 276). Teachers will need to weigh up the likely impact of their chosen strategy on both possible learning gains and the way that their students will respond on an emotional level (see 'Including positive feedback' section.)

Which errors should the teacher correct?

It is clearly neither practicable nor desirable for teachers to provide corrective feedback on every error that is produced in a fluency-based activity. Teachers will need to make decisions about which items to focus on and what kind of balance they wish to achieve between negative and positive feedback. Research can help to inform these decisions, but it cannot provide concrete rules.

In teacher training guides, it is common to differentiate errors, mistakes and slips, but the choice of term varies confusingly from one guide to another. To simplify matters here, I will only use the term 'error'. Drawing on the work of Corder (1967), errors are commonly categorized into:

- errors in performance caused by time pressure and competing attentional resources (these are often referred to as 'mistakes' or 'slips');
- errors caused by a lack of knowledge or by misapplication of knowledge.

When selecting which errors to focus on in feedback, it is suggested that teachers should focus on performance errors, since the brief interventions of corrective feedback are more suited to dealing with these. This advice is common-sensical but is not always easy to follow. It is not always possible in the classroom to identify the cause of a particular error (Mackey et al., 2016: 500) and errors may, in any case, have more than one cause (Nation & Newton, 2009: 142).

An alternative categorization was offered by Burt (1975), who looked at the communicative effect of the error, rather than its cause. He suggested that it makes sense to give feedback on errors which affect overall sentence organization and impede comprehension (incorrect word order, for example). He referred to these as 'global errors'. 'Local errors', in contrast, do not result in communicative breakdowns (missing third person singular or past tense verb endings, for example) and may be passed over in feedback. Again, however, this reasonable sounding categorization runs into problems in the classroom. Is a missing definite article in the utterance 'Do you have time?' a global or a local error?

Other attempts to categorise errors are no less problematic. Ellis, for example, suggested that feedback should be limited to 'marked grammatical features or features that learners have shown they have problems with' but later acknowledged that this, too, was hard to judge in the classroom (Ellis, 2009: 6).

Researchers have tended to focus on grammatical errors and there is evidence that teachers do the same (Lyster et al., 2013: 22). Communication problems, however, are more likely to be caused by vocabulary and pronunciation issues (Mackey et al., 2016: 505) so there may be a strong case for focusing on these more than on grammar. In addition, there is evidence that feedback on vocabulary and pronunciation leads to greater learning gains, in part because learners pay more attention to it (Lyster et al., 2013: 22). This is not to say that feedback on issues of grammar is not of value, but a change of emphasis is worthy of consideration.

Which techniques should the teacher use?

Teachers have a range of feedback techniques to choose from. A useful way to think about the range of options is to categorize them according to (1) the kind of feedback given (the two main categories are prompts, where students are encouraged to correct themselves, and reformulations / recasts, where the teacher provides the correction); and (2) how implicit or explicit the guidance is. Examples of these are provided below, but it should be remembered that classifications of this kind cannot reflect the full variety of strategies that teachers employ, and that there may be considerable cross-over between the categories.

It should be said at the outset that none of these strategies is necessarily any better than any other. There is continuing debate among researchers, and there is evidence to indicate that all these strategies can be effective. Everything will depend on the particular context in which the feedback is provided.

There appears to be a preference among teachers for less direct forms of feedback (Ellis, 2009: 10) and this is probably because they are mostly concerned with the affective impact of feedback. They want to minimize anxiety and build their students' confidence. When feedback is provided immediately (rather than delayed), a clarification request or a simple reformulation is less likely to break up the flow of communication than an explicit correction. This depends, however, on the clarity and economy of the teacher's feedback. A teacher's comment like 'I'm sorry, I don't understand' may not be clearly understood by the student: what is it precisely that the teacher does not understand? Similarly, a simple reformulation may not even be noticed by the student.

