Timing Instructor Feedback to Increase Student Utility
Brandon Narasaki

ABSTRACT
Feedback can be defined as “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior for the purpose of improving learning” (Shute, 2008). This has been a focus of much research in the field of language education. Studies such as Black and William (1998) assert that formative assessment is vital to increasing student achievement in the classroom, which also applies to the English Discussion Class (EDC) program. This study aims to better understand how students perceive three methods of teacher-fronted formative feedback; in discussion, after discussion, and the EDC website. It addresses two main research questions: (1) Do students find feedback from the instructor useful? and (2) Which feedback methods do students feel are most effective? Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected, all three feedback types were considered useful by participants, while after discussion feedback was considered the most useful of the three.

INTRODUCTION
Feedback has always been a topic of interest for teachers and researchers alike (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Because of this long-standing interest in discovering what kind of feedback works well for students in a classroom, there have been several different areas of feedback focused on in the research; instructor generated (Black & William, 1998), autonomous (Boud, 1981; Narasaki, 2015), and video-, audio-, or computer-assisted (Hattie & Temperly, 2007). It is difficult to determine the best way to provide effective formative feedback since there are numerous variables that arise with any particular situation and target population. As Shute (2008) explains, “The vast literature [of formative feedback] reveals dozens of feedback types that have been subjected to experimental scrutiny [and] different studies report disparate findings regarding the same feedback variable” (p.154). In the end, it may be difficult to generalize results if the context and the students themselves vary from the focus group in previous research. However, the current study aims to better understand what is considered effective formative feedback for a very specific student population: students enrolled in the English Discussion Class (EDC), a compulsory course for all first-year students at Rikkyo University.

A student-centered approach is taken in the EDC to maximize student output, thereby decreasing teacher talk-time as evident in standard teaching protocol: “To guarantee students can successfully develop their fluency and communication skills, and thereby achieve all EDC course goals, instructors should keep their talking time to a minimum.” (Center for English Discussion, 2015. p.24). Given the nature of the goals of a typical EDC lesson to encourage a student-centered approach, one of the most important roles for an instructor is to provide meaningful and applicable feedback both inside the classroom (in-class feedback) as well as out-of-classroom (online class comments). In every lesson, instructors are required to provide feedback, but this can be done in a number of ways. Feedback through the instructors’ immediate correction and close monitoring of target language use is done in practice activities near the beginning of an EDC class. Towards the end of the lesson, however, students are asked to complete an extended discussion without instructor intervention (Discussion 2) and feedback is restricted to being given post-task. Based on this requirement, the EDC curriculum assumes that teacher feedback is best given at the end of D2, allowing student groups the freedom and autonomy to navigate through an entire discussion on their own. From the teacher’s perspective, it is clear why we follow this classroom protocol,
but it is also important to understand how students understand the reasons for this kind of formative feedback.

Since EDC teaching procedures have remained consistent over the last three years, I have become confident and consistent in my feedback methods. However, at the same time I have also felt a strong desire to better understand what students think of different feedback types. Since monitoring and providing meaningful feedback is a very important part of this English language course, I have looked for different ways of studying effective feedback methods in the past, such as self-reflective feedback (Narasaki, 2015). By better understanding what kind of feedback students find useful, the results may point to general methods of effective feedback for students, or possible reasons why certain kinds of feedback are not as useful. Formative teacher feedback is designed to allow students to better understand their own strengths and weaknesses, thereby promoting L2 improvement, but is this how the students see teacher feedback as well? Or, do students have a different opinion about teacher feedback? To give this study focus, two main questions were addressed: (1) Do students find teacher feedback useful? and (2) What kind of teacher feedback do students prefer? To answer these research questions, the following procedures were taken.

METHOD
All students in the researcher’s Monday-Friday classes were asked for their voluntary participation in this study. Those who chose to decline participation were treated no differently than those who agreed to participate, with the exception of not needing to complete any questionnaires. In the end, a total of 75 students agreed to participate. To help give this study focus, the basic themes of teacher feedback used remained consistent (a combination of content and use/non-use of target language). The time at which feedback was given and the specific feedback method were the variables for the study. From Lesson 2, students were explicitly told what kind of feedback would be given after each section of the lesson; (1) in discussion feedback (given during discussions), (2) after discussion feedback (given at the end of an activity), and (3) EDC website feedback (written and posted online sometime before the next lesson). In discussion feedback is teacher-fronted feedback given to students while they are performing an activity. The teacher-fronted formative feedback follows immediately after an error or proper use of language occurs. The purpose of this feedback is to confirm appropriate use of target language, and help correct student use (or non-use) of target language as soon as it happens. Therefore, students can make immediate corrections to their performance. After discussion feedback is teacher-fronted formative feedback given to the entire class on main strengths and weaknesses. The point of this feedback is to wait until students have finished a discussion before giving feedback on only a few main points that should either be continued or improved upon in subsequent discussions and classes. Therefore, students are given the space to make mistakes and carry on throughout a discussion with no teacher intervention. Finally, EDC website feedback is written on an exclusive EDC website where students can read teacher-fronted feedback from a computer or smartphone. The purpose of this feedback is to allow students to review each week’s strengths and weaknesses in order to improve in following lessons.

