Going Forward with Feedback: On Autonomy and Teacher Feedback

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Abstract: Language teachers often complain that they are becoming "composition slaves" (Hairston 1986) spending an inordinate amount of work on giving feedback on students' texts. This might be particularly true of L2 teachers as several studies indicate that students prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback, particularly in L2 learning (Zhang; Hyland). While the ultimate goal of teacher-written feedback is an independent and self-regulating, the risk of "over-dependence on teacher feedback lower[ing] the students' initiative" (Miao, Badger, and Zhen) looms large. This paper probes the limits and implications of teacher feedback focusing on the question of whether teacher feedback generates dependent students. Through a discussion of three cases, we ask: when does feedback go from being constructive to impeding development of independence? This idea of dependence is further considered in relation to current debates about the rise of "therapeutic education" in which students are discussed in terms of "vulnerability" (Füredi; Ecclestone and Hayes). We conclude by suggesting that the challenge for teachers is not to assume the role of therapists but to encourage reflective education through clarity about academic goals, and making explicit the crucial role of autonomy for successful student progression — in and beyond the university setting.

Introduction

This paper probes the limits and implications of teacher feedback focusing on the question of how teacher feedback can generate independent self-regulating students, and what type of feedback is desirable in a tertiary-education framework. The idea of independence is further considered in relation to current debates about the rise of a generation culturally unaccustomed to overcoming obstacles, and one with different expectations of the responsibilities that being a student entail and thus, in turn, what the role of the university lecturer entails. As Yang Miao, Richard Badger and Yu Zhen suggest, an "over-dependence on teacher feedback [will] lower the students' initiative and lead to fewer self-initiated corrections" (192), a risk that threatens the ultimate goal of teacher-written feedback: a student who is able to assess her own work critically and successfully edit her own text. This paper thus problematises the feedback process and through three brief cases, we discuss the gap between teacher- and student expectations on the academic writing process.

One of many possible starting points for a problematisation of feedback effects is   Etienne Wenger's "Components of a social theory of learning," which acknowledges that learning is in turn linked to practice (learning as doing), identity (learning as becoming), community (learning as belonging), and meaning (learning as experience). In acknowledging that writing skills are the key that opens many an academic door, it is a useful exercise to discuss Wenger's diagram from a writing perspective.

In exchanging "Learning" for "Writing," in the particular context of our discussion, we aim to establish a framework in which writing is discussed from a variety of perspectives: writing to belong in the academic community; writing and scholarly identity; writing as meaning-making; and writing as a scholarly practice. All these aspects are crucial in the quest for the autonomous student: for the student herself and for her lecturer. Particularly, then, we are interested in how feedback — especially teacher-written feedback — functions in terms of building self-regulating autonomous students.

Figure 1: Components of a social theory of writing

Adapted from Wenger 1998

We thus propose to approach writing in a manner that makes explicit the connection between *practising* and *practice* through this holistic lens; that is to envision writing as:

1. Belonging in the academic community;
2. Becoming — a writer with a scholarly identity;

3. Experience — by understanding writing as meaning-making practice;
4. Doing — whereby writing is performing scholarly practice and -identity (adapted from Wenger).

If autonomy and independence are the goal, it is necessary first to gain an understanding of the cohort. Amongst the many articles published in newspapers and other popular media, it is not hard to discern a trend in how today's generation is depicted. Are we in fact facing a generational cultural turn?

Meet the "Me Generation"

Our adaptation of Wenger's framework presupposes an active participation on behalf of both student and lecturer (or apprentice and 'master') whereby the student's drive as well as the lecturer's external scaffolding are necessary parts; however, this balance, or rather, the lack thereof, is becoming increasingly visible in today's academic climate and in popular media.

