



## Examining feedback sessions in pre-service teachers' practicum courses

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### Abstract

This paper discusses a collaborative study of feedback sessions done in the BA in English Language Teaching at the State University of Aguascalientes. The practicum subjects include four practicum courses. In these courses, student teachers teach EFL classes while a tutor observes their teaching practice. At the end of each class, student teachers are given feedback by the tutor. These feedback sessions served as the focus of this study into the types of feedback offered by the tutor/mentors.

In education, there has been a shift from regarding teaching as imparting knowledge to the students, to conceiving teaching as the facilitation of the students' learning process. Moreover, the old model of education dealt only with the education of the intellectual, theoretical and application level; however, the new model integrates this with emotional, interpersonal and political competence. (Heron, 1990)

Based on *Heron's Six Intervention Category Model*, this study seeks to inform the participants in this process of how feedback in practicum sessions can lead to personal and professional growth for both student-teachers and tutor/mentors.

The study began with a workshop for the tutor/mentors of the practicum courses. This workshop explained Heron's model and discussed its potential application to the feedback sessions. During the feedback sessions the tutor/mentors were recorded and observed. Then the results of these observations were presented to the tutor/mentors and finally, discussions were held to promote awareness of the interaction in the feedback sessions.



## **Introduction:**

In education, there has been a shift from regarding teaching as the imparting knowledge to the students, to conceiving teaching as the facilitation of the students' learning process. Moreover, the old model of education dealt only with the education on the intellectual, theoretical and application level; however, the new model integrates this with emotional, interpersonal and political competence. (Heron, 1990).

These changes demand new ways of thinking from teachers, such as becoming the facilitators of learning. The tutor/mentors of practicum courses have the fundamental goal of helping the student-teachers develop critical thinking and new understanding through feedback sessions. Based on Heron's *Six Intervention Category Model*, this study seeks to inform the participants in this process of how feedback in practicum sessions can lead to personal and professional growth for both student-teachers and tutor/mentors.

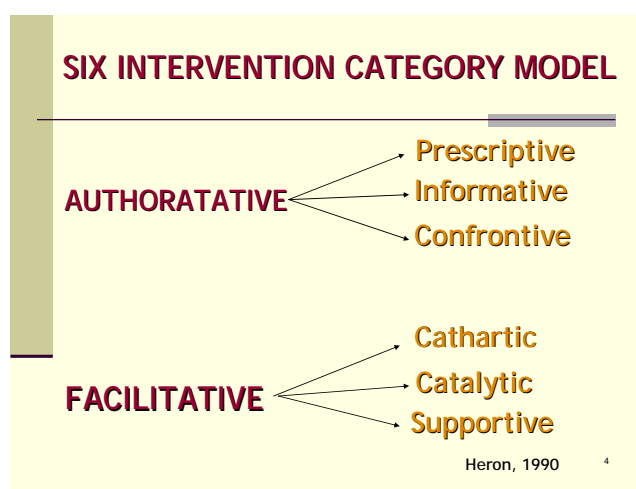
## **1 Six Intervention Category Model:**

The six intervention category is a model proposed by (Heron, 1990) to work on personal and professional growth. This model has a wide application to any human situation where there is a formal or an informal enabling relationship, or a formal working relationship, going from one person to another. The central enabling bond in this model, is to service the personal development of future teachers.

The six category analysis of counseling interventions can take place while working on personal or professional growth. Due to the comprehensive repertoire of interventions this model presents, it can be adapted and selectively applied to a broad range of occupational groups. One of its central uses is the training of trainers and facilitators in higher education. (Heron, 1990).

**Description of the Six Category Interventions:**

The six category system deals with six basic kinds of intention the tutor/mentor can have in helping the student-teachers in their development. The system has great flexibility and power to respond to a very wide range of student-teacher needs and tutor roles, and to cover them with practical input. The interventions are separated in two main categories, which are the authoritative category and the facilitative category, and each one has three different interventions.



**Table1**

**1.1 Authoritative**

1.1.1 Prescriptive: This intervention explicitly seeks to influence and direct the behavior of the student-teachers. This behavior is usually external for the student-teachers and the tutor/mentor relationship.

1.1.2 Informative: This intervention seeks to impart knowledge and information which is meaningful to the student-teachers. It has to be relevant to their needs and interest in terms that can be understood by them, and in a manner that enhances the student-teachers to participate in the learning process with self-directive activities.

1.1.3 Confrontive: This intervention seeks to raise student-teachers' awareness about weak or strong aspects within teaching practice. It unequivocally tells an uncomfortable truth; however, it is not aggressive and non-combative, and its manner is deeply affirming of the value of the student-teacher.

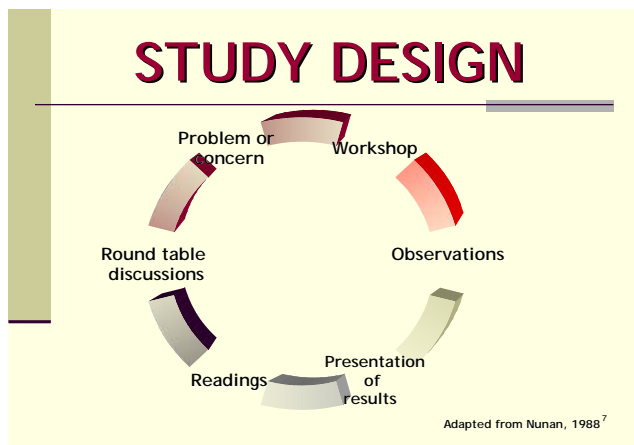
**1.2 Facilitative:**

1.2.1 Cathartic: This intervention enables the student-teacher to discharge painful emotions, primarily grief, fear and anger. It also gives space for the expression of spontaneously generated insights.