During Discussion Test 1 and 2 (Lessons 5 and 9), the students were asked to answer short answer questionnaires about their thoughts on the different kinds of teacher feedback being used in class (see Appendix A and B). From Lesson 2, students were made aware of the differences between the three types of formative feedback to be used in this study, with the titles of in discussion, after discussion and EDC website feedback explicitly explained and written on the classroom whiteboard. To be consistent, as well as to ensure EDC curriculum procedures were
followed so that there was no teacher interruption during D2, *in discussion* feedback was implemented during Discussion 1 (D1), *after discussion* feedback for D2, and students were always encouraged to check the *EDC website* at the end of every class. By Lesson 5 (the implementation of the first questionnaire), students were aware of the purpose of the questionnaire, but were also reminded about what each feedback method was before distributing paper questionnaires. Students were asked to complete their questionnaire while waiting outside of the classroom during the discussion tests.

**RESULTS**
The results of each questionnaire have been compiled in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

*Table 1*. Responses from Questionnaire 1 (Lesson 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Participants = 75</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Was <em>in discussion</em> feedback for D1 useful for you?</td>
<td>74 (99%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Was <em>after discussion</em> feedback in D2 useful for you?</td>
<td>72 (96%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Was the feedback on the EDC website after class useful for you?</td>
<td>57 (76%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>12 (16%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data from Questionnaire 1 shows that almost all participants felt *in discussion* and *after discussion* teacher feedback were useful (over 95% saying “yes”), but the usefulness of the *EDC website* was not as unanimous, with only 75% of students responding that website feedback was useful. This questionnaire was not asking the participants to rank or compare the different types of teacher feedback, but simply asked whether or not they felt each type of feedback was useful. To answer Research Question 1 of whether or not students feel teacher feedback is important and useful in developing English language skills, the answer is a yes for all three types, to varying degrees.

To help better understand why students felt that the three types of feedback were useful, each participant was asked to give reasons for their responses. For *in discussion* feedback, some of the most common answers included: “[It] was immediate so I could quickly correct my mistakes.” “If I did not understand something, the teacher could remind me or help me understand how to use the phrases from class.” and “I could quickly understand and practice what to do for the next discussion when the teacher corrected me.” For *after discussion* feedback, students responded with; “I was able to understand what my group did well for the whole discussion.” “The teacher summarized my good points and bad points for me to know what is most important to improve.” and, “If I did not do something in Discussion 2, my teacher gave me an example of how to do it for the next time.” Common answers for *EDC website* feedback included; “the homepage comments helps me to review what I need to do in the next class.” “I can know my good points and bad points after every class.” and, “the homepage feedback is good because I can take time to read my teachers comments and study what I need to practice more.”

Based on these student responses, it is apparent that students feel there are different benefits to each type of teacher feedback. I would therefore suggest that although the EDC curriculum only mandates *after discussion* and *EDC website* feedback, instructors should also make use of *in discussion* feedback as well. Based on responses in Questionnaire 1, students find
in discussion and after discussion feedback equally useful, but for different reasons.

Table 2. Responses from Questionnaire 2 (Lesson 9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Participants = 75</th>
<th>In discussion</th>
<th>After discussion</th>
<th>EDC website</th>
<th>In &amp; after discussion</th>
<th>All three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What kind of teacher feedback do you prefer?</td>
<td>31 (41%)</td>
<td>38 (51%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During Lesson 9, students were asked to compare the three different teacher feedback methods, and decide which they preferred. As evident in the data from Table 2, in discussion and after discussion feedback were preferred significantly more than EDC website feedback (41%, 38%, and 3% respectively). To answer Research Question 2, students in this study preferred after discussion feedback most, followed by in discussion feedback in close second, and EDC website feedback in a distant third.

