

Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Providing Feedback

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Introduction

Assessment of adult and continuing education permits the critical question to be asked and answered: have the goals and objectives of the curriculum been met?. It assesses individual achievement to satisfy external requirements, and provides information that can be used to improve curriculum and to document accomplishments and failures. Assessment can provide feedback and motivation for continued improvement for learners and curriculum developers. In this reading we will be looking at both of the above aspects of assessment.

We must not forget that in the last decade we have observed the rapid evolution of assessment methods used in Education from the traditional ones towards more sophisticated assessment strategies. Single methods were replaced by multiple methods and paper-and pencil tests were replaced by computerized tests. Assessment tools such as portfolio approach and standardized performance tests are examples of the new measurement tools. The introduction of these new methods and the results obtained has had a system wide effect on education.

What is Assessment?

Evaluation and assessment are two terms interchangeably used by educationists. However we must understand the difference between the two to move forward in this session. Therefore, in this section we will try to look at some definitions given by different experts.

According to Nitko (1995) **Evaluation** is the process of **judging the quality** of a student's performance. Teachers usually assess students and use this assessment information to judge the quality of their learning for either formative or summative purposes. **Assessment** is the process of **gathering information** for the purposes of making decisions about educational policy, about curriculum and educational programs, or about individual student's learning. Thus the term assessment, refers to the process of gathering relevant information, for the expressed purpose of making educational decision.

Dietel, Herman, and Knuth (1991) explained assessment as "any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses." This implies that assessment can be as simple as a teacher's subjective judgment based on a single observation of student performance, or as complex as a five-hour standardized test. Lambdin, Kehle, Perston (1996) defined assessment as the process of gathering evidence about student's knowledge of, ability to use, and disposition toward the mathematics and of making inferences from that evidence for a variety of purposes. Evaluation is the process of determining the worth of, or assigning a value to something on the basis of careful examination and judgment. In an outcome environment, this means in relation to the standards set and through careful monitoring of each student's progress (National Council of Teaching Mathematics)

In another definition Airasian (1991) "Assessment is the process of collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting information to aid in decision making. According to the definitions highlighted here evaluation means the process of judging the quality of student performance and assessment means the process of gathering evidence about student performance.

Different Types of Evaluation

Let us now turn our attention to the different types of evaluation and the special objectives of each of these approaches.

- Formative and Summative evaluation

Evaluation done from time to time during the course of the instructional activity is termed formative evaluation. The objective of formative evaluation is to provide continuous feed back to the pupil and the teacher, regarding the success of learning and teaching activities, enabling them to make necessary improvement. You may draw your attention to the School Based Evaluation system that has been introduced into our schools.

Summative evaluation is evaluation undertaken at the end of a term or a year. The main objective is to determine how much learning has occurred in the pupils and to award grades or certify their attainment level. These are also used in determining teacher efficiency and effectiveness.

- Norm, Criterion and Ipsative referenced evaluations

These three types of evaluation represent three different kinds of comparisons in order to determine the degree of success in pupil learning.

A test is given to all pupils in a class after a period of instruction, the scores gained by each pupil is compared with those gained by the others and the degree of success of each pupil's learning is determined on the basis of this comparison.

This type of evaluation is called Norm Referenced Evaluation.

Before the commencement of instruction the attainment levels (learning objectives to be realized) that the pupils are expected to reach as a result of instruction are determined. At the end of instruction a test based on the expected attainment levels (respective learning objectives) is given to the pupils. The results of each pupil are then compared with the expected levels, and a decision is taken on the degree of success of each pupils learning. This type of evaluation is called Criterion Referenced Evaluation.

Pupils in a class are given a test at end of some specific learning task and the attainment levels are identified. These attainment levels are compared with attainment levels shown on similar learning tasks on subsequent occasions. On the basis of these comparisons decisions are taken on the degree of success of each pupils learning. This type of evaluation is called Ipsative Referenced Evaluation.

Think of the different situations where each of the above types of evaluation would be suitable.

