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The Impact of Faculty Feedback on Student Perceptions of Faculty-Student Relationships

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The Impact of Faculty Feedback on Student Perceptions of Faculty-Student Relationships

Abstract

This qualitative study examined four communication sciences and disorders (CSD) graduate students' experiences with feedback from CSD faculty members to understand how it affected their relationships with faculty. Review of the literature revealed the importance and impact of feedback; however, it offered little research examining feedback within the field of CSD. Graduate CSD students who completed their undergraduate degrees in CSD were interviewed to reflect on feedback experiences they received from faculty during their undergraduate and graduate education. The students were also presented with two mock papers with differing feedback styles and were asked their reactions to the feedback. It was discovered that feedback received directly contributed to faculty's overall perceived approachability, with more imbalanced critical feedback increasing the perception of unapproachability towards faculty members. Additionally, the feedback modality, language used, and balance of positive and negative comments strongly influenced participant's perception of the feedback being given as an inherently pleasant or unpleasant.

Keywords

Feedback, faculty-student relationships

Introduction

Feedback is an expected and essential component in any higher education program. Not only does constructive feedback aid students in closing the gap between learned concepts and their real-life applications, it also enhances self-awareness in students (Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). However, while feedback may appear to be a fairly straightforward process, it is extremely variable in its execution, leading to ambiguous interpretations by students. The importance of feedback, different feedback styles, and outcomes of those feedback styles based on student perceptions have been researched in various allied health fields, such as psychology, social work, and nursing; however, student perceptions of feedback relative to their relationship with faculty in the field of communication sciences and disorders (CSD) has been minimally researched. The majority of the research in regard to feedback in the CSD field relates to feedback in the context of clinical practicums from clinical educators and does not address feedback from CSD faculty in non-clinical situations (Moss, 2007; Taylor et al., 2012; Wilson & Emm, 2013). Additionally, there is a lack of information regarding how feedback impacts and influences CSD students' interactions and relationships with faculty.

Perspectives on student views of faculty feedback are informed by the literature about feedback as well as faculty relationships. These bodies of literature were explored for the purpose of creating a framework for this research.

Feedback. For the purpose of this study, feedback refers to information provided to students by teachers in regard to their work in order to close gaps in their performance to reach the desired behaviors, skills, and knowledge (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). The importance of feedback has been noted across various professions in both supervision and field experiences in higher education, with four major themes being identified including the effect of feedback on: enhancing knowledge, improving skills, increasing self-reflection, and creating opportunities to achieve better professional development (Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). These four themes were identified in association with graduate students' reflections with their experiences of feedback in their social work program. A majority of the participants in this study noted that the feedback they received allowed them to better conceptualize classroom concepts as well as to clarify and validate their understanding of their clinical skills thus allowing them to enhance their overall knowledge. In terms of improving skills, students reflected that feedback they received directly influenced their future actions regarding that skill. Feedback was found to increase students' examination of elements they may have done differently, increasing their overall self-reflection. Additionally, feedback plays a key role in enabling students to become independent learners as it allows them to monitor and evaluate their learning which generalizes beyond their higher education and into their professional practice as it promotes reflection and self-evaluation skills (Evans, 2013).

There are types of feedback that may be utilized for different purposes. Feedback can be classified as directive, nondirective, critical, or supportive in nature (Stephens et al., 2017). Directive feedback entails the use of a specific suggestion to the recipient with little ambiguity, such as "maybe add more concrete details." In comparison, nondirective feedback utilizes the use of probing questions requiring the recipient to dig deeper for the resolution on their own, for example, posing a probing question like, "How do these two correlate?" Critical feedback clearly points out

mistakes to the recipient without providing specific instructions or suggestions, while supportive feedback encourages or affirms students with comments like “great job!” (Stephens et al., 2017). Wilson and Emm (2013) investigated the type of written feedback used by SLP clinical educators in a university clinic and found that feedback could be classified as “vague-positive, specific-positive, vague-corrective, and/or specific-corrective feedback” (p. 29). They found that both the quantity and quality of the feedback differed greatly amongst clinical educators and student did not always receive preferred and effective feedback (Wilson & Emm, 2013). They concluded that written specific and corrective feedback with rationales was helpful in the learning process.

Feedback in Clinical Education. Other disciplines, such as the medical field, have noted three different classifications of feedback that emerged from their study of the definition of feedback, including feedback as information, a reaction, and a cycle (Van de Ridder et al., 2008). Feedback as information involves the message being the content of the feedback. In comparison, feedback as a reaction involves more of an interaction with the recipient. Lastly, feedback as a cycle combines the two but also includes an outcome or a consequence of the feedback message being relayed. Researchers of this study further noted the difference between these general feedback types and feedback in clinical education defining clinical education feedback as “specific information about the comparison between a trainee’s observed performance and a standard given with the intent to improve the trainee’s performance” (Van de Ridder et al., 2008, p. 189). They discuss how this is distinct from regular feedback as feedback given with the intent of clinical education is perceived as being a “form of communication” (p. 193) due to the inherent nature of the complexities of comparing a trainee’s performance to the desired performance. Expanding upon feedback in clinical education, Cascia (2013) details what this should look like for the CSD field and states there should be observations of student’s sessions, discussions regarding the observations, and performance feedback. An emphasis was placed on the importance of the meeting with the clinical educator and student as that is when the student clinician is able to ask questions, understand the educator’s rationale, in addition to receiving feedback on their strengths and weaknesses.

Modality. The modality in which feedback is provided can be separated into two categories, written and oral. Feedback can also be presented in either a formal or informal manner. One of the main differences between the two modalities is the immediacy in which the feedback is relayed, with oral feedback typically being immediate and written feedback being more delayed (Ellis, 2010). Informal feedback can be classified as discussions or answers given to students in class discussions or office hours. Formal feedback in contrast consists of comments or grades on a body of work submitted by a student. Feedback modality refers to the manner in which the feedback is delivered to the recipient, researchers expanded on the modalities of feedback, stating,

Traditional forms of feedback delivery, such as print media and face-to-face interactions remain, but the rapid development of the internet and computer technology has opened a host of new options. These new modes for expressing feedback include, but are not limited to, computer displays, e-mail correspondence, text messages, video conferencing, and social media communications (Warrilow et al., 2020, p. 237).