In her two books, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable than Ever Before* and "*The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (with W. Keith Campbell), psychologist Jean M. Twenge focuses on young Americans born roughly between 1980 and 2000, claiming that they are characterised by a much greater degree of self-focus and entitlement than previous generations. Some reasons for this development are, according to Twenge, parenting, the Internet, and the celebrity culture in media (Interview with Lynne Malcolm 2014). Today's parents tend to focus more on building self-esteem in their offspring than previous generations, wanting to make their children feel special and unique in the misguided (according to Twenge) belief that this will foster future success. The same ideas are reinforced by an influential entertainment industry and social media, which promote a view of the individual as a brand name to be marketed. The great importance placed on the self in social media plays a great role in the behavior of this generation and, says Twenge, "reality TV-stars make narcissism seem normal" (Interview with Lynne Malcolm 2014).

This development is not unique to the United States. A recent book by Ana Udovic, *Generation Ego: Att fostras i en narcissistisk kultur[1]*, identifies a similar trend here in Sweden. Issues of parenting are addressed by Udovic too, as the behaviour of the present generation is considered to be produced by anxious so-called "helicopter parents" always hovering over their children, ready to save them not only from danger, but from boredom and hard work. In Sweden, they are known as "curling parents" — a term coined by Danish psychologist Bent Hougaard to describe parents who sweep away any difficulties that their young ones might encounter (Hougaard). These parents[2], it is claimed, have over-protected their children and taught them that self-centeredness pays. In other words, it is the previous generation that responsible for over-protecting these children and for failing to teach them to act independently and to persevere in the face of difficulties. In *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, Kathryn Ecclestone and Dennis Hayes talk about the "thera-

peutic" turn in education, which they trace from preschool to the university (as school and workplace). As a result, students' feelings of inadequacy, stress and inability to cope, responses that were previously considered 'normal' challenges for anyone beginning a university education, are now being pathologised. For example, "school exams have been criticized on the grounds that they create stress and other illnesses among children" (Füredi 8). In short, to these scholars, the university, which was once the stronghold of reason and the pursuit of knowledge, is now becoming preoccupied with feelings; what Frank Füredi refers to as a "culture of vulnerability" in which individuals learn to interpret the world through the prism of emotion.

It is thus reasonable to conclude that the students who enter university today do so with different expectations and competencies than previous generations. Furthermore, Swedish primary and secondary education have recently undergone changes that have an effect on tertiary education as well. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012, Swedish 15-year-olds score lower than the OECD average in mathematics, science, and reading. One of the reasons for this is that the Swedish schools fail to fulfill the goal of equality[3] (Skolverket 2012). According to the political opposition, it is the rise of charter schools since the 1990s that has led to increased segregation and schools focusing on profit rather than education (Sveriges Radio 2013).

Here at Kristianstad University, the students we meet often come from a non-academic background and some may, in fact, have chosen to study because the alternative would be unemployment. Jobs are scarce and competition is fierce, and many young people are ill prepared to meet the demands of the job market. This is a very bleak picture and no doubt it is reductive and stereotypical; the point is, though, to suggest that many of them (luckily, there are also many exceptions) have been let down by the previous generation and that we as teachers need to keep this in mind in order to support them in the best possible way, and that we need to identify the tools by which they can regain their autonomy and agency. In *Ungdomsbarometern 13/14*[4] (Simonsson and Horn af Rantzien 2013)*, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their abilities; the selection of responses below paints a grim picture:

Table 1: Selected responses from Ungdomsbarometern 13/14

How good would you say you are at:	5	4	3	2	1
Understanding complex concepts and relationships	19	36	31	9	3
Working independently	44	35	14	4	1
Planning and organisation	31	32	22	10	3
Meeting a deadline	37	33	18	8	4

(5= very good; 1= not at all good; answers in %). Source: *Ungdomsbarometern 13/14*, p. 54[5]

Notably, we are looking here at between 19 and 43 per cent of respondents who self-report being average or below at performing tasks that are key in the academic environment, and which are key in writing within the academic environment. The evidence for students being ill-prepared for the task at hand is worrying on many levels, not least in terms of the assessment that they will undertake during the course of their studies[6].

