

Education Review

Reseñas Educativas



Resenhas Educativas

August 26, 2026

ISSN 1094-5296

Dochy, F., Segers, M., & Arikan, S. (2022). *Dialogic feedback for high impact learning: Key to PCP-coaching and assessment-as-learning*. Routledge.

170 pp.

ISBN: 9781032277981

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Dialogic Feedback for High Impact Learning by **Filip Dochy, Mien Segers, and Sibel Arikan** reconceptualizes feedback as a relational and dialogic process, moving away from transmission-based models toward interaction grounded in interpretation and shared meaning-making. Situated within the framework of Assessment as Learning, the authors argue that impactful learning emerges not from the delivery of evaluative information, but from sustained engagement in which learners interpret, negotiate, and act on feedback. At the center of the text is the claim that “feedback dialogues are the beating heart of learning with impact” (p. 108). This position persuasively challenges dominant assessment practices that prioritize efficiency, standardization, and measurable outcomes over relational engagement.



I approach this text from a systems-level perspective, working at the intersection of organizational design, employee experience, and the governance of feedback structures in a public agency. From this vantage, dialogic feedback is both a pedagogical framework and a structural design principle, particularly as feedback systems are increasingly shaped by algorithmic mediation rather than human judgment.

Here I examine the book’s central contributions, identifies its limitations, and extends its core arguments into the domain of artificial intelligence and algorithmic governance. While the book offers a compelling conceptual foundation, it stops short of addressing the technological conditions reshaping contemporary feedback infrastructures. Extending dialogic theory into these conditions is necessary work, and the stakes are substantial.

The book is grounded in Assessment as Learning, which reframes assessment from an external measure of performance to an internal process of meaning-making. Within this framework, feedback is not an endpoint but part of an ongoing cycle through which learners interpret information, reflect on their understanding, and take purposeful action. This reframing shifts the locus of evaluative authority from the assessor to the learner, repositioning assessment as a collaborative rather than hierarchical process.

A central contribution of the text is its articulation of dialogic feedback as a relational practice. Feedback is not delivered to learners but constructed with them, enabling interpretation, negotiation of meaning, and shared responsibility for learning. This distinguishes dialogic feedback from transmission-based models in which authority resides with the evaluator and learners are positioned as passive recipients of verdicts.

The authors further develop the concept of feedback literacy, drawing on Carless and Boud (2018), to describe the capacity to understand, interpret, and use feedback effectively. This extends feedback beyond information exchange to encompass emotional and relational dimensions: managing responses, engaging productively in dialogue, and developing shared ownership over the learning process. Meaningful engagement with feedback depends not only on access to information but on participation in a culture of trust, reciprocity, and relational accountability.

Together, these concepts position feedback as a cultural and political practice rather than a technical intervention. The choice to foreground dialogue reflects a substantive claim about where evaluative authority should reside.

The book's most significant strength is its sustained challenge to transmission-based models of feedback. By foregrounding dialogue, the authors shift the focus from efficiency and delivery to engagement and interpretation, offering a meaningful alternative to compliance-driven approaches that dominate many educational and organizational contexts.

The integration of feedback literacy strengthens the framework by expanding feedback beyond information exchange to include emotional, relational, and interpretive dimensions. This provides a more comprehensive account of how feedback functions in practice and reinforces learners as active participants in their own development rather than recipients of external evaluation.

The book's theoretical foundation is rigorous, drawing on research in assessment, learning sciences, and educational psychology. Its arguments are clearly articulated and well-supported, maintaining scholarly depth while remaining accessible. The emphasis on dialogue effectively repositions both learners and educators as participants in a shared process.

The book's applicability is uneven. It does not clearly define its intended audience, instead relying on broad and interchangeable terms such as "learner," "trainer," and "learning coach." While this flexibility allows the framework to span multiple institutional contexts, it creates ambiguity about who the text is designed to support in practice. The level of abstraction suggests the book is

most valuable for strategic leaders, instructional designers, and system-level administrators. The absence of concrete, classroom-level examples or actionable strategies limits its usefulness for practitioners seeking direct guidance.

More significantly, the authors engage only indirectly with the sociotechnical conditions shaping contemporary feedback systems. The rise of artificial intelligence and data-driven evaluation has introduced structural constraints that directly challenge the relational assumptions underlying dialogic feedback. The authors emphasize reciprocity and interpretive engagement, yet these conditions are increasingly difficult to sustain when feedback is generated by algorithmic systems operating through statistical inference, producing outputs derived from aggregated data rather than shared dialogue. In such environments, opportunities for interpretation and negotiation may be structurally foreclosed.

A more explicit engagement with power, governance, and technological mediation would strengthen the framework's relevance and reveal its most important potential contribution: as a normative standard against which automated systems can and should be evaluated.

Dialogic Feedback and Algorithmic Governance: Extending the Framework

The relevance of dialogic feedback extends beyond educational settings into any context where artificial intelligence mediates evaluation and decision-making. AI systems now generate performance indicators, behavioral nudges, risk scores, and recommendations across educational, professional, and public sector environments. Understanding what is lost when feedback is algorithmically produced, and what would need to be recovered, is among the most consequential questions in contemporary institutional design.