Graduate CSD students involved in a study to uncover their supervisor preferences and interactions conveyed wanting written and face-to-face feedback instead of feedback relayed via electronic methods (Taylor et al., 2012). These students did not express a strong opinion on receiving delayed

feedback but recognized that immediate feedback is important, with many students wanting feedback to focus on “overall clinical performance, strengths in therapy, and ways to improve” (Taylor et al., 2012, p. 51).

Student Perceptions. Given the numerous variations in types of feedback it is not surprising that students respond quite differently depending on the type of feedback given and respond more positively to feedback that is timely, accessible, comprehensible, and constructive (Pentassuglia, 2018). This is evident based upon Pitt and Norton’s (2016) findings that students’ preferred types of feedback are one of the main contributors in their perceptions of successful feedback. Some students react more positively to written feedback and others have a more positive reaction to oral feedback. Due to the innate complexity of the vast components that come together to influence and create students’ perceptions, these components may contribute to the students’ perspective. Expanding upon the two modalities of feedback, this study also found that verbal feedback was valued by some students as it allowed for the clarification of any misunderstandings or areas of confusion in comparison to being unable to immediately clarify a question regarding a written feedback comment. Other students preferred written feedback as it allowed them to engage with the feedback as frequently as they liked and ensured they would not forget a component of the feedback (Pitt & Norton, 2016).

Furthermore, feedback that was specific and concrete was found to be preferred and valued over broad and vague feedback (Ackerman et al., 2016, Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). Students who have had negative experiences with feedback being unclear and unhelpful may disengage with current feedback in other courses and from various faculty due to these prior experiences. Critical feedback was commonly interpreted as being negative by students and led to the student perception that the instructor had a negative impression of them (Ackerman et al, 2016). It was found that students do have a preference for written feedback, specifically feedback consisting of frequent brief written comments and/or a written summary or overview to be more useful in comparison to written feedback regarding a stated grade, numeric mark, tick or rating as well as personal or group verbal feedback (Ferguson, 2011). This study also discovered that the level of supportive or critical feedback had a direct impact on their confidence for future assignments with students stating if the majority of the feedback they received were negative they would feel like giving up. Not only did students emphasize how important the phrasing of feedback comments is, 90% felt there needs to be a balance between positive and negative feedback to maintain student morale (Ferguson, 2011).

Student-Faculty Relationships. Student-faculty relationships are one of the most important factors in graduate students’ perceptions of the quality of their education (Lechuga, 2011). Furthermore, college students benefit overall from positive interactions with faculty (Cox et al., 2010). Ingraham and colleagues (2018) examined major factors that impacted undergraduate student-faculty relationships in nursing including support, caring, civility, and diversity from faculty. The study described that support from faculty is comprised of three components: mentorship, accessibility, and approachability. All contribute to the students being successful in their education. Furthermore, the study uncovered that if faculty were not perceived as caring by students, the students began to perceive the overall profession of nursing as less caring. In addition to this perception of the field, it was noted that lack of caring from faculty also led to students feeling belittled or isolated from their learning experience (Ingraham et al., 2018). Environments that are uncivil, with incidents of verbal abuse, disruptive behaviors, or bias in clinical experiences

led to frustration, stress, lack of trust, and lack of respect for faculty. In terms of diversity impacting student-faculty relationships, this study found that largest barriers in this area are language and cultural differences. Differences in language and cultural views between students and faculty and customs may lead to frequent miscommunication with students coming from linguistically diverse backgrounds thus creating a barrier between student and faculty. Additionally, in nursing education, students have shared the need to have some form of emotional bond with faculty in order to consider approaching that faculty member. If they have not felt comfortable with their professor, it is very unlikely that they will seek them out (Pralle, 2016). In respect to these relationships in more challenging courses, Micari and Pazos (2012) concluded that a positive relationship with the professor predicted the students' confidence in their overall abilities in the course, with a correlation that the stronger the relationship with faculty the more students would gain in confidence. A positive relationship was defined as relating to feelings of comfort approaching faculty and feeling that the professor respected them.

Not only does feedback directly impact students' perceptions of their own academic success, but students' relationships with faculty impacts their overall academic success as well. Given that students have such strong reactions and preferences to feedback coming from faculty it is likely that feedback may impact students' perceptions of their relationships with faculty. Feedback received by students either critical or supportive may contribute to the likelihood of students to engage or disengage with faculty hindering the ability to form a student-faculty relationship.

Justification and Significance

As evidenced in the literature, various studies have been conducted in allied health fields examining students' perceptions of feedback, varying feedback styles, and the subsequent effects feedback has on students. These studies have afforded these fields with valuable insight into improving their feedback models and techniques to create better feedback experiences for future students, an area which CSD is lacking.

The aim of this study was to identify in what ways faculty feedback, specifically formal, written feedback impacts undergraduate CSD students. Additionally, the study examined what effect that feedback had on students' comfort in approaching and initiating contact with faculty, specifically their likelihood in approaching faculty inside and outside of class and that impact on the student-faculty relationship. The primary focus of the study was to understand the relationship between students' perceptions of faculty feedback, faculty approachability, and relationships with faculty.

Research Questions

The current study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are CSD students' attitudes and perceptions towards different types and formats of feedback?
2. What are CSD students' attitudes towards faculty based on the different types of feedback that they receive?
3. How does feedback influence CSD students' relationships with faculty?