A note on assessment

The Structure of the Observed Learning Outcomes, or SOLO taxonomy, first described by John Biggs and Kevin Collis in 1982 (Biggs N.D.) famously classifies learning outcomes in terms of complexity and is an assessment tool in terms of evaluating the quality of student work, but also helpful terms of course design when it comes to the implementation of structural alignment.

If we envision first the level at which the student is intended to be at the completion of a course (or task or program), we must take into account all the required sub-skills they need first be able to master. Our reason for referring to the scheme here is to highlight that what are considered to be higher-order skills belonging to the relational and extended abstract abilities, are in fact where our pass grade begins: it is not sufficient to name and identify, nor to describe — our learning outcomes concern *analysis* and *application*, *comparing* and *contrasting*, *explaining* and *justifying* as well as the ability to *create* different types of text. In order for the most basic assessment criteria to be met, higher-order skills are necessary, yet we see student work that is purely descriptive in focus, with a glaring lack of analysis and justification. Arguably, the extended abstract skills are especially applicable to the assessment criteria for a pass with distinction grade (VG), where the ability to *hypothesise* and *theorise* are key aspects. For students nearing the completion of their degree, the essay absolutely requires extended abstract skills also at the pass level.

Guiding students to becoming life-long learners, critical thinkers, and independent agents in their pursuit of knowledge and understanding and giving them the tools to continue this journey once the scaffolding of the learning institution is removed, ought then to be our primary goal. Meeting criteria such as "*The student is able with independence to construct original arguments, to contextualise, and to provide discussions of intellectual depth*," which is lifted from our assessment criteria for the essays that our first-year English students are to produce, require that the students take responsibility for their learning process and that we as lecturers do not settle for lower-level skills in lieu of the required ability critically to analyse.

A further point is that we view critical writing skills as the effect of critical thinking skills. If we are truly interested in shaping autonomous life-long learners, we must acknowledge that what we are providing them with is not the end result, but the ability with independence to tackle the world outside academia: we are not simply shaping a scholarly practice within the walls of the university, but merely laying the foundation for their future endeavours.

In light of the evidence in favour of a changing cohort, it is worthwhile to consider the influences on teachers in their meeting with students. Richard James highlights that "the higher education process not only *shapes* student expectations, the education process itself is *influenced by* the character of student expectations" (4); he further stresses that "massification and related trends have partially eroded the traditional reference point for standards" (4). What we see, and which we shall soon turn to with explicit examples, is a gap in the feedback that students want and expect and the type of feedback that encourages autonomy. The feedback that students request is, in our experience, largely related to the lower levels of understanding in the SOLO taxonomy, and though these levels may perhaps lend themselves more easily to direct feedback than the higher levels, the problem lies in that students who do not master the lower levels of understanding, as our cases will show, continue to expect and demand direct feedback.

Feedback as an arena for the teaching — learning dialogue

Feedback is a crucial arena for the teaching–learning dialogue, in which issues of dependence/independence, scholarly practice, and the assumption of a scholarly identity are played out. We provide here a brief review of the research on teacher-written feedback in order to reach some conclusions about the implications this has for our work in the classroom.

In 1996, Professor John Truscott's review essay in the journal Language Learning called "The Case against Grammar Correction in L2 Writing Classes" argued that error correction is harmful and should be abolished. This article sparked a debate about the role of teacher feedback (corrective feedback) in language learning that is still ongoing. The majority of writers in response to Truscott's provocative statement, have by contrast found that written correction of errors can help learners improve both their drafts and their longer-term writing ability (e.g. Ferris 1999, 2004, 2010; Chandler 2004, 2009; Ellis et al. 2006; Bitchener 2008; Bitchener and Knoch 2009, to mention just a few).

During the past decade there have been many attempts to broaden this research base with studies seeking to answer the question of what type of (written) feedback is most helpful for students, and is likely to enhance not only the text at hand, but also lead to greater accuracy in future work (so-called 'incremental' learning). In fact, an article on Scholarship on L2 writing in 2011 (Silva et al.), named feedback as one of the year's most significant trends.

Below, we provide a brief summary of the differences between direct and indirect feedback, problematising some of its aspects.

