Ambition Institute

Ark Teacher Training

Summary for educators



Why do some teachers improve more than others? Exploring initial teacher trainees' feedback orientation

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Foreword

There is a wealth of evidence which asserts that teachers are the greatest lever to impact the outcomes, future pursuits and life chances of young people in schools. The role of teaching is complex and cognitively demanding, and it is critical that we acknowledge the nuance behind what it means to teach well. Teaching well is highly dependent upon our combined knowledge of subject curriculum, assessment and pedagogical strategies. This expert synthesis is how we ensure students learn.

Why is this difficult? Because teaching exists for the most part in the live practice of our classrooms in real time. We therefore need to rely on a bank of tools to develop a shared understanding of what we mean by high quality teaching. Feedback is one such dialogical tool that helps develop this collective model. Beyond this, feedback holds a multi-faceted role in developing professional relationships that leave colleagues feeling supported and empowered as a result of the clarity that feedback offers.

We know that feedback is also a dynamic process between colleagues. While the research suggests that this tool should feature heavily in our repertoire for supporting colleagues, we should also exercise caution in viewing feedback as a solitary tool through which we can determine and improve teacher quality.

For these reasons, this new research from Ambition Institute is an important contribution to our understanding of how school leaders can add value to a new teacher's professional induction. While this paper focuses on feedback in the Initial Teacher Training sphere, it has broader applications. It will be of great interest to anyone involved in coaching, mentoring or supporting colleagues to develop expertise in the classroom, alongside a wider repertoire of tools.

I am delighted to introduce this research from Ambition Institute. It is an important addition to increasing our collective understanding of how to support teachers through an ongoing dialogue around practice. It will be of real value to our work at Windsor Academy Trust, as well as colleagues across the sector who work to induct and develop teachers so that we can ensure our students thrive. Above all, this research is a demonstration of what it means to be a teacher, a role that is hugely valuable and deeply rewarding: they continue to be our most vital resource.

Kat Howard
Executive School Improvement & Curriculum and Assessment Lead,
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Read the research in full at: **ambition.org.uk/initial-teacher-trainees-feedback/**

What is feedback orientation and why should teacher educators care about it?

Teacher educators are interested in ways to support teachers – particularly novices – to continue to improve. They are also interested in recruiting and retaining the best teachers. Teacher educators may be interested in exploring tools which help to predict someone's potential as a teacher. Although there has been appetite for such tools, there is also a wider conversation around whether teacher potential can be predicted at all, as it is not a fixed entity. Assessing feedback orientation is one possible way to understand why some novice teachers improve more than others.

Feedback orientation refers to how much a person values and accepts feedback (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010; London & Smither, 2002). This concept comes from performance management research and helps explain why people respond to feedback differently at work (Katz et al., 2023; London & Smither, 2002).

Feedback orientation is made up of different characteristics about how people use and respond to feedback. For example, feedback self-efficacy is believing that you have the ability to deal with feedback effectively and knowing that you can handle the feedback you receive. Social awareness means that you rely on feedback to make a good impression and use feedback to gauge what other people think of you. These different characteristics contribute to someone's feedback orientation, and people who are higher in feedback orientation generally perform better in the workplace (Katz et al., 2023). It is also believed that feedback orientation can change and develop over time as people experience cycles of feedback in the workplace.

We thought that feedback orientation could be important for teacher educators for several reasons. Understanding why some teachers take on board feedback better than others may help coaches or mentors to use feedback more effectively. If feedback orientation predicts improvement in teaching quality, teacher educators may want to measure it, or they might consider ways to develop it in novice teachers to help them improve. Teacher educators may also be interested in feedback orientation as a recruitment tool, if teachers who have higher feedback orientation do appear to improve more in practice.