Methodology

Study Design. This was a qualitative study utilizing a phenomenological approach to examine the experiences of participants through use of interviews. This approach was used as it allowed the researcher to understand and describe the meaning of lived experiences in specific situations through the lens of the individuals who experienced it firsthand. The phenomenological researcher does not go into interviews and data collections with assumptions or the desire to obtain concrete facts, rather, to understand their participants' experiences. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002, Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). This lends itself well to the nature of qualitative researchers, as these researchers believe the way to accurately portray a participants' experience is to approach them with the goal to understand their perspective of events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). Furthermore, this approach is desirable when the researcher is aiming to "study what an experience means to a particular group of people" (Grossoehme, 2014, p.117).

Participants. The sample consisted of four CSD students currently enrolled in a CSD graduate program who also obtained their undergraduate degree in CSD. Sampling techniques consisted of email recruiting via faculty assistance through the sharing of invitations to potential participants by use of class lists of currently enrolled graduate students, and the recruitment letter being forwarded to applicable classes. Four participants were interviewed via Zoom to explore their experiences with feedback from CSD faculty and how that feedback impacted their likelihood to interact with them. All participants completed their undergraduate degree in CSD at the same medium sized, public, four-year university located within the Midwestern region and were currently enrolled in a CSD graduate program. Three of the four participants attended the same university for both their undergraduate and graduate CSD programs. Participants ranged from their early to late twenties (See Table 1). Following data collection participants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection. Data was gathered from individual, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with participants ranging from 30 to 40 minutes conducted virtually via Zoom. IRB approval was approved prior to conducting any participant interviews. All interviews were audio recorded (with permission of participant) and later transcribed by a transcriptionist. The interviews focused on participant reflection of both positive and negative experiences with feedback from faculty and how they perceived that feedback to influence their relationships with those individuals. Participants were asked two interview questions: "Tell me about a time when you received feedback from a professor that resulted in a pleasant experience" and "Tell me about a time when you received feedback from a professor that resulted in an unpleasant experience." Following each question participants were asked follow-up questions, "What about this feedback did you like?" and "Did this feedback make you more likely to engage with the professor inside/outside of class?" Additionally, participants were presented with two mock student papers marked with different types of feedback and were asked to describe their reactions to each document as if they received that feedback from a faculty member. Feedback comments for both mock papers are outlined and classified based on their feedback type in Tables 2 and 3. Mock Paper 1 contained a balance of supportive, directive, critical, and nondirective comments, while Mock Paper 2 is disproportionately critical and contains nondirective feedback comments. Each participant was presented with the mock papers in the same order, beginning with Mock Paper 1 followed by Mock Paper 2.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant's Name	Age
Molly	26
Olivia	23
Mia	22
Emily	24

Table 2*Mock Paper 1: Balanced supportive, directive, critical, and nondirective comments*

Feedback Comment	Type of Feedback
“Some examples of the pictures shown may be helpful, just a thought.”	Directive
“Good observation. Perhaps next time a quick debrief with the clinician would be beneficial in clarifying this!”	Supportive, Directive
“I wonder if the client’s fatigue was the only reason. Any suggestions on how to avoid this other than slowing the pace of the assessments?”	Nondirective
“Very clear, concise explanations. Some language such as ‘clinician’ became repetitive and less engaging.”	Supportive, Critical
“Great job overall. I enjoyed your insights and observations.”	Supportive

Table 3*Mock Paper 2: Unbalanced critical and nondirective comments*

Feedback Comment	Type of Feedback
“No mention to the relevance of this observation at all...so what is the point?”	Critical
“So what?”	Critical, Nondirective
“Repetitive and limited vocabulary. This needs to be addressed.”	Critical, Nondirective
“Again, why was this important? Or not important? This needs to be clarified.”	Critical, Nondirective
“Repetitive wording, poor grammar, and many personal speculations. Your writing is not at the collegiate level. This needs to be changed entirely.”	Critical

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis began with the coding process of the transcribed individual interviews and reactions to the mock student papers. This coding process involved analyzing all the obtained data to reveal “regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover”. These patterns were then given a word or phrase to represent them, creating a coding category (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002, p. 161). Additionally, Grosseohme (2014) describes the moving of a code to theme as “data from multiple participants clustered under each topic name”. Once this coding process was completed for each interview, the interviewer examined what codes overlapped in all interviews and if any patterns were evident, allowing for clear separation of the data to become main concepts or themes. These codes became themes only if there was enough data present supporting each coding category as a code cannot turn into a theme if there is not enough data to support that classification. The coding categories that had a larger compilation of data became themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2002). This process was completed by the primary researcher and the research mentor of the study to ensure there was consensus reached between coders to move a code to a theme to maintain the integrity of the data analysis.

Results

Data analysis of each participant’s interview revealed three emerging themes: language used, approachability of faculty, and feedback modality. Data supporting these themes is presented here.

Language Used: “You’re Doing This Wrong”.

Interview Data. Throughout the interviews, many of the participants shared that they wished there would have been more suggestions or solutions in the feedback they received to aid them moving forward in their programs. Olivia described her unpleasant feedback experience as being primarily due to the language used and the overall “blunt” delivery from the faculty member. She elaborated on the experience, explaining, “There was no introduction with, ‘I like how you did {x, y, and z} but maybe focus on {a, b, and c}.’ There was none of that; it was just this is what was wrong. Figure it out.” Olivia also recalled an additional unpleasant experience sharing there was nothing constructive and stated, “I had to do a lot of extra digging. I had to do the probing with the professor and that just put me in an awkward position because they are supposed to be there to help teach.” Emily shared a similar experience associated with her unpleasant feedback experience, stating, “she kind of just tore the whole assignment apart and told me everything I did wrong...instead of sitting there helping me to improve to make it better”.

Mia echoed this phenomenon once again with her experience with primarily critical feedback. She recalls her faculty member telling her, “You’re doing this wrong; you’re doing that wrong” but was not told how to “fix it” and the feedback being “consistently negative.”