Scholars of algorithmic governance have long argued that algorithms are not neutral instruments but sociotechnical systems that embed normative assumptions, distribute authority, and produce effects extending beyond their stated functions (Gillespie, 2014; Kitchin, 2017; Winner, 1986). Pasquale's (2015) concept of the "black box" captures a critical feature of many AI systems: their opacity. When the logic of evaluation is inaccessible to those being evaluated, meaningful contestation is foreclosed by design. Zuboff (2019) demonstrates how data-driven systems extract behavioral patterns to predict and modify conduct, transforming feedback from a communicative act into an instrument of behavioral governance. Beer (2017) argues that the social power of algorithms lies in their capacity to appear objective while encoding particular values and interests.

Taken together, this literature reveals a structural incompatibility between dialogic feedback and most current AI evaluation systems. Dialogic feedback, as Dochy and colleagues articulate it, depends on three conditions: interpretive openness (feedback is provisional, subject to negotiation, and responsive to context); relational accountability (both parties bear responsibility for the quality of the exchange); and shared authority (the learner participates in determining meaning rather than merely receiving it). Algorithmic systems, as currently designed, tend to violate all three.

First, algorithmic feedback is typically presented as determinate rather than provisional. A model's output, whether a risk score, a performance rating, or a recommendation, is rendered as a conclusion rather than an opening for dialogue. Even when uncertainty estimates are included, they rarely invite the interpretive negotiation that dialogic feedback requires. The feedback arrives as a verdict.

Second, relational accountability is absent in most automated systems. When a human evaluator gives feedback, they are accountable to the person being evaluated, to the relationship, to professional norms, and to the possibility of being wrong. Algorithmic systems have no analogous accountability. They cannot be questioned in dialogue; they do not revise their outputs in response to context or objection. As Coeckelbergh (2020) observes, this absence is not merely a technical limitation but an ethical one: it relocates moral responsibility in ways that are often deliberately obscured.

Third, algorithmic systems concentrate rather than distribute interpretive authority. The learner or employee who receives AI-generated feedback is positioned as the subject of evaluation rather than a participant in it. Jasanoff (2016) describes this as technological paternalism: systems designed to optimize outcomes on behalf of populations without enabling those populations to participate in defining what outcomes matter. Williamson and Eynon (2020) identify a related pattern in educational AI, where algorithmic systems encode narrow, measurable constructs of learning while rendering invisible the relational and interpretive dimensions that dialogic frameworks treat as central.

These structural features have direct consequences. In performance management, AI-generated evaluations may reduce feedback to a compliance mechanism, something done to employees rather than with them, eroding the psychological safety and relational trust that research consistently identifies as prerequisites for genuine development. In educational settings, automated feedback may improve efficiency while narrowing the conditions under which students develop feedback literacy: the very capacity Dochy and colleagues identify as foundational.

The dialogic framework, though not developed with these questions explicitly in mind, provides the normative vocabulary needed to evaluate and challenge these systems. The conditions the authors identify as essential, reciprocity, interpretive plurality, relational accountability, and learner agency, function as criteria against which any feedback system, human or automated, can be assessed.

Paths toward more dialogic AI-mediated feedback exist. Systems can present outputs as provisional rather than definitive, include structured opportunities for recipients to contest or contextualize results, and make the logic of evaluation sufficiently transparent to support interpretation. Human oversight can be preserved in high-stakes contexts as a structural commitment to relational accountability. Feedback literacy programs can be extended to include critical AI literacy: the capacity to interrogate algorithmic outputs and advocate for interpretive authority in automated environments.

Dialogic Feedback for High Impact Learning makes a significant contribution to assessment theory by repositioning feedback as a relational and dialogic process. Its challenge to dominant models of evaluation is timely and well-grounded, and its emphasis on dialogue, feedback literacy, and learner agency offers a coherent alternative to compliance-driven approaches that reduce feedback to procedural transmission.

The book is most valuable for researchers, instructional leaders, and system-level administrators who bear responsibility for designing feedback structures at scale. Its limitations, an underspecified audience, limited practical guidance, and insufficient engagement with technological mediation, are real, but they are limitations of scope rather than argument.

The book's most important contribution may be one it does not explicitly make: it provides the normative vocabulary for evaluating feedback in an age of algorithmic governance. The conditions it identifies as essential, reciprocity, interpretive authority, relational accountability, and learner agency, are precisely those that automated systems are most likely to erode. Insisting on them as standards rather than aspirations is necessary work for anyone designing, implementing, or governing feedback systems in contemporary institutions.

Whether dialogic feedback can survive the turn toward automation is not a question about technology. It is a question about power: About who holds interpretive authority, who bears accountability, and what it means to treat the recipients of feedback as participants rather than subjects.

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Pamela Capulong is a senior human resources leader, doctoral student, United States Air Force veteran, and lifelong educator dedicated to strengthening people, systems, and workplace culture. In her current role, she leads initiatives in employee relations, employee experience, HR operations, onboarding, supervisor development, and organizational support. Before entering HR leadership, Pamela built a strong foundation in public education as an elementary teacher, middle school teacher, campus librarian, and district-level administrator. Her military service and extensive experience in education reinforced her belief that strong organizations are built on trust, accountability, clarity, continuous learning, and genuine support for every employee. Pamela holds two master's degrees from East Texas A&M University and is currently pursuing her doctorate.



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Education Review / Reseñas Educativas / Resenhas Educativas is edited by Gene V Glass and Yanming (Ami) Ren (English), Gustavo E. Fischman (Spanish/Portuguese), and Stephanie

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