	Prompts	Reformulation
Implicit	**Clarification request** S: They no win a lot. T: I'm sorry, I don't understand.	**Simple reformulation** S: They no win a lot. T: Ah, OK. They don't earn a lot.
Implicit	**Repetition** S: They no earn a lot. T: They no earn a lot. *(The teacher stresses 'no', says this word with rising intonation, or uses a hand gesture /makes a facial expression while saying 'no' to indicate that there is a problem here.)*	
Explicit	**Elicitation** S: They no earn a lot. T: They *(Long pause accompanied by gesture / expression)* earn a lot. Or T: No earn? *(The teacher accompanies the prompt with gesture or expression.)*	**Explicit correction** S: They no earn a lot. T: You need to say 'They don't earn a lot'. *(The teacher stresses the corrected form.)*
Explicit	**Metalinguistic clue** S: They no earn a lot. T: Negative form?	**Explicit correction with metalinguistic clue** S: They no earn a lot. T: Remember you need 'don't' to make the negative. They don't earn a lot.

Many teachers also seem to prefer prompts to reformulations, and, in this, they are following the saying 'What you tell me, I forget; what I discover for myself, I remember' (Scrivener, 2005: 298). The process of rephrasing is believed to aid language development, since it requires deeper processing, and this should help memorization and automatization (Mackey et al., 2016: 502). In addition, the opportunity to self-correct can be more motivating and such moments can contribute to a more dynamic and interactive classroom (Li, 2014: 197).

Research has focused mostly on the cognitive, not the affective, aspects of different correction techniques, and is usually more interested in accuracy than fluency. Some researchers (e.g. Ellis et al., 2006) have found that explicit correction with metalinguistic information is more effective than simple reformulations. A meta-analysis by Li (2010) also found that explicit feedback was usually more effective in the short-term, but over longer periods of time implicit feedback had more impact. To complicate the picture further, Lyster and Saito (2010) found that explicit correction was no more and no less effective than prompts or reformulations.

The discussion above has considered the relative advantages of self-correction and teacher correction, but there is a third possibility: peer correction. During fluency-based tasks, many students are reluctant to offerfeedback on their peers' language performance and, when it is offered, it is probably less attended to than feedback that comes from a teacher (Lyster et al., 2013: 29). This is a pity, because one of the possible benefits of these tasks is the opportunity to learn from others in the processes of clarification, rephrasing and confirmation. When feedback is delayed until the speaking task is complete, it is possible to invite all students to suggest corrections or improvements to the language that is being focused on. One way of doing this is by writing examples of language that can be improved on the board. Students then work in groups to discuss the improvements or changes. The feedback process then becomes a learning opportunity for everyone.

It now seems unlikely that research could determine, in general, which feedback strategy is more effective than another. If all these strategies can lead to learning gains (although not everyone agrees that they will, as we saw in the section on 'The case for giving feedback'), teachers are probably best advised to use a mixed approach (Lyster et al., 2013: 21; Mackey et al., 2016: 504). Many teachers instinctively provide opportunities for self-correction first, and turn to a more explicit strategy if this fails (Ellis, 2009: 7). However, cultural expectations, learner preferences, level, age and metalinguistic knowledge may all require different strategies or combinations of strategies.

Including positive feedback

Speaking in another language, especially for lower-level learners, is stressful, putting them under intense pressure (Goh & Burns, 2012: 31). In addition to the demands of finding things to say and finding ways of saying them in comprehensible English in real time with limited resources, students must deal with the fact that they must do this in public, in front of others (peers or teachers) who may be judging how well they perform. The potential for debilitating anxiety about loss of face can be huge, especially for shy learners. Corrective feedback from the teacher that highlights their mistakes can make things worse.

The negative effects of anxiety on language learning have been well-established by researchers (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014: 430). In the most extreme cases, students may say nothing at all. More often, they may adopt a strategy of limited participation: the less they say, the fewer mistakes they will make. When this happens, the potential learning benefits can clearly not be realised.