It is better to conduct formative evaluations using the criterion referenced approach and to conduct summative evaluations using the norm referenced. When it is required to analyze pupil's attainment in order to identify learning difficulties, provide feed back and adopt suitable remedial measures, criterion referenced evaluation is considered to be more effective.

Purposes of Evaluation

The reasons why we assess vary considerably across many groups of people within the educational community.

Purposes of Evaluation	
Who Needs To Assess?	
Policymakers	<p>Policymakers use evaluation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Set standards* Focus on goals* Monitor the quality of education* Reward/sanction various practices* Formulate policies* Direct resources including personnel and money* Determine effects of tests <p>Monitor program effectiveness planners use assessment to:</p>
Administrators and school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Identify program strengths and weaknesses* Designate program priorities* Assess alternatives* Plan and improve programs <p>Make grouping decisions use assessment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">* Perform individual diagnosis and prescription* Monitor student progress
Teachers and administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Carry out curriculum evaluation and refinement* Provide mastery/promotion/grading and other feedback* Motivate students* Determine grades <p>Gauge student progress assessment to:</p>
Parents and students use	<ul style="list-style-type: none">* Assess student strengths and weaknesses* Determine school accountability* Make informed educational and career decisions

What should be Evaluated and When?

The evaluation that attempts to determine different aspects of educational structure, process and outcomes may have several forms. The formative evaluation provides feedback to an individual learner identifying areas and provides suggestions for improvement. Summative evaluation measures whether specific performance objectives were accomplished. As a teacher educator it is easy for you to place emphasis on the second one, since one of your most visible jobs is to assign grades that become the part of the permanent record. The first one is often the most important one for the success of your students as well as your success as a teacher. For that you must plan your evaluation tools and events so as to help students learn, rather than as opportunities to generate grades. Frequent assignments and tests rather than one big exam will give students a better chance to monitor their work and to alter their study habits.

Students are very sensitive to grades and the criteria on which they are based. Will this be written tests and oral examination? How much assignments count towards final grade? Do you consider participation in the activities? You must answer these questions well in advance.

The first step in planning the evaluation is to identify the likely users of the evaluation. Different stakeholders who have responsibility for, or who may be affected by the curriculum will also be interested in evaluation results. In addition students are interested in the evaluation of their own performance. Those results may also be of interest to educators from other institutions.

The next step in designing an evaluation strategy for a curriculum is to identify whether the evaluation is used to measure the performance of individuals, the performance of an entire programme or both. The evaluation of an individual involves determining whether the individual has achieved the objectives of a curriculum. Programme evaluation assesses the aggregate achievement of all individuals, actual processes of a curriculum implementation and perceptions of learners.

Characteristics of Good Assessment

Good assessment information provides accurate estimates of student performance and enables teachers or other decision makers to make appropriate decisions. The concept of test **validity** captures these essential characteristics and the extent that an assessment actually measures what it is intended to measure, and permits appropriate generalizations about students' skills and abilities. For example, a ten-item addition/subtraction test might be administered to a student who answers nine items correctly. If the test is valid, we can safely generalize that the student will likely do as well on similar items not included on the test. The results of a good test or assessment, in short, represent something beyond how students perform on a certain task or a particular set of items; they represent how a student performs on the objective which those items were intended to assess.

Measurement experts agree that test validity is tied to the purposes for which an assessment is used. Thus, a test might be valid for one purpose but inappropriate for other purposes. For example, our mathematics test might be appropriate for assessing students' mastery of addition and subtraction facts but inappropriate for identifying students who are gifted in mathematics. Evidence of validity needs to be gathered for each purpose for which an assessment is used.

A second important characteristic of good assessment information is its **consistency, or reliability**. Will the assessment results for this person or class be similar if they are gathered at some other time or under different circumstances or if they are scored by different raters? For example, if you ask someone what his/her age is on three separate occasions and in three different locations and the answer is the same each time, then that information is considered reliable. In the context of performance-based and open-ended assessment, inter-rater reliability also is essential; it requires that independent raters give the same scores to a given student response.