Mock Student Paper Data. When presented with the critical and directive mock student paper Mia’s demeanor instantly changed. She stated, “you are making someone feel dumb...If I saw this, I would be upset”. Mia also went on to comment that this would impact her motivation for future assignments.

Emily shared a similar reaction to the same mock paper revealing that she would “definitely be discouraged” and would “shut herself out” of the assignment due to the tone of the comments causing her to feel “not good enough”.

Molly’s reaction to the critical directive paper focused heavily on the type of language used by the faculty. She conveyed that “right off the bat, this seems very negative...that could have been a lot nicer or not written at all”. Olivia, Emily, and Mia stated that these experiences strongly influenced the student’s perceived approachability of the faculty.

Balance of Critical and Supportive Comments.

Interview Data. In contrast to the feedback encountered with primarily critical and little to no supportive comments, Emily recounts a pleasant experience with feedback where she described a balance of the two. She recalls there being a handful of comments for future improvements and not just the things she did incorrectly. She described the experience as “helping her move in a better direction”.

Similarly, Mia shared a balance of critical and supportive feedback that led to her having pleasant receipt of the feedback given. She stated, “I liked that she told me what I was good at and also what I could improve on.” Mia conveyed the importance of hearing constructive feedback as she knows she doesn’t do everything correctly.

Mock Student Paper Data. When presented with the supportive and nondirective feedback Mock Paper 1 Olivia stated she would be okay receiving this type of feedback due to the “mixture of things that the professor liked, and the negative feedback were more suggestions than orders”: She felt the language used made the negative comments easier to receive.

Mia’s feelings were in agreement with other participants in regard to the same mock student paper reviewed. She shared that she enjoyed receiving feedback on what she did well and valued comments that allowed her to “think on her own and put things in her own words”.

I like that they told this person they did good, and what they can fix but not giving them the answer, you know? Not saying, “Add this, this, and this...” But letting that person think on their own, putting things in their own words.

Emily also shared very similar views as Olivia and Mia, stating,

A lot of the comments had suggestions but also had good parts to what happened and let the person who was writing the paper take the lead on what they wanted to change as opposed to being like, “This is what you need to change. This is how you need to change it.” It gave them the ability to change it how they wanted to and then they were more like suggestions and not just demanded statements.

Molly shared her reaction with the same mock student paper

I’ve always liked when professors give positive feedback for something very specific like that.

Expanding upon the importance of balanced feedback comments, Emily elaborated on why this is crucial for her:

I just think it’s really important that even if you are getting some sort of negative feedback, that you also give the positive feedback in there as well because when you are constantly giving students negative feedback you are draining them and beating them down and making them feel like they are not good enough in what they are doing. When you add that

positive comment, it gives them a glimpse of hope and just for the professors being open and willing to help, it's so much beneficial when you are comfortable going to a professor to get help because they are open, and they want to help you.

Feedback Modality.

Interview Data. Olivia, Molly, Mia, and Emily discussed their most salient experiences with balanced and imbalanced feedback, describing the way that feedback was relayed to them and how that contributed to the feedback experience being perceived as overall pleasant or unpleasant. Participants identified the modalities in which their feedback was delivered as being verbal only, written only, or a combination of verbal and written feedback. Olivia discussed her preference of feedback modalities as a mixture of verbal and written feedback, she noted she enjoyed the modality of the verbal feedback as it “stuck with her” due to it being “immediate and specific.” When prompted to expand on her thoughts of the written feedback modality of her salient experience, she commented that she enjoyed being able to reference it at a later date and that feedback being “more concrete.” Olivia shared she did not prefer solely verbal feedback as in her experiences it did not allow for any opportunity for an open discussion with the faculty delivering the feedback, causing her to feel like she could not ask that faculty any questions during the feedback delivery and in subsequent interactions. When probed to expand on a verbal modality not allowing for discussion with faculty, Olivia reflected on her most salient experience receiving verbal feedback where the faculty member did not create a space for an open discussion due to an imbalance of critical comments and language and failing to invite her to ask questions or share her perspective.

Molly's feedback experiences were given via a verbal modality in a one-on-one setting. She reported rarely receiving written feedback throughout her undergraduate and graduate schooling. Similarly, to Olivia's feedback modalities, Mia received her verbal feedback during her pleasant experience from her faculty member and received a mixture of verbal and written feedback during her unpleasant experience. Mia explained that she preferred verbal modalities as the professor can “explain things better” whereas in written modalities things may be taken out of context. She expanded on the ambiguity of written feedback, stating,

I feel like when it's written stuff, it's hard to know what they mean. Are they being rude or just saying, “What does this mean?” even though it's, “What is this?” And you're like, “Oh well, I did a crappy job!”

Emily reported receiving solely verbal and written feedback in her pleasant and unpleasant experiences and expressed she preferred verbal feedback as it allowed for further clarification in the moment. However, she expressed no problem receiving feedback in a written modality.

Approachability. Following reflections of feedback experiences, participants expressed very strong feelings regarding their comfort approaching and interacting with the faculty member who delivered the feedback.

Avoiding Faculty.

Interview Data. Emily reflected on the time she received imbalanced feedback, and when asked if that feedback impacted her likelihood with interacting with that faculty member, she responded:

I tried to avoid her at all costs. And if I had to ask her a question, it was very short and sweet and to the point and that was it. I would try to go to classmates and other people to have clarification, so I didn't have to go to her.

Molly expressed a very similar feeling after having an experience of imbalanced critical feedback from faculty. She stated, "I know I stayed away from her in class—I wouldn't ask her questions in class...that's when I kind of veered off to asking just my classmates for help and just going to her if I absolutely needed it." Olivia shared that following her solely unpleasant experience receiving faculty feedback, her confidence levels were adversely affected, and she was very hesitant to reach out to that faculty member, recalling,

I was feeling a lot of anxiety reaching out to her that very first time after that encounter. It was difficult for me to even send an email without re-reading it 10 times and making sure there were no spelling errors...just simple things that most people don't think about.