Even for students with lower anxiety levels, corrective feedback may undermine the objectives of a fluency-based activity. Skehan has argued that a student's attentional resources during a speaking activity are limited (Skehan, 1998: 73). They cannot give equal attention to the competing demands of getting their meaning across (fluency), using varied and interesting language (complexity) and accuracy. Attempting to do so may lead some students to experience cognitive overload (Goh & Burns, 2012: 246) and the anxiety that will result. Even when this does not happen, there is a risk that corrective feedback will break up the flow of communication and encourage students to focus on accuracy at the expense of fluency and complexity (Pili-Moss, 2014).

Most teachers are well aware of such dangers and will have experience in the classroom of fluency-based activities where students were reluctant to speak. In response, teachers adopt a variety of strategies to avoid generating additional anxiety or, at least, to minimize its impact. Some avoid corrective feedback altogether, but, as we saw in the section on 'The case for giving feedback', this may be too extreme a position. Three strategies (delaying feedback until the end of the activity, adopting a selective policy regarding the errors to be corrected, and using implicit, rather than explicit, correction techniques) have already been discussed in this paper. Here, we will consider a number of other strategies, which may be used individually or in combination.

1 Using praise

Praising students for good performance is believed to increase motivation and to foster positive attitudes to learning (Ellis & Shintani, 2013: 250). The extent to which it will actually do so depends on the response of individual learners. Research suggests that praise is least effective when it is general (such as praise for having completed a task), because it does not provide any information which learners can use to further their learning (Hattie, 2009: 175). Praise is more effective when it is specific.

Singling out an individual student for praise in front of the whole class may not be welcomed by the student concerned. Catching a student for a few positive words after class may be a better strategy.

2 Highlighting accurate and appropriate language use, rather than indicating errors

In general educational contexts, it has been found that feedback on correct responses is more effective than feedback on incorrect responses (Hattie, 2009: 175). Confirming that a student has produced accurate and appropriate language in a particular instance (e.g. avoiding a very common mistake) is likely to benefit both the individual student and others in the class, who will have their attention drawn to the language item in question (Ur, 2012: 91).

Corrective feedback may also have more impact if it is mixed with positive reinforcement. When, in delayed feedback, teachers write examples of things they have heard on the board, they should mix up examples of errors and good language use. The students' first task is to identify the examples of good language use.

In general educational contexts, it has been found that feedback on correct responses is more effective than feedback on incorrect responses.

3 Planning the monitoring of speaking activities

It is not easy to monitor group-speaking activities and it is easy to focus attention on errors. Teachers should decide, in advance of the activity, that for some groups they will focus on the content and for others they will focus on examples of accurate or appropriate language use. This will facilitate the giving of positive delayed feedback. Different strategies should be adopted in different lessons.

4 Adopting a supportive manner

The potential for anxiety will be reduced if teachers maintain a tactful, supportive and sensitive manner in any intervention during or after a speaking activity. Correcting students, as Harmer (2007: 26) observes, is always 'a delicate event'. With some classes and some individuals, it may be worth devoting some time to ensuring that students understand the purpose of corrective feedback if this will lower their anxiety levels (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014: 430).

Teachers should always try to model good listening skills, including appropriate body language and confirming expressions (e.g. 'Right', 'Uh-huh'). They can also be taught explicitly to students and some coursebooks do this.

5 Encouraging positive feedback from peers

At the end of a pair or group work activity, students can be asked to tell their peers one or more things that they did well.

6 Showing interest in the content of what students have said

If students are to focus primarily on communicating their ideas (rather than on accuracy), teachers will need to show interest in and respond to the ideas they have expressed. Comments such as 'That was an original idea', 'I'd never thought of that' or 'X was saying something interesting about Y, but I didn't catch all of it – could you tell us again?' (so long as they are genuine) can act as positive reinforcement to the focus on the content of the speaking activity.

Conclusion

A fluency-based task is, first and foremost, an opportunity for learners to participate in extended speaking, using the full range of their linguistic resources and experimenting with new language. Although the focus of these tasks should be on communication, learners will make language errors and teachers need to decide how to handle them. However, although most learners want to be corrected, teachers need to handle feedback sensitively so as not to affect students' willingness to speak.