Table 2: Feedback: how and why?

Direct: Sentences are recast	Indirect: Coded feedback
Student is provided with corrected text.	"Subject-verb agreement," "Word choice," "Refer to the referencing style guide," etc.
May lead to the student's work meeting assessment criteria, albeit superficially as the question of autonomous production has been compromised and the student cannot demonstrate that s/he masters the ability individually to meet assessment criteria.	May not lead to the student's work meeting the assessment criteria as the student may or may not be able to 1) decode the feedback and 2) self-edit and self-regulate to an acceptable standard. Making explicit the feedback process can be a remedy to aspect 1. Autonomy is not compromised in this model.

We note here that though the feedback given when an assignment is submitted may be summative in that it does provide an evaluation of where the student stands, it should function formatively by providing the tools for the student *independently* to raise the text to a level that meets the goals: as self-regulating learners, which is our goal, "actively interpret external feedback, for example, from teachers and other students, in relation to their internal goals" (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 200). We thus aim to increase autonomy by providing external feedback that in conjunction with students' internal goals creates a platform for their socialisation into the academic environment whereby they are able to negotiate meaning as well as their academic identity through the process. As such, through writing as doing — as the means of the negotiation of meaning — they increasingly find their place in the academic community.

Current research does not offer conclusive evidence on feedback practices, but it points slightly in favour of indirect over direct feedback (Bitchener & Knoch). Those who suggest that indirect—or coded—feedback is more effective than direct feedback—when the teacher provides actual recasts of sentences—argue that it requires students to engage in guided learning and problem-solving and, as a result, promotes the type of reflection, noticing, and attention that is more likely to foster long-term acquisition (Ferris & Roberts).

On the other hand, one of the main arguments presented in support of more direct types of feedback (by, for example, Chandler) is that direct feedback is more helpful to students because it reduces the type of confusion that can occur if learners fail to understand or remember what the feedback is saying. For example, in situations where error codes are provided, it is argued that students may not always understand or remember to what they refer.

Crucially, feedback ought to be framed as a dialogue—as a way for teachers and students to communicate about their mutual interest: that of improving the text, which also decreases the risk of teachers becoming "composition slaves" (Hairston). As David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick argue:

One way of increasing the effectiveness of external feedback, and the like-lihood that the information provided is understood by students, is to con-ceptualise feedback more as dialogue rather than as information transmis-sion. Feedback as dialogue means that the student not only receives initial feedback information, but also has the opportunity to engage the teacher in discussion about that feedback. (209)

The success of feedback does not, then, depend solely on intention—even the best-constructed feedback is pointless if the student is unable to understand it—but crucially on the success on behalf of the student to conceptualise it, which itself requires independent effort. This effort can nevertheless be facilitated through dis-cussion and dialogue. In order to make sure that the external feedback becomes internalised, and builds on students' "own internal constructions of goals, criteria and standards" (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 208), which is exactly the practice we aim to cultivate, we encourage feedback to be regarded as a crucial arena for the teaching–learning dialogue.

The three cases to which we now turn problematise the teaching–learning dialo-gue: the cases demonstrate less-successful feedback scenarios. Our discussion then turns to possible causes and consequences, and to future directions needed to re-medy issues such as these.

Three feedback scenarios

Case A

A was a student at the Master's program in English at Kristianstad University. The stu-dents in this course were offered eight group seminars on writing followed by individual tutorials in which feedback was given both orally and in writing. The feedback offered began with idea development, and continued with argument cohesion and editing (cf. Ferris); comments were both 'global' (about the text as a whole) and 'local' (about spe-cific instances of text).

In this case, teacher feedback did indeed lead to quite a few revisions, indicating a high degree of dependence on teacher feedback. Feedback on global issues, for ex-ample concerning the presentation of results and factors to include in the analysis worked better than the feedback on language. To exemplify, the plural form of nouns was consistently incorrect and indirect feedback — in the form of electronic margin notes —were made highlighting the noun in question and stating that 'plural form' should be used. Student A treated the feedback not as indirect requiring critical enga-gement with the language, but instead as direct (recasts) and replaced all nouns with the words 'plural form' or 'plural' where this was provided in the margin note. The essay submitted for examination thus contained sentences where the words 'plural form' re-placed key concepts in the text.