Mock Student Paper Data. When presented with the critical and directive Mock Paper 1, Olivia noted,

It would definitely make me timid to approach the professor only because it doesn't seem like they are open to conversation. It's just "I didn't see this so...wrong kind of thing." There was nothing asking for a clarification or thought process behind it. So, I don't think I would engage with the professor very much after.

Emily shared that if she received the overtly critical and directive negative feedback in the mock student paper, "it wouldn't make [her] want to go see the professor because of how they approached the comments and the wording they used, and they weren't very open or friendly. It was more closed off and rude." In contrast, Molly verbalized feelings of hesitation to approach that faculty member, sharing,

I would be really hesitant to approach this professor for anything the rest of the semester and if this was the first assignment of the semester, I would definitely be really scared to submit any other assignments after this because you know you are going to be critiqued for every minor detail.

Approaching Faculty.

Interview Data. Olivia, Mia, Emily, and Molly all reported that following their pleasant experiences with feedback were due to the feedback being balanced and constructive they would be likely to engage with the faculty member again. Molly elaborated that her pleasant experience receiving feedback from that faculty member stating, "[It] definitely made me more comfortable to approach her," and she carried those feelings throughout the duration of her program. Olivia described her thoughts after her pleasant experience with faculty, sharing,

I felt much better about interacting and even going up and saying, "Yes, I see I got all the points and I appreciate that, but what could I have done better in this section...? That would have made the information I was presenting even better?" So, I had no problem talking to her face-to-face whereas other professors like with the question marks I would only email because I just didn't want to interact.

When asked if she would approach faculty after her perceived pleasant feedback interaction, Emily enthusiastically responded, "Oh, 100%!"

Mock Student Paper Data. When probed if Olivia would be likely to approach the faculty if she received the feedback in the positive mock student paper, she reported that she would be neutral. Emily shared she “would definitely be more keen” to interact with the professor. Molly stated, “I would approach faculty after this. I think it makes them seem approachable. It shows that they are actually reading your paper and not skimming it.”

Discussion

Analysis of the data revealed participants of this study had very strong reactions to the language used in feedback and that played a large role in their comfort interacting with faculty following their feedback experiences.

Language Used: “*You’re Doing This Wrong.*” Participants reflected that the overall language used during the relay of feedback was a key contributor to the feedback experience being perceived as pleasant or unpleasant. Olivia, Molly, Mia, and Emily all discussed in detail the overtly critical language used in their feedback and how the presentation of that feedback did not allow for any discussion with the faculty on how to improve their mistakes. Olivia shared that her feedback was delivered so bluntly that there were no comments on what was done well, only what was wrong. This experience resonates with other students’ feelings of feedback from faculty as identified in Kourgiantakis et al. (2018) study who stated that they require “warmth and empathy” from faculty members to increase their learning (p. 129). Emily also elaborated on the poor delivery and content of her feedback stating the faculty member “tore the assignment apart” and only told her what she did incorrectly. Not only did this feedback experience that Emily detailed jeopardize her own success as a student by her performance in the course, it required her to complete significantly more work to find answers to questions she may have. Additionally, Molly shared her feelings and reactions to the second mock student paper, she commented that the language of “so what” would be very triggering to her and would greatly hurt her feelings. These collective experiences are a cause for concern as the intended purpose of feedback is to close gaps to achieve the desired behaviors and skills (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Kourgiantakis et al., 2018), and this imbalanced language hindered the learning process that feedback it was intended to invoke as evidenced by the barriers created in interacting with faculty because of the language used. It should be noted that there is minimal literature detailing students’ responses to specifically the type of language used during feedback experiences with exception to the findings of Kourgiantakis et al. (2018) study. Due to this, the present study is limited in the ability to draw connections from the findings of the language used to what is currently known regarding this issue.

Balance of Critical and Supportive Comments. The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA, n.d.) states that feedback given needs to be about behavior that can be changed, given at appropriate times, open to discussion, and a balance of positive and negative criteria which the participants’ feedback experiences failed to meet in these interactions. The idea of balanced critical and supportive feedback comments was explored in relation to building students’ confidence as students reported an excess of negative comments causing them to “give up” on future assignments (Ferguson, 2011). Ferguson (2011) expanded on this balance through student recounts of how attuned they were to the wording of the comments and how the rephrasing of a comment to be less forceful and directive positively impacted their experiences. Emily shared her perspective of receiving imbalanced feedback, stating, “Instead of using constructive feedback,

she kind of just tore the whole assignment apart and told me everything I did wrong.” Her experience supports the findings of Ferguson (2011), where it was revealed that 90% of students felt there needs to be a balance between positive and negative feedback in an attempt to maintain student morale. Furthermore, in referencing the framework ASHA sets for their expectations of feedback within the field of CSD, these participants’ experiences with imbalanced feedback directly contradict the types of feedback students within the field should be receiving (ASHA, n.d.). The feedback the participants shared they received falls under the classification of solely critical feedback based on Stephens et al. (2017) framework as it pointed out the errors of the participants but failed to provide instructions or suggestions for the student to learn and grow from, once again straying from ASHA’s parameters of feedback constraints. Participants shared having to complete extra “digging” or seeking out of additional information on their own which led to their feedback experience being unpleasant. Similar findings are outlined in the Price and colleagues (2010) study, which also examined students’ views on feedback from another discipline and revealed that the participants struggled with feedback that was vague or unclear, as it caused them to dissect all the components of their work rather than the component that may have been intended by the feedback comment. Interestingly, it also shed light on the unclear purpose of feedback as reported by both faculty and the students. Faculty reported the awareness of feedback to guide the learning of students. They also noted that it is perceived to justify scores, or final grades given based off their feedback comments. Students shared they looked to the actual feedback comments to provide them with insight that was not evident from their score on the assignment (Price et al., 2010). It is possible that the perspective of providing feedback comments to justify scoring or grading criteria may cause faculty to unknowingly default to implementing an imbalance of critical feedback comments in an attempt to provide that justification. However, the data from the current study is unable to corroborate this due to only students’ perspectives being interviewed and no presence of facultys’ perspective.