Also important is the practicality of the assessment procedures. Factors such as number of evaluators available, their status and specialties and cost have to be taken into account. The number of students assessed to be taken into account as an assessment procedure appropriate for twenty students may not be practical for hundreds. The resources available to conduct evaluations are always restricted.

Other Characteristics of Good Evaluation for Classroom Purposes:

- * The content of the tests (the knowledge and skills assessed) should match the teacher's educational objectives and instructional emphases.
- * The test items should represent the full range of knowledge and skills that are the primary targets of instruction.
- * Expectations for student performance should be clear.
- * The assessment should be free of extraneous factors which unnecessarily confuse or inadvertently cue student responses. (For example, unclear directions and contorted questions may confuse a student and confound his/her ability to demonstrate the skills which are intended for assessment. A math item that requires reading skill will inhibit the performance of students who lack adequate skills for comprehension.)

Researchers at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) are developing an expanded set of validity criteria for performance-based, large-scale assessments. Assessment researchers Bob Linn, Eva Baker, and Steve Dunbar have identified eight criteria that performance-based assessments should meet in order to be considered valid.

Determining Evaluation Criteria

Students are concerned about the evaluation criteria adopted by the educational institution they are enrolled in. What components count toward the evaluation of student performance? How much assignments and projects count towards the final grade? Are there any written examinations? Is the final evaluation based only on the continuous assessment? These are some of the questions to which you must find answers well in advance.

Before constructing an exam, assignment or project you need to decide exactly what it is you expect your students to demonstrate that they have learned. Reviewing the instructional objectives you established at the beginning may be a good way to begin. The first step is to think carefully about the goals you set for students.

Next question is how you can best evaluate the extent to which students have achieved these goals. Perhaps a certain type of test will suggest itself immediately. If you know

what you want to assess and why, then writing actual questions will be a straight forward process to follow.

Different Assessment Methods

Two important categories of methods could be identified: They are formal methods and informal methods. Formal methods include Objective type and Essay type tests, Assignments, Standardize tests such as Intelligence tests and Aptitude tests, Performance tests etc.

Informal methods include observation of student activities, work samples portfolios, diaries, and questioning, discussions and interviews. Please read Informal assessment in educational evaluation: implications for bilingual education programs by **Navarete, Wilde, Nelson, Martínez and Hargett** (1990) in NCBE Program Information Guide Series, Number 3, Summer for more information on informal assessment methods.

Effects of Traditional Tests

Billions of dollars are spent each year on education (where...cite a source), yet there is widespread dissatisfaction with our educational system among educators, parents, policymakers, and the business community. Efforts to reform and restructure schools have focused attention on the role of assessment in school improvement. After years of increases in the quantity of formalized testing and the consequences of poor test scores, many educators have begun to strongly criticize the measures used to monitor student performance and evaluate programs. They claim that traditional measures fail to assess significant learning outcomes and thereby undermine curriculum, instruction, and policy decisions.

The higher the stakes, the greater the pressure that is placed on teachers and administrators to devote more and more time to prepare students to do well on the tests. As a consequence, narrowly focused tests that emphasize recall have led to a similar narrowing of the curriculum and emphasis on rote memorization of facts with little opportunity to practice higher-order thinking skills. The timed nature of the tests and their format of one right answer has led teachers to give students practice in responding to artificially short texts and selecting the best answer rather than inventing their own

questions or answers. When teachers teach to traditional tests by providing daily skill instruction in formats that closely resemble tests, their instructional practices are both ineffective and potentially detrimental due to their reliance on outmoded theories of learning and instruction.

New Trends in Assessment and Evaluation

Since the influence of testing on curriculum and instruction is now widely acknowledged, educators, policymakers, and others are turning to alternative assessment methods as a tool for educational reform. The movement away from traditional, multiple-choice tests to alternative assessments-variously called **authentic assessment** or **performance assessment**-has included a wide variety of strategies such as **open-ended questions, exhibits, demonstrations, hands-on execution of experiments, computer simulations, writing in many disciplines, and portfolios of student work over time**. These terms and assessment strategies have led the quest for more meaningful assessments which better capture the significant outcomes we want students to achieve and better match the kinds of tasks which they will need to accomplish in order to assure their future success.