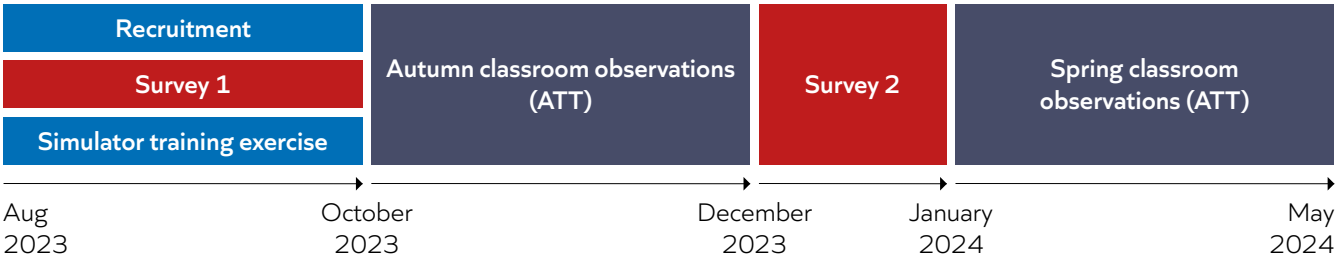
How did we research feedback orientation in this study?

We wanted to know if a novice teacher's feedback orientation could predict how much their teaching skills would improve in a single online training exercise, and during their first term of teaching. We also wanted to know whether novice teachers' feedback orientation changes over time.

To measure feedback orientation, we used the Feedback Orientation Scale (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). We surveyed 135 trainee teachers twice: once near the start of their course, and again after their first term of teaching (Survey 1 and Survey 2). To understand how much their teaching skills improved, we collected additional data in two ways. The teachers completed an online training exercise using a classroom simulator. Their performance was measured by how well they applied feedback from a teacher educator. We also gathered data on their teaching practice during their first term of training with Ark Teacher Training (ATT). This was based on standardised classroom observations made during their school placement. Observations were collected by trained observers using Ark's Great Teacher Rubric, which covers five critical domains of teaching practice.

In Survey 2, we also asked them about the feedback environment they experienced in their first school placements. We used a Feedback Environment Scale (Steelman et al., 2004) to ask participants about the quality and type of feedback they received from their coach or mentor, and from the colleagues they worked closely with in school. The scale consists of seven subdimensions: credibility, quality, delivery, favourable feedback, unfavourable feedback, availability and promoting feedback seeking.

Timeline of the study



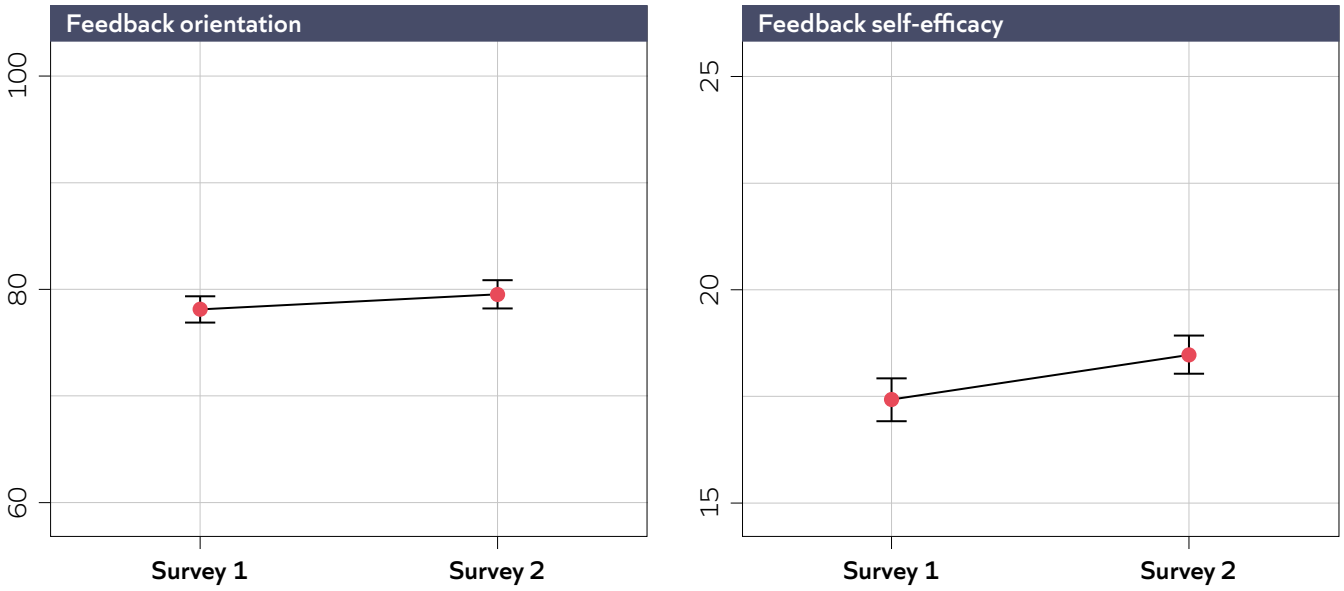
What did we learn about feedback orientation from this study?