1.2.2 Catalytic: This intervention elicits self-discovery, self-learning and problem-solving. Its purpose is to help student-teachers become more responsible for who and what they are in order to gain more control over their performance.

1.2.3 Supportive: This intervention affirms the worth and value of the student-teacher as a person. It deals with their qualities, attitudes and actions. It is authentic and caring.

**2 The Study:**



**Table 2**

The study began with a workshop for the tutor/mentors of the practicum courses in the BA in ELT at the University of Aguascalientes. During this workshop,

Heron's model was explained and discussed for its potential application to the feedback sessions.

In order to raise student-teachers' awareness on their performance, and to promote changes in their way of teaching and encourage teacher development, observations were done to ten student-teachers and one in service, using an observation instrument based on Heron's model. During the feedback sessions, the tutor/mentors were recorded and observed in order to see what intervention category model was being used.

## OBSERVATION RESULTS

### I N T E R V E N T I O N S

Tutor	Prescriptive	Informative	Confrontive	Cathartic	Catalytic	Supportive
Aurora	5	8	1	7	7	5
David	3	8	1	2	0	1
Felipe	3	6	3	1	3	3
Susana	2	6	3	1	4	3
Noemí	2	3	2	1	3	3
Alejandra	4	2	1	1	2	4
Vanesa	2	5	3	2	2	3
Gerardo	2	1	0	1	1	2
Emma	1	5	4	0	2	2
Roberto	4	4	2	1	7	4
Ernesto	2	7	5	1	5	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>

**Table 3**

The results of these observations were presented to the tutor/mentors, and final round table discussions were held in order to see what approach was taken to feedback, how it was done, what types of feedback were given, the roles of the tutor/mentors, and finally, the knowledge and skills that were acquired through reflective teaching.



### 3 Discussion:

In the round tables the tutor/mentors agreed that the purpose of feedback was to raise student-teachers' awareness on their performance, and through this, to promote changes in their way of teaching and encouraging teacher development.

A non-directive approach, which is a process of reflection and self-evaluation, (Freeman, 1982) was considered important to follow because in this type of approach, a dialogue is established between tutor/mentors and student-teachers to construct understanding in order to help them move to the next level within their learning process through reflection and self-evaluation. The tutor/mentors also discussed that they generally followed Egan's three-stage model of helping. (Egan, 1994):

#### Stage 1.- Exploration:

Student- teacher gives opinions and reasons of his/ her performance

#### Stage 2.- New understanding:

Observers give their opinion, ask questions and make suggestions. Tutor/mentor questions the student-teacher and observers about specific aspects.

#### Stage 3.- Action

Tutor/mentor guides student-teacher to set personal goals.

Regarding the types of feedback through the analysis of the observations, it was discovered that most feedbacks were more of an informative intervention, followed by catalytic and supportive interventions; however, in the round tables, the tutor/mentors favored confrontive, catalytic and supportive interventions. They underlined the importance of having confrontive sessions to help the student-teachers identify weak and strong aspects of their teaching. Tutor/mentors also considered catalytic interventions highly important to develop the ability to create autonomy in the student-teachers and help them start the process of developing



critical thinking. Supportive interventions were also regarded relevant to affirm the value of the student as a person and create rapport.

Also during the round tables, concerning the roles of the tutor/mentor, they said that it was important to have the ability to know which role to use during certain feedback stages. They considered as their main roles to be attentive listeners, guides, advisors, facilitators, and teachers.

After having discussed all the aspects mentioned above, tutor/mentors underlined the importance of having knowledge in three different areas, which are: a) conceptual knowledge, b) procedural knowledge, and c) attitude knowledge. (Diaz-Barriga, 2002)

**a) Conceptual knowledge:**

This first knowledge would be considered the *know what*. This knowledge refers to the language, the methodology and the linguistic theories.

**b) Procedural knowledge:**

This knowledge would be considered the *know how*. By this we mean that the tutor/mentors have to know how to be a guide. For example; the tutor/mentor has to know how to observe actively, listen actively, give feedback effectively and be able to guide the student-teachers.

**c) Attitude knowledge:**

This knowledge could be considered as the *know how to be*. By this we consider having the disposition to help the student-teachers in their professional and personal growth. Tutor/mentors value and respect their student-teachers as persons who are able to trust and value themselves in whatever they do.



### **Conclusion:**

Through the development of this study it was observed that tutor/mentors share the same point of view on feedback because they consider it highly important to encourage teacher development.

In general tutor/mentors follow a non-directive approach and Egan's three stage model of helping in feedback sessions. Regarding Heron's six intervention model, supportive, confrontive and catalytic interventions are the ones most developed by the tutor/mentors. They also consider being an advisor, a facilitator, a guide and a teacher as their main roles in this type of sessions. In order to give feedback, it was also concluded that tutor/mentors have to have awareness in the three main areas of conceptual, procedural and attitude knowledge.

As a final conclusion, tutor/mentors' performance is highly influenced by their personality, their knowledge on the subject and their experience, but it is very important to underline that not everybody can be a tutor/mentor in the practicum area.

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### **Biodatas**

Maria Esther Lemus holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Sussex. She has more than 20 years experience in English teaching and teacher mentoring. Ms. Lemus has been a coordinator, administrative and a program writer. She is currently a professor of the BA in ELT at the University of Aguascalientes and MEXTESOL State President.

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