Trends in Evaluation and Assessment

Trends away from	Trends Towards
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summative assessment in a formal setting (Examinations)• Examination on infrequent and special occasions.• Comparing Pupils with each other to indicate final achievement and for ranking and selection purposes.• External responsibility for setting and marking examination.• Recall of course content.• Assessment concerned with academic achievement, with content, within established subjects.• Assessment in artificial situations and dominated by the concern to be heatproof.• Assessment as a self-contained activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formative and informal assessment• Continuous assessment often as a normal part of the teaching/ learning process• Comparing pupils performance with predetermined criteria to provide feedback for improving performance.• Internal responsibility for assessment, professionalism of teachers acknowledged, self-assessment by pupils.• Stress on learning process, e.g. study skills, information retrieval.• Recognition given to skills such as listening , speaking , practical skills, attitudes, personal and social development.• Assessment in situations more akin to real life, e.g. practical projects, folio assessment.• More awareness of education as a continuum and that curriculum and assessment should take account of what comes before and follows after. Assessment seen as an integral part of the curriculum and of teaching /learning

Source (Dietel, Herman, and Knuth, NCREL, 1991)

Principles of Good Practice for Evaluating Student Learning

1. **The evaluation of student learning begins with educational values.** Evaluation is not an end itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice then

begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve.

2. **Evaluation** is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated and relevance in performance over time. It involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes and habits of mind that affects both academic success and performance.
3. **Evaluation should be a goal-oriented process.** It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations-those derived from the institutions mission, from course design and programme objectives and from knowledge of students own goals.
4. **Evaluation requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experience that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance: where students end up matters greatly. But to improve outcomes we need to know about student experience along the way- about the curricula, teaching process and the kind of student characteristics that lead to particular outcomes.
5. **Evaluation works best when it is ongoing.** Improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken overtime. Along the way, the evaluation process it self should be evaluated and refined in the light of emerging insights.
6. **Evaluation foster wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** It is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity that involves the participation of academics, administrators and students.
7. **Evaluation is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Evaluation alone changes a little. Its contribution comes in places where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. So information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making.
8. **Through evaluation, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** As educators we have a responsibility to the public that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations.
9. **Evaluation makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** This implies evaluation approaches that

produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made.

(www.aahe.org/assessment/principia.htm)

Providing Feedback to Students

Evaluation is the process of judging the quality of a student's performance. Once the judgment is completed feedback procedures are identified and implemented. In other words feedback is dependent on the evaluation process. Crook identified the impact of evaluation practices on students in relation to three main areas such as the impact of normal classroom testing practices, the impact of a range of other instructional practices which bear on evaluation and the motivational aspects which relates to classroom evaluation. He concluded that the summative function of evaluation-grading-is more dominant and more emphasis should be given to formative evaluation. In Sri Lanka, the situation is the same as our main focus is on examinations such as GCE/ OL and AL. There are attempts to introduce continuous assessment procedures to classroom situations. However, there is research evidence to prove that the implementation of those procedures is not very successful.

The important role of feedback in improving student performance has long been recognized by educational researchers (Mory 1992). The term is used to give different meanings in different fields. Kluger and Denisi (1996) defined feedback as " actions taken by an external agent to provide information regarding some aspects of one's task performance". Within the field of education, feedback is explained in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. There is still considerable variation however, regarding the provision of purposeful feedback to students.

As explained by Doig (p 2) the term feedback has a recent history, coming into noted usage in the 1930s to describe the function of process-control systems. Such systems may be defined as systems in which 'deliberate guidance or manipulation is used to achieve a prescribed value of a variable' (Scientific Apparatus makes Association, 1970, p11) . In such systems feedback is to provide guidance to the system, such that it can operate effectively. Doig explained the process in relation to the field of process control systems as having three elements.

1. The system must be working towards a known objective.
2. The system in operation must be monitored in such a way that any deviation from this objective on the part of the system can be detected.
3. Any gap between what should be happening and what is happening can be rectified by adaptations being made to the operation of the system.