Preference of Feedback Type. Participants expressed a strong desire to receive feedback that was evenly balanced with critical and supportive comments. It was noted that these participants did not perceive a feedback experience as being explicitly unpleasant if the feedback being presented contained critical comments and not all supportive or encouraging comments. Rather, they preferred to have constructive feedback to strengthen areas of weakness. These participants were not opposed to receiving critical feedback if it was in fact constructive and presented in such a way that they felt they still had some control over the matter. These feelings align with the definition of nondirective feedback as outlined in the Stephens (2017) study, as the students were not explicitly told what to do rather given comments to move their thinking forward enabling them to maintain autonomy. Olivia articulated this with her comments regarding the language used on the balanced supportive and nondirective mock student paper, “They let the person who was writing the paper take the lead on what they wanted to change. It gave them the ability to change it how they wanted to, and they were more like suggestions and not just demanded statements.” The desire to receive specific feedback to guide the student’s thinking is not a new finding. Social work students expressed a preference to receive feedback that addressed the specific skill or item being discussed, how the student used it and how it could be used differently in the future as being more useful than vague feedback comments (Kourgiantakis et al., 2018). Furthermore, this study revealed these students’ preference in type of feedback being received as opting for more constructive feedback to improve their mistakes rather than a reliance on solely supportive and noncritical feedback. The participants in the current study verbalized a strong desire to take control

of their learning experience via implementation of constructive criticism to guide their future work, however, the imbalance of critical feedback comments hindered their comfortability in seeking out additional information from faculty to further improve their skills.

In terms of actions that can be taken by faculty to best accommodate students' preferences of feedback modalities, there are various tools that can be implemented in the beginning of the semester if the faculty wishes to do so. For instance, the faculty members can require the students to fill out a survey to uncover what types of feedback they prefer and how they would like to receive that feedback. This method in particular may be extremely helpful in "breaking the ice" with faculty from the student perspective and would allow faculty members to have clear guidelines of what their students need to succeed in their class. Additionally, faculty members can choose to disclose their personal feelings towards feedback given to their students and how their execution of feedback looks so students are not intimidated or surprised by their first feedback experience with those faculty members. These practices would help to mitigate student anxiety in receiving feedback in addition to opening a channel early on in the semester inviting students to have dialogue with faculty in an effort to build and foster those crucial student-faculty relationships.

Feedback Modalities. While this study set out to examine CSD students' experiences with formal written feedback and how that written feedback impacted their likelihood to interact with faculty, participants most salient feedback experiences recalled were not with written feedback only. Most of the participants struggled to quickly identify times they received written feedback from faculty that were not clinical educators or clinical practicum supervisors and required additional time to recall an experience with written feedback from faculty. This was surprising as higher education students receive primarily written feedback throughout their studies (Agricola et al., 2020). While participants did not explicitly provide a reason as to why they struggled recalling salient written feedback experiences, there are some speculations as to why this occurrence was present. It is possible that participants first and foremost did not attend or review the feedback comments provided to them, and if they did, they may have skimmed the comments. Additionally, participants recalled experiences with a combination of written and verbal feedback in addition to solely verbal or written feedback and appeared to more readily recall feedback experiences with verbal feedback from faculty. While some of the participants expressed a strong preference in receiving feedback through a specific modality, others were more neutral and were open to receiving either, dependent upon the quality of the feedback given. In regard to this, Emily shared, "I think I prefer verbal feedback more, but it depends on the situation too. Like I have nothing against written feedback." Olivia reported her feelings towards the modality through reflection of one of her feedback experiences, stating, "The written feedback very similar to the verbal feedback but was a little more concrete in the sense I could review it and go over it." Lastly, Mia reported a preference of a verbal feedback modality as she reflected, "I feel like when it's written stuff, it's hard to know what they mean." These varying preferences from participants and an overall lack of consensus of preferred feedback modality are not an uncommon finding as evidenced in Pitt and Norton (2016), who also observed that their participants possessed varying preferences regarding their feedback modalities. While students' experiences in Pitt and Norton's study (2016) implied a discussion amongst student and faculty took place to clarify specific items, use of a verbal feedback modality does not automatically allow for an open discussion as evidenced by Olivia's experience with verbal feedback. Olivia stated that while she received her feedback verbally, she

“definitely felt like there wasn’t time for a discussion” and verbalized, “Not only did I feel like I couldn’t ask questions in the moment but then it also made me hesitant to ask questions even after.” She described that this faculty member delivered this feedback in a rushed manner and bluntly told her what items were wrong and what needed to be fixed, however, failed to ask for her perspective on the “wrong” items and if she had any questions.

Feelings of frustration and a lack of engagement in students stemmed from written feedback with no discussion component as they verbalized a desire to have more discussions with faculty (Price et al., 2010). It was also revealed that students struggle with deciphering written feedback comments, and this led to misinterpretations of those feedback comments and a need to follow-up with the faculty to clarify the written comments (Ferguson, 2011; Smith & Hardy, 2014; Weaver, 2006). These findings align with Mia’s statement regarding her preferred feedback modality as she stated, “I feel like when it’s written stuff, it’s hard to know what they mean. Are they being rude or just saying ‘what does this mean?’ even though it’s ‘what is this?’ And you’re like, ‘oh, well I did a crappy job!’” The ambiguity of perceptions and interpretations of written feedback was observed through students’ reactions to the mock feedback papers in the present study. The participants had different views and reactions to the supportive and nondirective mock paper, with some interpreting the feedback as more pleasant than others with likelihood of interacting with faculty after this feedback as ranging from neutral to likely to interact with faculty. The wide range of responses are representative of the issue written feedback poses as outlined in the literature as it is intended to be received in a particular way, however, it cannot account for how others may understand it. The multiple interpretations of the comments are indicative of how faculty providing feedback may not view their comments as overly harsh or critical however, via a written modality may not be aware of the discrepancy of their students’ reactions and how that in turn directly impacts their relationship with their students.