Comment on Case A:

There are several implications of this behaviour that need further scrutiny. To begin with, a student who is used to receiving direct, corrective feedback may be used to working with text in such a manner. Rather than rephrasing and editing the text, a stu-

dent who has previously received corrective feedback may continue to do so even in situations where it is not appropriate, which ultimately means there is no critical thinking underpinning the critical writing.

Throughout the writing process, response from the teacher was given in indirect form, and/or as suggestions and questions, rather than the more directive imperative form, in order to encourage independent work and invite the student to make decisions about the text and to encourage the student's ownership of the text. The open-ended nature of the feedback given in the questions made it impossible for the student to incorporate them into the text without reflection and active decision-making. Evidently this practice entails the risk that the student misunderstands or simply ignores the feedback at hand. While direct feedback may work for students at a very low level of proficiency, who may not be able to self-edit successfully (Hyland), it is reasonable to expect a student at this level (and arguably at any tertiary level) to be able to deal with the kind of indirect comments provided. Giving direct feedback entails other risks, as the issue that "teacher response may appropriate student text if it is too directive" (Bates, Lane and Lane in Shin 363). In an article the role of grammar correction in a writing class, Sang-Keun Shin states that there has to be "a process of negotiation of meaning" to avoid text appropriation (Shin 363). This negotiation of meaning is best achieved by indirect forms of feedback and is key within the framework we adopt here.

In this context, we also need to consider peer-reviewing, which has been the focus of a great deal of attention in recent years. Language teachers and researchers often stress that peer reviewing offers a more equal learning situation than the hierarchical one of teacher and student, and that it can take place in a less formal and more supportive milieu. Furthermore, it may stimulate the engagement, cognitive conflict, and social activity that Agneta Svalberg claims are significant aspects of language learning, though it is has also been noted that "teachers are much more effective in identifying errors or misconceptions in students' work than peers or the students themselves" (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 208).

Clearly, peer reviewing may have an important role to play in language learning and it fits very well into the process-writing paradigm; however, the problem of dependence occurs in connection with peer reviewing as well and the case of Student B indicates potential risks involved.

Case B

B was a student in an English literature course with a focus on writing at Kristianstad University. The students were asked to read four novels in English and produce a short paper on each of the novels. They were asked to work in pairs and provide comments on one another's work according a peer review sheet asking them to focus on an introduction providing a brief background to the research question and its relevance; a clear formulation of and development of the argument; a coherent structure; and a conclusion creating a sense of completion by referring back to questions raised in the introduction. They were also asked to give comments on grammar and style. Student B had submitted two versions of her paper and had received comments from both teacher and peer reviewer. When she submitted the final version of her paper for examination, she accidentally submitted a draft version on which a person outside of the boundaries of the course had provided extensive electronic edits using tracked changes as well as comments in the form of margin suggestions. When queried about the submission, the

student said that her draft had been corrected by a friend who was claimed to be "very good at English" and appeared surprised that there was any issue at hand as the corrections had "only related to language".

Comment on Case B:
This example points to a number of problematic issues. There are researchers, such as Fiona Hyland (2000), who see asking for help from, for example, spouses, or friends who might be native speakers or at least more proficient than the writer in question, as something positive as it shows that the student is actively seeking to expand her/his knowledge and that receiving constructive criticism in a relaxed and friendly setting is potentially beneficial; however, the example of Case B raises again the question of text appropriation. This is slippery ground: just when does a text cease to be the student's own? The question is further complicated by the grading criteria's requirement of independence, or, the level of student independence may be used to distinguish between a pass grade and a pass with distinction. These aspects are thus necessary to problematise in the interest of legal certainty required from Swedish university teachers as our employment is as public servants.