First, **feedback orientation might improve over time** as individuals train to be teachers. Self-efficacy regarding feedback particularly appears to improve. The coaching and training that teachers received over the course of their training may have supported them to feel more confident and self-assured toward feedback. While this did not influence their overall improvement in classroom observation ratings, it can still be seen as a positive outcome amid the challenges of recruitment and retention in teaching, especially as feedback orientation has been linked to teacher job satisfaction (Hemler, 2020).

Second, we found that **feedback orientation did not reliably predict how much novice teachers improved** in the simulator training exercise, or in their teaching practice over two terms. This may be because feedback is only one of many facets which influence teacher performance. Other factors, such as the support novice teachers receive from their schools and training providers, may be more important than their individual feedback orientation. However, we found that novice teachers' social awareness of feedback (a subdimension of the Feedback Orientation Scale) predicted the quality of their classroom teaching during the first term of training. Based on classroom observation ratings, novice teachers who were more socially aware and wanted to use feedback to make a good impression had better teaching practice during the first term of their training.

Third, there may be a **link between teachers' feedback environment during their school placements, and their feedback orientation.** For example, teachers who received favourable (positive) and better quality feedback (for example, that was useful and helped them do their job) from their coach or mentor became more receptive to feedback and more confident in responding to it. As London and Smither (2002) predicted, an organisation's feedback environment likely matters.

These graphs show trainees' improvement in feedback orientation overall, and in their feedback self-efficacy



What should teacher educators do differently as a result of this study?

First, teacher educators should be aware that feedback orientation is not a reliable way to predict how much novice teachers will improve. Therefore, we do not recommend that training providers use feedback orientation to predict a teacher's potential, or as a measure of performance. When considering use of validated scales to predict novice teachers' potential, teacher educators should look for studies within teaching which demonstrate the scale's effectiveness before using it.

Second, teacher educators should be aware that feedback orientation can and does improve over time, similar to other personality traits (see also Jach et al., 2023). Therefore, they may wish to provide opportunities for trainees to develop this. For example, providing ample opportunities for good quality coaching and feedback which may improve participant's self-efficacy towards feedback.

Third, our findings point to the importance of an organisation's feedback environment to improve teacher's self-efficacy in responding to feedback. The quality and delivery of feedback from teachers' coaches or mentors may therefore be an area that training providers wish to focus on in the future. To reiterate, improving self-efficacy regarding feedback may not directly improve teaching, but it may have wider benefits, perhaps in terms of job satisfaction (Hemler, 2020).

If you would like to learn more about this research, please read the full research report that also contains the materials utilised in this project. **ambition.org.uk/initial-teacher-trainees-feedback/**

References

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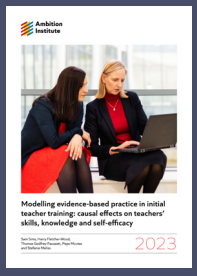
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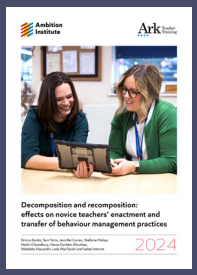
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Evidence is at the heart of what we do at Ambition Institute. Through our research we want to push forward our collective knowledge of effective professional development and share what works, to turn evidence into action. We aim to answer important questions faced by the sector, help teachers and leaders to address disadvantage, and show the impact of evidence-informed teaching.



Does adding modelling to professional development help to bridge the theory-practice gap? This research looked at whether video models helped initial teacher trainees to develop their retrieval practice skills.



This research explored whether breaking down (decomposing) and then recombining teaching practices into a different sequence of teaching (recomposing) helped initial teacher trainees apply what they learnt to new contexts.

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