In relation to the above description, feedback does not operate in an isolated capacity but rather exists within a tightly defined and controlled system in which objectives and outcomes are known from the outset. Even though it is very difficult to relate the scientific concept of feedback to education there has been an attempt to explore the practice of feedback as it relates to teaching -learning and assessment.

Feedback from a Cognitive Perspective

Butler and Winne (1995) examined how feedback comes to be understood by students according to their individual learning objectives. According to them feedback describes "the nature of outcomes and qualities of the cognitive processing that led to those status" (p246) It explained that the effectiveness of feedback is determined by anticipated outcomes. The qualities of cognitive processing required to achieve these outcomes are further defined as a set of criteria generated by the learner which assist them to monitor their own performance as they work towards the desired outcomes. As explained by them feedback can be both internal and external and while teachers may feedback information on students work regularly, it can only be incorporated in to individual learning when it is related to their individual learning goals and objectives. If a learner does not possess or has not developed goals or objectives with respect to desired learning outcome feedback can do little to assist them in the learning process.

Teachers have a limited role to play in relation to this theory though they can act as facilitators in this process. They can explain the outcomes to students so that the students can set their own goals and objectives in relation to the expected outcomes. Students must be informed that whether they are moving towards the right direction. When they come across certain problems the teacher must help the students to identify procedures suitable for them to overcome their problems.

Effective Feedback

Sadler (1989) discusses feedback as it pertains to formative assessment, provides an informing and theorized consideration of the general principals of effective educational feedback. According to Sadler, feedback is "information about the gap between the actual and reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way" (Ramprasad, p. 4). The important feature of the above definition is that information about the gap between actual, and reference levels is considered as feedback only when it is issued to alter the gap.

Sadlers primary concern was with how feedback needs to be provided to students. Therefore how information received during the feedback process can be utilized by the students is also important to improve the performance of students. Sadler recommended that the learner has to

1. process a concept of standard or a goal being aimed for
2. compare the actual level of the performance with the standard
3. engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap (p121).

Standards according to Sadler (1989) are the medium through which students come to identify the difference between the current and the desired level of performance. They are prescribed at a level beyond the student. Teachers and curriculum developers should do it. However, as explained by Sadler when those standards are understood by students they can guide the improvement of performance. Therefore as argued by Doig the provision of standards as an instrument of feedback act as a way of 'pulling individual students back on target towards the eventual realization of long term objectives" (Mcmeniman 1986)

In relation to this approach teachers have a significant role to play in providing feedback to students.

1. Teachers should define the objectives and outcomes and make them explicit and transferable to students
2. Teachers can inform the students whether they are reaching the set objectives and targets and the strengths an weaknesses in their activities using written and oral comments
3. Teachers can provide the emotional and other support the students need to reach the final outcomes

Quality of Feedback

The quality of feedback provided to students is a key feature in any procedure of assessment. The following research evidence shows how quality of feedback is to be maintained.

Numerous studies have been carried out to study the effect of quality of feedback on student performance. The instructional effects of feedback from tests was reviewed by Bangert-Drowns (1991). The conclusion was that the feedback was most effective when it was designed to stimulate correction of errors through a thoughtful approach to them in relation to the original learning relevant to the task (Black and William, date of source). By conducting an experimental study with one control group and two experimental groups Flawar and Crono (1985) studied the impact of written feedback which concentrated on specific errors and on poor strategy with suggestions about how to improve the performance. Analysis of variance of the results showed a big effect on student performance associated with the feedback treatment.