We have no conclusive answer to the question of how to avoid situations like this, but what we see here seems to suggest that direct feedback is also potentially problematic if we teach this as a practice as it may then be seen as an acceptable form of help to receive even outside of the course. As a step in clarifying to students that help in completing any writing assignment is not allowed outside of what is offered within the explicit framework of the course, we composed a handout that is now distributed to students at all levels. It may be that case that making explicit these boundaries is crucial in terms of aiding students' enculturation into the academic environment.

In addition to Cases A and B, which deal with linguistic aspects specifically, we now turn to a case in which we highlight the demands of a student for direct feedback, but direct feedback arguably related to the independent critical thinking underpinning the critical writing.

Case C
Student C was writing a final-year essay in linguistics. The essay was not passed due to a number of fundamental flaws on which as much feedback as possible was given — as some sections were in initial draft form or missing entirely, the examiner could not always provide comments. A series of over thirty emails followed between the examiner and the student, in which the student requested feedback lying outside of what the examiner can provide[7]. The student asked a variety of questions, all showing a lack of independent engagement with the text, and with the research project as a whole. The feedback had stated that the results and analysis were descriptive rather than analytical; the student here asked for an example of what it should look like, a question that is simultaneously large and vague.

A subsequent email showed that the student was neither deconstructing nor attempting to deconstruct the feedback. The student claimed to be aware that the essay structure was not good, but asked what was meant by "lack of internal logic," a term that is part of the grading criteria. The student fails to connect this terminology to the further feedback regarding structural problems.

Further, the student asked about how old the literature in the theoretical background should be, suggesting 1980 as a reasonable cut-off year. The further feedback provided explained that the age of the literature is content- and context-dependent, in

an attempt to clarify to the student that the topic of investigation dictates the reading that must be undertaken. The student's reply showed no critical engagement with the feedback, instead providing thanks for the information that it is the context that matters, not if the literature is recent or not.

Following this response, clarification was given regarding context dictating what material is used in a theoretical background since the question of whether the research is relevant is directly related to the topic. The student again responded by asking for an example.

Comment on Case C:

Student C is a highly dependent student who does not embrace the components of a social theory of writing. The case highlights specifically a gap relating to the components of writing as meaning-making and as a scholarly practice as the student wants "the key," but is unable to recognise what lock it opens: the questions essentially ask for direct feedback, when the task demands independent thought and any feedback thus has to be indirect, taking into account scope and context especially[8].

It is also relevant to consider that purely formative feedback has been provided to this student—in the form of supervision—but that the examination process is seen by the student as merely another opportunity for formative feedback when by definition it has also to be summative as it evaluates the student's performance to be graded. Asking for examples at this stage is indicative of a highly dependent student, who is unable to engage with the construction of not just the essay, but of research material read for the theoretical background, which would presumably make helpful examples. Further focus on the difference between "results," "analysis," and "discussion" is necessary in cases like this where the lack of understanding of terminology translates into a lack of practical application and vice versa.

We have identified possible approaches to make explicit the stages of the process to students and are developing an extensive course compendium, which, in addition to standard information about requirements, deadlines, and assessment criteria, will clarify the rights and responsibilities of students, supervisors, and examiners, including a discussion of the aspects of independence involved in a final-year essay.

Discussion of cases

The issues discussed here have many facets, but we reduce them for the purpose of this discussion to being twofold: these students are, firstly, unable to assess the level of their own knowledge; that is, to distinguish between lower and higher levels of understanding; hence, they are unable to identify the gap between their current level and the level at which they will meet the pass criteria[9]. Secondly, and perhaps as a consequence, they do not understand that direct feedback may not be possible. Since these higher levels demand independent critical work, and since they are aspects related to context, producing an assignment that meets the criteria may perhaps not even be possible without the teacher interfering with the text at a level that de-autonomises the student. Alternatively, there are risks of the feedback focusing on lower-level skills as higher-level skills may be entirely absent, echoing the risks that feedback "might focus on low-level learning goals or might be overwhelming in quantity" (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 208), the latter aspect being a risk when the gap to be bridged is large. The students may not be able, in the sea of feedback, to navigate and to find the reference point necessary for development. This suggests

that students that are far from meeting the goals may not realise the amount of work required to meet criteria, and rather see the feedback as items to tick off rather than as a process requiring critical reading, -thinking, and -writing.