Approachability of Faculty.

Avoiding Faculty. Participants with the most salient experiences with a feedback experience that was perceived as unpleasant developed very strong feelings about avoiding faculty after the experience. Emily’s comment, “I tried to avoid her at all costs...I would try to go to classmates and other people to have clarification, so I didn’t have to go to her,” displays the long-lasting impact that feedback experience had on her. Additionally, Olivia reported how she felt “a lot of anxiety reaching out to her that very first time after that encounter” in regard to interacting with that faculty member. The biggest contributor to these visceral reactions of avoiding faculty following a feedback experience stemmed from the excessive imbalance of negative feedback and the harsh language used to convey participants’ errors. Participants in this study are not alone in their feelings of feedback directly impacting their confidence levels and subsequent likelihood to interact with faculty as students in teacher education shared the same feelings (Ferguson, 2011).

Past research demonstrated a correlation between students’ performances in courses and their relationships with faculty, the more positive the relationship, such as feeling comfortable to approach the professor, the higher the likelihood the students would achieve a desirable grade in the course and the greater their confidence in their own abilities (Micari & Pazos, 2012). While the body of literature does not address how feedback from faculty impacts the student-faculty relationship, it does reveal the benefits of students having relationships with faculty. The idea of

approachability mentioned in the literature is of importance to the current study, as it is difficult to develop a true student-faculty relationship without the student approaching their faculty member during or outside of class. The present study revealed that students who experienced imbalanced critical feedback from faculty would go to great lengths to minimize or completely avoid interacting with faculty, thus significantly limiting the chance for any substantial relationship to be forged with that faculty. Not only does this phenomenon potentially jeopardize the students' success and performance in the course, it requires the student to complete significantly more work to find answers to questions as reported by participants in the present study who expressed heavily relying on fellow classmates to obtain needed information, clarification, etc.

Approaching Faculty. In contrast to the strong desire to avoid faculty at almost all costs following a feedback experience perceived as critical, participants who received balanced and constructive feedback stated they would be more likely to interact with that faculty following their feedback experience. Emily reported that following her feedback experience with balanced and constructive feedback, she “would definitely be more keen to email that professor back and say, ‘Hey I saw your comments and am thinking about these different things....’” Similarly, in reaction to the first mock student paper, Molly stated, “I would approach faculty after this. I think it makes them seem approachable, it shows that they are actually reading your paper and not skimming it.” These reactions and responses show that these students are in a much better position of being able to fully access their faculty, as they are not being presented with the barrier of overcoming inaccessible feedback, which further supports fostering the supervisor-supervisee relationship in graduate education which was found to be of high importance in the field of CSD as evidenced in Taylor et al. (2012). It is to be noted that some of the participants did appear to feel more neutral about their likelihood to approach faculty after their reaction to the mock positive student paper, which may be due to the body of work not being theirs, and not having those feedback comments reflect the work they produced, limiting the authenticity of their reactions. However, these CSD students are at a disadvantage if they are unable to experience navigating faculty relationships prior to initiating their relationships with their clinical supervisors due to receipt of feedback acting as a barrier to access faculty. Reflections of the participants in the present study clearly identified the stark contrast between approaching and avoiding faculty based upon their feedback experiences.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored CSD graduate students' experiences and reactions to feedback from faculty and how those feedback experiences influenced their decision to approach faculty inside and outside of class. It is clear from the findings that there is a direct correlation between language used and students' perceived approachability of faculty following their feedback experience.

Three themes emerged: language used, approachability of feedback, and feedback modality. Participants described the impact the language used in their feedback experiences had on their perception of that experience being pleasant or unpleasant. It was discovered that language that was overtly critical and directive led to students actively avoiding their faculty and relying on other individuals to obtain key information if needed. On the other hand, if language used during the feedback experience was balanced with supportive, critical, and nondirective comments, students were much more inclined to approach and interact with faculty. Participants expressed a strong desire to receive constructive comments to further their learning in a supportive way that fostered

open discussion with faculty. Participants verbalized that in addition to the barriers of a lack of supportive comments and overly harsh and critical language used in having fruitful discussions with faculty, faculty did not create the space for the students to voice their perspectives during the feedback process, severely hindering the success of the interaction. Additionally, it was revealed that participants enjoyed a combination of multiple feedback modalities, specifically written and verbal feedback. This was preferred as participants discussed being able to refer to written feedback as it is more concrete but that they also enjoyed the immediacy of verbal feedback.

Implications. The perspectives of graduate students in the current study shed a much-needed light on the ambiguity that is present for non-clinical feedback in the field of CSD. The experience of receiving overly critical, imbalanced feedback was widely experienced amongst this study population, and there is a direct connection between language used and discomfort approaching or entirely avoiding faculty, therefore impacting students' abilities to form relationships with faculty members. This is of concern; if students are primarily receiving imbalanced feedback with harsh language, there is a strong likelihood they will not interact with their faculty, causing them to have poor professional relationships with faculty. Student-faculty relationships are crucial in students' professional careers, even more so for undergraduate CSD students seeking letters of recommendations from faculty to gain acceptance to a graduate program. CSD faculty members need to understand the power their feedback holds and how feedback can directly impact students' perceptions of them and their willingness to help their students.

To begin, faculty need to examine their current feedback practices, including not only the type of feedback they primarily provide to students using Stephens (2017) framework (directive, nondirective, critical, supportive) but also the modality in which they provide the feedback. Faculty members who tend to provide an imbalance of critical comments will need to actively self-monitor when providing feedback to CSD students to maintain a balance of supportive and critical comments if they wish to encourage ongoing dialogue and connections with their students. Additionally, faculty should determine in what ways they can incorporate more discussion with their students surrounding feedback given. There needs to be a conscious effort to create a space where students can be active participants in the discussion, rather than passive listeners with the faculty member talking at them rather than with them. It is clear from the participants' interviews that they possess a strong desire to learn and prefer to have a fruitful discussion with faculty; however, faculty may fail to acknowledge the value of their student perspectives limiting the nature of a true discussion.