Kluger and Denisi (1996) developed a model to explain the effectiveness of feedback. There are three levels of linked processes in the model:

1. Meta-task processes-direct attention of the feedback is to self rather than the task, i.e. praise and punishment to a student-Feedback such as praise and punishment which draw attention to self rather than the task appear to be likely to have negative effect on student performance.
2. Task -motivation process- involving the focal task- Feedback interventions that direct attention towards the task itself are generally successful. Feedback was more effective when the feedback give details of the correct answer, rather than simply indicating whether student 's answer was correct or incorrect. Another finding was that oral delivery of feedback is more effective than written delivery of feedback
3. Task-learning process- the details of the focal task- The research evidence supports the idea that students given as much or little help as they needed out-performed those students given a complete as soon as they got stuck, and were more able to apply their knowledge to similar or only slightly related tasks. Some researchers have found that repeated explanation of techniques that have previously led to failure is less effective than using alternative strategies. There is also evidence that the quality of student dialogue in a feedback intervention is important and can be more significant than

prior ability and personality factors. Further, feedback related to progress seem to be more effective than feedback on product goals.

Teachers educators also should be very concerned about improving the quality of their feedback by employing suitable strategies at the end of evaluation process.

Teachers Feedback to Children in Formative Assessment

How should the feedback be provided to students is also another important area of concern of educationists.

By conducting a study with teachers and students Tunstall & Gipps (date of source) had explained the steps involved in providing feedback to students. According to them, feedback from teachers to children, in the process of formative assessment, is a prime requirement for progress in learning. Formative assessment is that process of appraising, judging or evaluating student's work or performance and using this to sharpen and improve their competence. Tunstall & Gipps have identified, from teachers child interaction in infant classrooms, a grounded typology of teachers feed back which give us a large language to use in discussing feedback with teachers and gives teachers a framework to use in reflecting on their practice.

They identified four types of assessment feedback (A, B, C, D) and their sub groups (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 and D1, D2) and the nature of feedback in relation to socialization (Type S) is summarized in Table 1.

Typology of teachers feedback in formative assessment

Type	S	A1	B1	C1	D1
Category	Socialization	Rewarding	Approving	Specifying attainment	Constructing achievement
Type		A2	B2	C2	D2
Category		Punishing	Disapproving	Specifying improvement	Constructing the way forward
Role	Socialization /management	Classroom individual management	Performance orientation	Mastery orientation	Learning orientation

Table I: Summary of the full typology.

Feedback S was used by teachers to provide all-encompassing messages about what children come to school for; it appeared to be the feedback of socialization. Therefore S reinforced how children were expected to work and behave in the classroom society.

Feedback A1, Rewarding is evaluative feed back at its most positive. Rewarding was used by teachers to express there desire to reward children for there efforts in work or behaviour.

Feedback A2, Punishing is evaluative feed back at its most negative. A2 is feed back which teachers provided to signify complete disapproval. This feedback was often related to some sort of physical action.

Feedback B1, Approving was feedback which was of an overall evaluative kind and was positive. When teachers judged that children were achieving in work or behavior beyond that which they might have expected, B1 seem to be the expression of that judgment.

Feedback B2, Disapproving Teachers feedback B2 is of an overall evaluative kind and is negative. Some time it led on to punishment. Normally teachers use several feedback, such as Non verbal negative feedback and Verbal negative feedback,

Feedback C1 Specifying Attainment is teachers feedback which is descriptive and identifies in a specific ways the aspects of successful attainment. It is a feedback which the project teachers used to provide information about what they considered to be the basis of compete. Teachers use this feedback to identify and label the successful component of attainment.

Feedback C2 Specifying improvement is a descriptive feedback which teachers use to specify how something which is been learned can be corrected. This kind of feedback is specific to a particular task or aspect of behavior and is focused where mistakes lie. C2 feedback is different from B2 because it uses **in correcting** whatis focused much more on work, or behavior.

Feedback D1 -Constructing achievement, is teacher feedback which articulates the process that the child was or is engaged. It emphasizes more on the child's own learning therefore teachers role will be changed to a facilitator.

Feedback D2- Constructing the way forward, is teacher feedback which articulates future possibilities in child's learning. This gives a greater responsibility to children as there is room for themselves to make choices about their future improvements.

Evaluation is a part of the teaching learning process that would lead to take decisions on the kind of feedback necessary for students. Feedback is much more useful in formative evaluation than in summative evaluation. When providing feedback the teacher should be aware of the suitable strategies and steps involved to maximize the impact of feedback on student performance.

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