Classrooms are complex, diverse and unpredictable places. Decisions by teachers about whether or not and how to give feedback usually have to be made in the 'heat of the moment'. The findings of research can help to inform these decisions, but an element of improvised guesswork in the teacher's approach to feedback is unavoidable. In this, there is a direct parallel to the learner's experience. Errors may occur, but they are opportunities for learning, and even when a teacher's approach to feedback seems to be effective, little will be lost from experimenting with something new. This might involve trying out a different balance of positive and corrective feedback, modifying the balance of immediate and delayed feedback, trialing different feedback techniques, reducing or increasing the amount of feedback that is given, or getting feedback from students about how they feel about the approach.



Recommendations for further reading

There are a number of practical guides to correction for teachers. Two are especially recommended:

Bartram, M. & Walton, R. (1991). *Correction*. Hove, Sussex: LTP

Edge, J. (1990). *Mistakes and Correction*. London: Longman

On positive, non-corrective feedback, there is a useful chapter in:

Scrivener, J. (2012). *Classroom Management Techniques*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.163–166.

Bibliography

Burt, M. (1975). Error analysis in the adult EFL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 9(1): 53–63.

Corder, S.P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors.*International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 5(4): 161–169.

Doughty, C. (2001). Cognitive underpinnings of focus on form. In Robinson, P. (ed.) *Cognition and Second Language Instruction* (pp. 206–57). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (2009). Corrective Feedback and Teacher Development. *L2 Journal*, 1(1): 3–18.

Ellis, R., Loewen, S. & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2): 339–368.

Ellis, R. & Shintani, N. (2013). *Exploring Language Pedagogy through Second Language Acquisition Research*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.

Goh, C. C. M. & Burns, A. (2012). *Teaching Speaking*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harmer, J. (2007). *How to Teach English*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.

Hattie, J.A.C. (2009). *Visible Learning*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.

Hattie. J.A.C. & Timperley, H. (2007). *The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research*, 77(1): 81–112.

Havranek, G. (2002). When is corrective feedback most likely to succeed? *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(3–4): 255–270.

Hunter, J.D. (2011). *A multi-method investigation of the effectiveness and utility of delayed corrective feedback in second-language oral production*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Birmingham.

Kaivanpanah, Sh., Alavi, S. M., & Sepehrinia, S. (2015). Preferences for interactional feedback: differences between learners and teachers. *The Language Learning Journal*, 43(1): 74–93.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. New York: Longman ELT.

Li, S. (2010). The effectiveness of corrective feedback in SLA: a meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 60(2): 309–365.

Li, S. (2014). Oral corrective feedback. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 68(2): 196–198.

Lyster, R. & Saito, K. (2010). Oral feedback in classroom SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2): 265–302.

Lyster, R., Saito, K. & Sato, M. (2013). Oral corrective feedback in second language classrooms. *Language Teaching*, 46(1): 1– 40.

Mackey, A., Park, H.I. & Tagarelli, K.M. (2016). Errors, corrective feedback and repair. In Hall, G. (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of English Language Teaching*. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge. pp. 499–512.

Nation, I.S.P. & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL / EFL Listening and Speaking*. New York: Routledge.

Pili-Moss, D. (2014). The role of timing and corrective feedback in L2 discussion activities. *International Journal of Pedagogy and Curriculum*, 19(4): 53–62.

Quinn, P. (2014). *Delayed versus Immediate Corrective Feedback on Orally Produced Passive Errors in English*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto.

Roothooft, H. & Breeze, R. (2016). A comparison of EFL teachers' and students' attitudes to oral corrective feedback. *Language Awareness*, 25(4): 318–335.

Scrivener, J. (2005). *Learning Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.

Skehan, P. (1998). *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thornbury, S. (2005). *How to Teach Speaking*. Harlow: Pearson. Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning*, 46(2): 327–369.

Truscott, J. (1999). What's wrong with oral grammar correction. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 55(4): 437–456.