Limitations. Limitations of this study include that most participants attended the same university for both their undergraduate and graduate programs, limiting the diversity of the study. Additionally, this study was limited to a small sample size that resided in the same geographical area. This was an unintended outcome in the participant recruitment process. Due to this, it is recommended that further studies with a larger participant pool be conducted to examine programs from different geographical areas to determine if there are similarities across CSD programs or if the participants' experiences in this study were unique to their geographical area and graduate university. The use of solely student perspectives and no faculty perspectives regarding their feedback practices is an additional limitation of the study. Furthermore, it is to be noted that inadvertently, the presentation order of the mock student papers with the positive feedback paper

preceding the negative feedback paper, may have influenced their reactions and perceptions to the types of feedback portrayed.

Disclosures

Lauren Trejo: I do not have any financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose.

Sarah Ginsberg: I have no financial relationships to disclose. I have a nonfinancial relationship with *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders* as President of the Board of Directors.

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Appendix A

Mock Paper 1

Assessment Observation Critique: Diagnostic Methods

Throughout the assessment procedures it was very clear what the clinician was measuring. There was no confusion whether she was measuring articulation at some points or language skills. The clinician made sure to implement age-appropriate items to aid in the assessment. In the first assessment the pictures used were all familiar to the child and he was easily able to recognize them. In addition to this, during the third assessment the clinician was playing with the client with toys like a bear, crayons, a ball, and a box which were also developmentally appropriate for the child.

Commented [LB1]: Some examples of the pictures shown may be helpful, just a thought.

In terms of the data collection, it was unclear how the clinician was recording data and in what detail. For the first assessment, the articulation portion it wasn't clear whether she was marking on the clipboard whether the word was produced correctly or if she was transcribing the production that was made. For all of the following assessments she appeared to be marking things down but I don't know to what detail. The clinician was excellent at adapting to the many unexpected changes during the assessment. When the client began getting distracted, she brought his mother in to refocus his attention. Following this, the client stated that he was tired and couldn't do the tasks anymore, in response to this the clinician suggested a stretch and water break for the client to rest for a minute. Towards the very end of the assessment the client became much more difficult to keep focused on tasks and the clinician worked very well with the client's mother to keep him on track as best she could.

Commented [LB2]: Good observation. Perhaps next time a quick debrief with the clinician would be beneficial in clarifying this.

The transitions between assessments were very fluid, it was hard to tell where one assessment ended and another began if not observing closely. However, the pacing was a bit fast for the client as he began to noticeably fatigue and grow distracted as the assessments went on. The clinician maintained a very professional working demeanor with the client and her attire reflected that. The only questionable item of her attire was her lack of shoes, this however, could be explained by her need to be on the floor with the client. The clinician did show a caring attitude toward the client but was very professional in her responses to him. Anytime the client started talking about something off topic from the assessment the clinician gave a polite and brief one-word response. In addition to this, she was very in tune to when the client did need a break or was struggling with staying focused.

Commented [LB3]: I wonder if the client's fatigue was the only reason. Any suggestions on how to avoid this other than slowing the pace of the assessments?

Commented [LB4]: Very clear, concise explanations. Some language such as "clinician" became repetitive and less engaging.

Commented [LB5]: Great job overall. I enjoyed your insights and observations.

Appendix B

Mock Paper 2

Assessment Observation Critique: Diagnostic Methods

Throughout the assessment procedures it was very clear what the clinician was measuring. There was no confusion whether she was measuring articulation at some points or language skills. The clinician made sure to implement age appropriate items to aid in the assessment. In the first assessment the pictures used were all familiar to the child and he was easily able to recognize them. In addition to this, during the third assessment the clinician was playing with the client with toys like a bear, crayons, a ball, and a box which were also developmentally appropriate for the child.

In terms of the data collection it was unclear how the clinician was recording data and in what detail. For the first assessment, the articulation portion it wasn't clear whether she was marking on the clipboard whether the word was produced correctly or if she was transcribing the production that was made. For all of the following assessments she appeared to be marking things down but I don't know to what detail. The clinician was excellent at adapting to the many unexpected changes during the assessment. When the client began getting distracted, she brought his mother in to refocus his attention. Following this, the client stated that he was tired and couldn't do the tasks anymore, in response to this the clinician suggested a stretch and water break for the client to rest for a minute. Towards the very end of the assessment the client became much more difficult to keep focused on tasks and the clinician worked very well with the client's mother to keep him on track as best she could.

The transitions between assessments were very fluid, it was hard to tell where one assessment ended and another began if not observing closely. However, the pacing was a bit fast for the client as he began to noticeably fatigue and grow distracted as the assessments went on. The clinician maintained a very professional working demeanor with the client and her attire reflected that. The only questionable item of her attire was her lack of shoes, this however, could be explained by her need to be on the floor with the client. The clinician did show a caring attitude toward the client but was very professional in her responses to him. Anytime the client started talking about something off topic from the assessment the clinician gave a polite and brief one-word response. In addition to this, she was very in tune to when the client did need a break or was struggling with staying focused.

Commented [LB1]: No mention to the relevance of this observation at all....so what is the point?

Commented [LB2]: So what?

Commented [LB3]: Repetitive and limited vocabulary. This needs to be addressed.

Commented [LB4]: Again, why was this important? Or not important? This needs to be clarified.

Commented [LB5]: This is a weak speculation at best.

Commented [LB6]: Repetitive wording, poor grammar, and many personal speculations. Your writing is not at the collegiate level. This needs to be changed entirely.