

## **REFLECTION ON FEEDING BACK, FEEDING FORWARD, WINNING A PRIZE, PRACTISING A PROFESSION**

**The Report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT), December 1988, introduced me to the term 'feed forward'. Not a particularly elegant term but it served to remind us that when tutors comment on students' work it involves more than delivering judgment: more than feeding back: assessment is a sense-making process integral to education; and education is not time bound.**

Courses and programmes are, however, time bound; but today even when the last assignment has been submitted and assessed comments may also point a way forward. It was not always so.

When my masters dissertation was examined the comments were to be seen only by the exam board. So my tutor waited with me till the secretary who guarded the filing cabinet containing the comments was out of the room, stole the key, got the comment and let me have all of thirty seconds to read it. Then we scrambled like naughty giggling schoolchildren.

Too often assessment was something done to students behind their backs. For me to make sense of my own work I needed to know more than that I had passed. I needed to know what it signified: what it demonstrated in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding and what I might do next in terms of my career and future learning. So, as well as feedback I needed feedforward.

Back then there were no assessment criteria in that university department. If an academic told you that your work was good or bad that was more or less it. Almost the first thing that I did when I got the job of being in charge of masters degrees in that same department was to draft assessment criteria and guidance to go with them. I wanted a language of assessment that could be shared and developed by both students and tutors and that could become part of teaching and learning. Students help the development of such a language because they show tutors that criteria can be exemplified in ways not anticipated. They also highlight poorly drafted criteria.

It was looking back at what I had written in 2005 about a twenty thousand-word prize-winning masters dissertation that prompted my reflection on this. Here is the title.

***Developing motivation and self-esteem: action research with  
a class of 9<sup>th</sup>. grade girls***

I was not the supervisor. I was what, even today, is quaintly called a 'second marker'. The student won a prize for her work from the International Professional Development Association (ipda).

I enjoyed reading the dissertation, have never forgotten it and finished my comments with:

*"You will need to think carefully about where you go next with your ideas about further research. This is not simply a case of doing a doctorate next. It is also a case of what should follow in terms of the children, the teachers and the school (and other schools). And, of course, your career.*

**I presented the ipda prize to this professional educator in Jerusalem where she is now principal of a girls secondary school. Had she applied for a job at my university I would have snatched her hand off. Her professional future has continued to motivate young women whose lives these days in East Jerusalem are seldom easy.**

**My personal professional feedforward? Her story was about girls who had been losing self-esteem, gaining a bad reputation and missing out on education because a teacher, not wishing to teach, constantly provoked them into misbehaving. That meant punishment: 'Sit up straight in silence with your arms folded.' Remember that well worn anti teaching technique?**

**Eventually the girls managed their teacher so that she did her job. They got their education. Self-esteem that had been plummeting began to climb.**

**I learned a lot from that student. She fed forward my future learning and my career. As teachers, tutors, supervisors and general educators perhaps we might do more to let our students know what we have learned from them.**

**Cliff Jones March 2017**