Another gap appears to as a notable in the context of this discussion. The paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered, or from teaching-centered to learner-centered approaches, means a shift of power from teacher to student, and hence a shift of ownership as well as an increased level of demands of activeness on part of the student (O'Neill & McMahon). Arguably, a student-centered approach is irreconcilable with practices that de-autonomise the student. It seems what the three cases have in common is the passivity displayed, whereby direct feedback is expected, indirect feedback is read as direct, and the students attempt to relinquish power and ownership of their work. This is reminiscent of a traditional structural framework in which the teacher primarily holds the power and the student has a low level of choice. Communicative teaching and student-centred learning demand, arguably, more of both teacher and student, but the cases here do not reflect a sense of ownership on behalf of the students. In terms of life-long learning, in the recognition that what we are aiming to provide our students with is not the ability to complete an assignment that requires critical reading, -thinking, and -writing skills, but a mindset that makes them critical thinkers and learners in the long term, it seems these students are unable to recognise that giving them what they demand would actually be a disservice and would mean that they have not met the learning goals even if the text itself would meet the requirements due to a too-large level of external assistance. A key argument of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's is that

> students are already assessing their own work and generating their own feedback, and that higher education should build on this ability. … This shift in focus, whereby students are seen as having a proactive rather than a reactive role in generating and using feedback, has profound implications for the way in which teachers organise assessments and support learning. (199)

The proactive role of students is one that we have not seen in the cases described here, and leads us to the following questions, which we will be exploring in future work:

1. How do we support students' proactive engagement with their texts?
2. How does feedback move from monologue to dialogue?
3. How do we build on students' existing ability to generate their own feedback?

An in-depth understanding of the cohort is key here and we acknowledge that feedback works both ways—improving the dialogue with the student body is imperative to increasing our understanding of these complex matters.

Conclusion

A discussion of feedback requires a holistic perspective taking into account a multitude of aspects; here, we have focused on notions of dependence and vulnerability in the student cohort and have argued that the former is partly a product of the latter: the discourse of vulnerability victimises the student and has negative consequences on student agency as the power balance is shifted. Ecclestone stresses that "[t]he rise in vulnerability claims is leading academics to become more lenient. Some withdraw assessment demands or soften their feedback;" in this vein, we argue that framing education in a discourse of vulnerability will be counterproductive for both students and their teachers. Such a discourse can thus not only have dire consequences for assessment, but beyond: if students are not given the tools to become life-long critical thinkers, academia, too, has let them down.

What students want, then, is not necessarily what they need, as these cases of a desire for direct feedback have shown: if we want our student to meet the learning goals, we have to demand autonomous engagement, and the way forward here can here only be via indirect feedback. Below, we visualise how feedback is integrated into the process as a crucial component of the schema proposed.

Figure 3: The feedback cycle
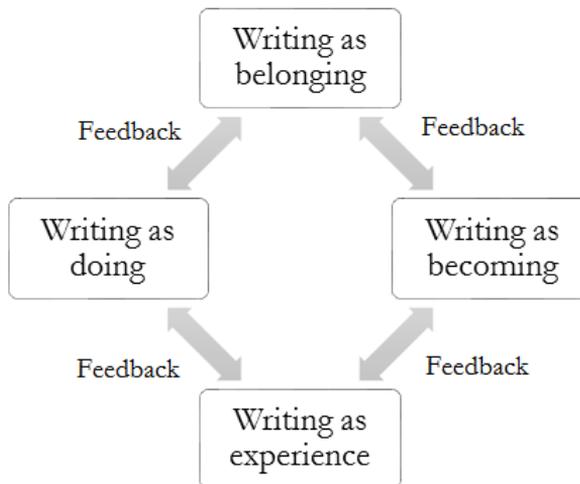
The framework we propose here, we thus visualise as a circular process, in which all components are equally important: if one component is missing, the circular flow is interrupted and progress is not possible. Feedback affects not just one of the components but all — for example, feedback on the practice of writing will impact not only on creating meaning at the text level, but also on the students' sen-

se of belonging in the academic community and equally their scholarly identity as part of this community. We stress that the cognitive conflict underpins this model: critical engagement is necessary for the students' development of these skills. Without it, the parts of the whole will no longer be interconnected.