Tsui, A. (1996). Reticence and Anxiety in Second Language Learning. In Bailey, K. & Nunan, D. (eds.) *Voices from the Language Classroom*. (pp.145–167) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.145–167

Ur, P. (2012). *A Course in English Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, L. J. & Rahimi, M. (2014). EFL Learners' Anxiety Level and their Beliefs about Corrective Feedback in Oral Communication Classes. *System*, 42: 429–439.

Author biography

Philip Kerr is a teacher trainer and ELT materials writer based in Vienna, Austria. He is the author or co-author of titles in a number of coursebook series, including *Straightforward* and *Inside Out*. He is also the author of the award-winning *Translation* and *Own-Language Activities* and two ebooks, *A Short Guide to Adaptive Learning in ELT* and *How to Write Vocabulary Presentations and Practice*.

Appendix

The following activity, referred to on page 4 of this paper, is taken from Penny Ur's (2012) book, *A Course In English Language Teaching*, published by Cambridge University Press.

Oral correction

When you make a mistake in class, you think it's . . . if the teacher	very good	good	not very good	bad
1. . . . ignores it, doesn't correct at all.				
2. . . . indicates there's a mistake but doesn't actually tell you what's wrong, so you have to work it out for yourself.				
3. . . . says what was wrong *and* tells you what the right version is.				
4. . . . says what was wrong and gets you to say the correct version yourself.				
5. . . . says what was wrong and gets someone else to say the correct version.				
6. . . . explains *why* it was wrong, what the rule is.				

Written correction

When you make a mistake in a written assignment, you think it's . . . if the teacher	very good	good	not very good	bad
1. . . . ignores it, doesn't correct at all.				
2. . . . indicates there's a mistake (e.g. underlines it) but doesn't actually tell you what's wrong, so you have to work it out.				
3. . . . tells you what's wrong (e.g. 'spelling') but doesn't actually give you the correct version, so you have to work it out yourself.				
4. . . . writes in what it ought to be.				
5. . . . corrects (any of the ways 2–4 above) but doesn't make you write out the correct version.				
6. . . . corrects (any of the ways 2–4 above) and makes you rewrite correctly.				

Task

Fill in the questionnaire yourself with your own preferences as a student learning another language. Then, if you are teaching, fill in the answers you guess your students would write, using another colour.

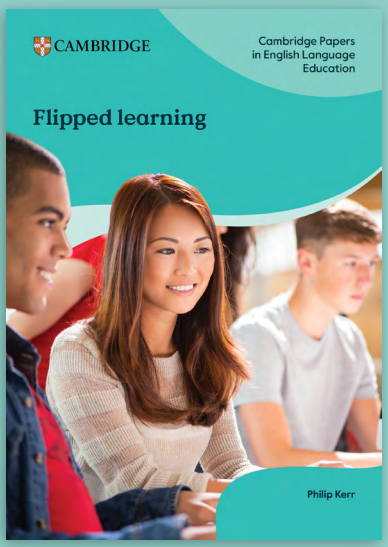
Compare your entries with my results as shown below.

Explore more

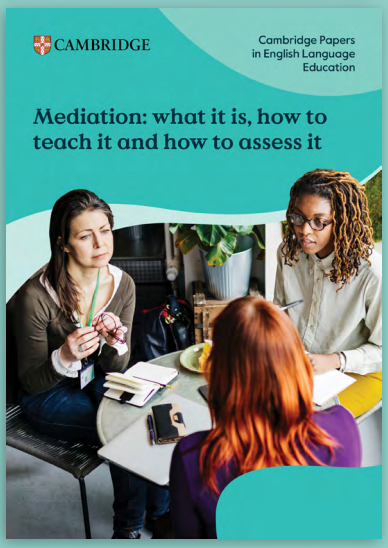
Cambridge Papers

in English Language Education









cambridge.org/english-insights



Find out more at
cambridge.org

We believe that English can unlock a lifetime of experiences and, together with teachers and our partners, we help people to learn and confidently prove their skills to the world.

Where your world grows

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS & ASSESSMENT

All details are correct at the time of going to print in July 2026.

© Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2026