Questionnaire 2 was designed in a similar way as Questionnaire 1 by asking students to give reasons why they preferred one type of teacher feedback over the other two. For each feedback, some of the most common responses have been compiled. For After discussion feedback, sample answers included: “Being given feedback right after I finished a discussion helped me remember more clearly.” “I enjoyed having my feedback from the teacher face-to-face. This made it easier to understand, and I could ask the teacher to clarify if I didn’t understand.” and, “In discussion feedback may affect the discussion, and website feedback is too late, so after discussion feedback is good timing.” Here, we see that some responses compare the other feedback choices, and that many students feel immediate feedback is easier to connect to their discussions (instead of waiting for online feedback on the EDC website). Also, one student remarked that in discussion feedback may affect the progress of a discussion (most likely this was meant as a negative effect), so having no interruption from the teacher is good. In discussion feedback was the second most preferred, and included reasons for its benefits such as; “Looking at the EDC website is troublesome.” “After discussion feedback is too late, so I forget what I did or didn’t do [when the teacher gives class feedback].” “In discussion feedback is immediate and easy to understand because the teacher corrects me if I make a mistake, so I know what to do differently.” and, “Even if I make a mistake, I can know how to do it better in the next discussion if the teacher gives me in discussion feedback.” Again, just as with the after discussion feedback responses, we see that students are comparing the pros and cons of each feedback type. Many students seem to think that checking the EDC website feedback takes too much work, and that feedback in class is better and easier to uptake. Also, after discussion feedback has a few drawbacks, such as making it more difficult to connect feedback points to specific instances in a given discussion (i.e. students may not remember use or nonuse of the specified feedback). Finally, although EDC website feedback is much less popular in the student responses, those who said that this was their favorite explained that; “I can take my time understanding my teacher’s feedback at my own pace.” and “Even though website feedback takes more time and effort to check, I find it useful for review.”

DISCUSSION
In this study, the participants found the website feedback more time consuming to use, so it can be inferred that the convenience of face-to-face formative feedback in class is preferred by most EDC students in the survey sample. If students have the motivation and are willing to take the
extra time, website feedback is good for review. Also, with so many different reactions to the two in-class feedback types used in this study (in discussion and after discussion), it is unreasonable to say that one is better than the other. The data collected from the Questionnaire 1 and 2 helped to better understand the student perspective of teacher feedback, as well as aided in generalizing the usefulness of the three types of feedback used in this study. Teacher feedback has always had a role in the language learning classroom (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), and it stands to reason that it will continue to be a useful method of aiding students in improving their language skills. Other forms of feedback may certainly be useful, such as self-feedback (Narasaki, 2015), but in regards to teacher feedback, several different types proved useful for the participants of this study. This leads to the idea that giving at least some kind of feedback is useful. With no definitive answer for what type of feedback was preferred, the 75 participants in this study showed that a variety may be best when servicing any large population of students. While Questionnaire 1 suggested the usefulness of all three types of teacher feedback, Questionnaire 2 results indicated that both in-class feedback types (in discussion and after discussion) were almost equally preferred.

CONCLUSION
This was a small-scale study done in the span of one academic semester, but several limitations can be noted. For one, it is unclear whether students who answered that EDC website feedback was not useful believed so because they read the feedback and did not think it actually useful, or did not even log into the website to check the feedback to begin with. Another limitation was acquiescence bias. The questionnaires used in this study asked students whether or not they felt the teacher-fronted formative feedback was useful, so there is a possibility that the students tried to answer questions based on how they felt the instructor wanted them to answer. A final limitation is the idea of relating how students feel about different types of teacher-fronted formative feedback to the effectiveness in student performance and improvement. For future research into better understanding the usefulness of teacher feedback in the EFL classroom, a follow-up study focused on whether or not different feedback styles have an actual effect on student performance could help determine if there are any correlations between student perceptions of teacher feedback versus actual effects on uptake. In this way, connecting student perceptions to actual performance would better inform instructors how different methods of implementing formative feedback could help a student’s learning development.

REFERENCES
In class Brandon gave in discussion feedback for D1, after discussion feedback for D2, and feedback on the EDC website after class.

1. Was in discussion feedback for D1 useful? Why or why not?
D1 のように、ディスカッション中のフィードバックは参考になりましたか？なぜですか？

2. Was after discussion feedback in D2 useful? Why or why not?
D2 のように、ディスカッション後のフィードバックは参考になりましたか？なぜですか？

3. Was feedback on the EDC website after class useful? Why or why not?
EDC のホームページに記載されていたフィードバックは参考になりましたか？なぜですか？
APPENDIX B

Student Questionnaire – Lesson 9

Questionnaire
アンケート

You can write in Japanese or English.
日本語か英語で書けます。

In class Brandon gave in discussion feedback for D1, after discussion feedback for D2, and feedback on the EDC website after class.
参加した授業でブランドンが：D1 ではディスカッション中に、D2 ではディスカッション後にフィードバックを、そして EDC のホームページでフィードバックを述べました。

1. What kind of teacher feedback do you prefer: (1) In Discussion Feedback, (2) After Discussion Feedback, or (3) Online Feedback?
教師/指導員からのフィードバックをもらう時、どれが一番良いですか？
(1) ディスカッション中
(2) ディスカッション後
(3) EDC のホームページ

2. Why do you prefer this kind of feedback?
なぜですか？