To put it provocatively, we suggest that students not be given what they want. Research points us slightly in favour of indirect feedback, but what we have identified here is the impossibility of direct feedback in relation to the learning goals that are to ensure students are not simply capable of performing isolated tasks, but that they become life-long learners equipped with transferable knowledge. We see indirect feedback as an activity that engenders reflective learning and independence, and encourages students to assume responsibility for their own work. All of these are vital components of a scholarly identity and a scholarly practice.

What we mean is this: do not let this generation down once again by sweeping all the obstacles in their way, but encourage them to seek knowledge independently. Clear instructions through the teaching of feedback will give students a feeling of empowerment and accomplishment. With systematic scaffolding in the form of indirect feedback, even a 'vulnerable,' dependent student could take on the challenges of academic life. Indirect feedback is constructive as it requires the students to work actively with their own texts. There are other values at stake here than simply language correctness, and which relate to good scholarly practice, namely actively to seek knowledge and assume responsibility for one's own learning process. What is perhaps most important about giving indirect feedback is thus *the practice it engenders.*

As teachers, we might need to start considering teaching more explicitly the feedback process, so that students know what to expect from it and have a clear sense of what we expect from them. Furthermore, not only do we need to remember the proactive focus on form, achieved through the teaching of grammar, but make sure that there is cohesion between the various modules offered as part of a full-term course, and progression throughout the various stages of education.

Additionally, in order to be able to self-assess and benefit from the feedback given, the learner needs to understand the goal, where they stand in relation to the goal, and how to get there. This can be made clear if we bring teaching and assessment closer together and familiarise the students with the assessment criteria; this can be done through reading-writing activities, text deconstruction and analysis, text improvement activities, and so forth (Icy Lee).

Liberal arts subjects are often criticised for lack of connection to actual working life, for their lack of 'usefulness', but we would like to suggest that teaching our students good scholarly practice, such as taking responsibility for their own work, setting realistic goals, and being able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, are valuable skills that might promote empowerment as well as career opportunities. Just as we must continually assess and reassess our approaches, methods, and practices, so too must our students in order that a genuinely reflective and autonomous practice be engendered.

Notes

1. Generation Ego: Being Raised in a Narcissist Culture, our translation.
2. Also referred to as "lawnmower parents".
3. Swedish "likvärdighet".
4. Ungdomsbarometern 13/14 (The Youth Barometer 13/14) is a survey of Swedish school-leavers' attitudes regarding tertiary education, future careers, and life paths. While we find many of the report's statements and values highly problematic, some of its data is, nevertheless, useful for the understanding of today's cohort.
5. 0 = do not know, and has not been included in this table.
6. A further step would be to engage in a problematisation of whether respondents' views on what constitutes 'working independently' corresponds to the expectations of and in the tertiary-education framework.
7. We recognise that students may not be able without explicit explanation to distinguish the different roles of the supervisor and the examiner; what we argue here is rather a mismatch between what students are able to recognise as their independent contribution and the feedback that can be provided is the underlying issue; some students have a tendency to hand back ownership to the supervisor and the examiner alike, as exemplified here in the demand for explicit "examples" of "what analysis looks like".
8. This student knows to ask for examples, and that we need to exemplify as part of our teaching responsibilities. What she fails to see is that the examples have been provided and that direct feedback would remove the independent component.
9. This is arguably less the case for Student B, who may have realised that the level of English is not of a sufficiently high standard to meet the criteria; however, rather than engaging with the text and individually raising the standard to meet the criteria, this student seeks external help to bridge the gap. As such, the criteria of independence is not met.

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