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## Scaffolding Feedback for Longer Term Knowledge Retention

Skye Playsted

University of Wollongong, sp275@uowmail.edu.au

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Skye Playsted



## Scaffolding Feedback for Longer Term Knowledge Retention

I don't know about you, but I find that some old "pedagogical habits" (Alexander, 2008, p. 93) die hard. I noticed this as I began to reflect on the ways in which I gave verbal feedback to students in my classes. Rather than challenge them to find answers to questions themselves, my responses were usually a yes or no, or a quick answer to the question a student asked. If I asked a question, I usually had an answer in mind that I was looking for from students, so the dialogue between us wasn't challenging them or drawing them towards finding new knowledge themselves. Alexander calls these habits of classroom questioning "pseudo-enquiry" (2008, p. 93). These patterns of interaction involve teachers asking open, unchallenging questions and giving "habitual...praise...rather than meaningful feedback" (Alexander, 2008, p. 93).



***All corrective feedback ... is not created equal.***

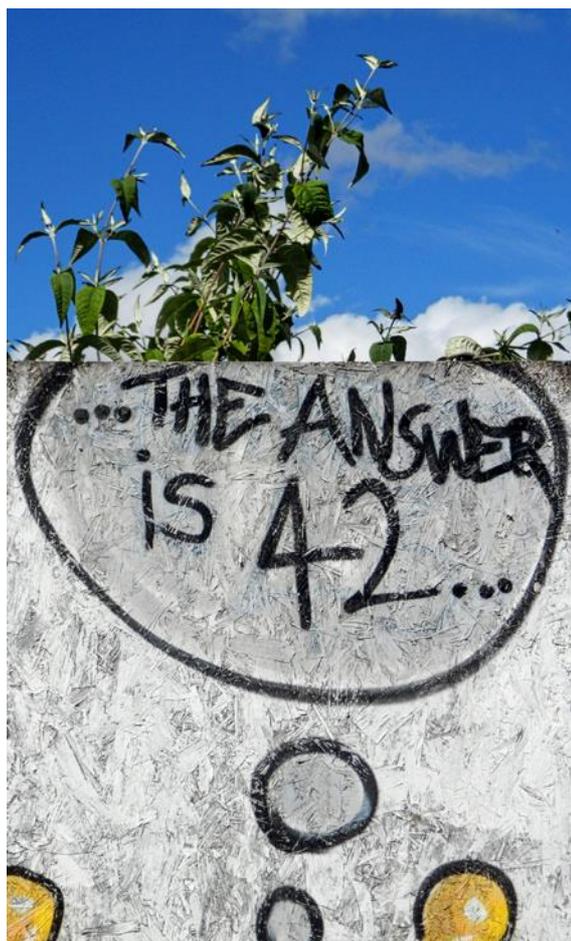
So, what does this have to do with brain studies? How teachers ask questions and respond to students' questions in class can help or hinder the brain's ability to recall the answers. Finn and Metcalfe (2010) suggest that "all corrective feedback...is not created equal" (p. 952). According to their research, it seems that the

harder we have to work for a correct answer, the better (and longer) we remember it.

In a series of experiments using an identical, general knowledge test, participants were given standard feedback (in which the correct answer to a question was given immediately), and scaffolded feedback (where students were given successive hints, but eventually discovered the correct answer themselves). Results suggested that "if

the goal is long-term knowledge retention...the student will be best served by scaffolded feedback” (Finn & Metcalfe, 2010, p. 959). Similarly, Hardiman suggests in her “Brain-Targeted Teaching Model” that “providing incremental hints [will] allow students to arrive at the correct answer themselves” (Hardiman, 2012, p. 14).

In English language classes, one scaffolding strategy I use is to ask a question as feedback, rather than giving a yes or no answer to a student. By asking a student questions such as “What do you think? Where could you look to find the answer? Which part of this have you heard/seen before?” the student has an opportunity to retrieve information she may already know. These hard-won answers are remembered by students, and develop independent thinking as well as helping longer-term knowledge retention.



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Skye Playsted is a teacher who studied ethnomusicology, cello and German. She taught German and music for 20 years, and has always enjoyed singing and playing music with others. She now has a Graduate Certificate in TESOL and teaches in academic English and adult migrant English programs in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. Skye is completing her M Ed via distance education through the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Australia.

Email: [skye.playsted@icloud.com](mailto:skye.playsted@icloud.com)

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***A fool's brain digests philosophy into folly,  
science into superstition, and art into  
pedantry. Hence University education.***

***- George Bernard Shaw***

