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# **On speaking: Giving feedback in the language classroom**



[**http://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2018/02/23/feedback-on-speaking-whitepaper/**](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2018/02/23/feedback-on-speaking-whitepaper/)

**A key part of speaking practice is providing feedback to learners – but how much should you give? Research Manager, Niall Curry, introduces our latest Cambridge research paper by Philip Kerr on this very subject.**

In every classroom, for every context, age group or purpose, we as teachers have to make choices. With students increasingly identifying that speaking in English is what they find most difficult, the choices that we make around speaking are important. What we’re talking about here is giving feedback on speaking in the English language classroom. And choices around giving feedback. This is what Philip Kerr discusses in his paper on ‘[Giving Feedback on Speaking Whitepaper](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Cambridge-Press_Whitepaper_Feedback_Speaking_2018.pdf)’.

What do teachers need to consider before giving feedback?

Broadly speaking, making decisions about what feedback to give can be guided by the purpose of the task. For example, are we looking to develop fluency or accuracy with the task? We know there is evidence that fluency tasks, like discussions or debates, can also develop accuracy. We also know that the learning opportunities associated with fluency tasks, such as gains in self-confidence and opportunities to use more complex language, are valuable to teachers and learners. However, managing fluency tasks successfully in order to ensure these benefits are realised is an important challenge for teachers. One that knowledge of feedback strategies can help us surmount.

When we think of feedback, we likely think of the teacher giving feedback to students, which is, of course, a valuable exchange. However, there are also ways for learners to get feedback from each other, which, in fact, can be more valuable. Moreover, we can see silence as feedback, where the absence of language can tell us something about the gaps in students’ knowledge.

When we think of feedback, we also likely think of correction. But is there a case for giving positive feedback? The research would indicate that yes, it does hold value. There is evidence of the correlation between both corrective and positive feedback and learning. In fact, it is argued that combining positive reinforcement with corrective feedback can be an effective way of facilitating learning. And the choices continue. If we are correcting, what should we correct? Students’ motivation and emotions come into play here; too little correction and they may feel neglected, too much and they may feel criticised. On top of this, we must ask ourselves, what should we correct? Mistakes made in the moment? Or gaps in knowledge? And how should we do this? Implicitly or explicitly? Delayed or immediately?

What can teachers do to answer those questions?

What’s important is to know how to make informed decisions and to see if research can guide us on our feedback path. Really, it comes down to being selective, understanding our students, and understanding our motivations as a teacher – what is the feedback supposed to achieve. Some of these questions are easier to answer than others, but if you’re interested, why not take a look at the latest Cambridge Paper on ‘[Giving Feedback on Speaking Whitepaper](http://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Cambridge-Press_Whitepaper_Feedback_Speaking_2018.pdf)’ to see what the research says.