

Teacher voice on peer feedback in early childhood: towards a shared definition

Paola Zoroaster, Emilia Restiglian¹

Il feedback tra pari è riconosciuto come strumento per promuovere l'apprendimento, ma rimane poco studiato nella fascia d'età 0-6 anni. Le definizioni presenti in letteratura sono spesso generiche e non riflettono le specificità di questa fascia d'età né le esigenze degli insegnanti. Indagare le conoscenze e le pratiche dei docenti è quindi fondamentale, sia per colmare lacune informative sia per sviluppare una definizione condivisa e adeguata al contesto della prima infanzia. Il presente studio qualitativo ha coinvolto insegnanti della scuola dell'infanzia operanti in Italia e in Inghilterra, con l'obiettivo di esplorare il tema attraverso interviste semi-strutturate e di formulare una definizione di feedback tra pari centrata sulla voce degli insegnanti e sull'idea del bambino come soggetto attivo e competente. I risultati evidenziano che il feedback tra pari è raramente riconosciuto come strumento educativo intenzionale, pur essendo presente nelle interazioni quotidiane in classe. Gli insegnanti lo interpretano principalmente come supporto e aiuto reciproco, sottolineando la dimensione relazionale più che quella valutativa. Sulla base di una definizione co-costruita con gli insegnanti, lo studio propone una concezione di feedback tra pari che supera la sola promozione dell'apprendimento, configurandosi anche come strumento per favorire la partecipazione democratica e tutelare i diritti dei bambini.

Peer feedback is recognised as a tool to promote learning but remains underexplored in the 0-6 age group. Existing definitions in the literature are often generic and fail to reflect the specificities of this age range or the needs of teachers. Investigating teachers' knowledge and practices is therefore essential, both to fill informational gaps and to develop a shared definition suited to the early childhood context. The present qualitative study involved preschool teachers working in Italy and in England, with the aim of exploring the topic through semi-structured interviews and of formulating a definition of peer feedback centred on teachers' voices and on the view of the child as an active and competent subject. The findings indicate that peer feedback is rarely recognised as an intentional educational tool, despite being present in everyday classroom interactions. Teachers primarily interpret it as a form of support and mutual assistance, emphasising relational rather than evaluative aspects. Based on a definition co-constructed with teachers, the study proposes a conception of peer feedback that goes beyond merely promoting learning, also serving as a means to foster democratic participation and safeguard children's rights.

Parole chiave: feedback fra pari, prospettive degli insegnanti, infanzia, definizione concettuale

¹ Credit author statement: *Conceptualization* (E. Restiglian); *Methodology* (E. Restiglian); *Investigation* (P. Zoroaster); *Formal analysis* (P. Zoroaster); *Data Curation* (P. Zoroaster); *Writing – original draft* (P. Zoroaster); *Writing – review & editing* (E. Restiglian); *Supervision* (E. Restiglian); *Project administration* (E. Restiglian).

Keywords: peer feedback, teacher voice, early childhood, conceptual definition

1. Introduction

Over time, the literature has proposed various definitions of feedback and peer feedback, each influenced by its underlying theoretical framework. The choice of a definition depends on the research goals and context, but it is useful to clarify the term to ensure conceptual consistency.

The term *feedback*, initially referred to as *retroaction*, originated with Black, who introduced the principle of negative feedback in the field of applied electronics in the 1920s², and with the mathematician Wiener, who formalised the concept of retroaction in his treatise *The Human Use of Human Beings*³.

Building on these early formulations, the idea of feedback began to spread beyond the engineering field, becoming a central element in communication with the model proposed by Shannon and Weaver⁴, and in psychology thanks to the contributions of scholars such as Thorndike⁵, Bloom⁶, and Skinner⁷. In particular, although Thorndike did not explicitly use the term *feedback*, he demonstrated through his law of effect that the outcome of an action can influence future behaviour. Later, Bloom demonstrated the impact of feedback on the learning process, emphasising how regular information provided to students supports and promotes their development. Skinner integrated the concept of feedback into his theory of operant conditioning, interpreting it as an essential mechanism for reinforcement and learning.

Thus, historically, the concept of feedback evolved from engineering to psychology and pedagogy, becoming central to learning processes.

Among the first to discuss feedback in the educational context was Ramaprasad, who defined it as information about the gap between the

² H. S. Black, *Stabilized feed-back amplifiers*, in “Electrical Engineering”, 53, 1934, pp. 114-120.

³ N. Wiener, *The human use of human beings: Cybernetics and society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989.

⁴ C. E. Shannon, W. Weaver, *The mathematical theory of communication*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1949.

⁵ E. L. Thorndike, *The law of effect*, in “The American Journal of Psychology”, 39, 1927, pp. 212-222.

⁶ B. S. Bloom, *Learning for mastery*, in “Evaluation Comment”, 1, 1968, pp. 1-12.

⁷ B. F. Skinner, *Science and human behavior*, New York, Macmillan, 1953.

actual level and the reference level of a system parameter⁸, which becomes feedback only if it is used to reduce that gap. Following Ramaprasad, other authors have conceptualised the term *feedback* in education, approaching it from different perspectives. While Ramaprasad focused on the effect that such information can have on learning, other scholars concentrated on its content, that is, the information provided to the student and the type of feedback most conducive to supporting learning⁹.

According to Hattie and Timperley, feedback consists of “information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding”¹⁰. For feedback to be effective, it must be clear, specific, meaningful, and it must answer three questions: *Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?* The authors also identify four levels of feedback: task, process, self-regulation, and self. Task-level feedback provides information about the quality of performance on a specific task. Process-level feedback focuses on the strategies used to complete the task. Self-regulation feedback concerns the learner’s ability to monitor and control their own learning. Finally, self-level feedback refers to praise or comments directed at the person, which are widely used by teachers in educational settings but, according to the authors, are not particularly effective.

In the educational context, Butler¹¹ emphasizes that feedback is more about *comments* aimed at improving the task than about grades. This interpretation is also linked to Nicol¹², who defines feedback as a tool capable of actively engaging students in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. In particular, through the concept of *internal feedback*, Nicol emphasises that students’ learning can be enhanced by drawing on their ability to generate continuous feedback through comparison with various types of external information, such as books, videos, or peers.

⁸ A. Ramaprasad, *On the definition of feedback*, in “Behavioral Science”, 28, 1983, pp. 4-13.

⁹ J. Hattie, H. Timperley, *The power of feedback*, in “Review of Educational Research”, 77, 2007, pp. 81-112.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 81.

¹¹ R. Butler, *Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: The effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and performance*, in “British Journal of Educational Psychology”, 58, 1988, pp. 1-14.

¹² D. Nicol, *The power of internal feedback: Exploiting natural comparator processes*, in “Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education”, 46, 2020, pp. 756-778.

From a similar perspective, Henderson et alii define feedback as a process to which students attribute meaning in order to enhance their learning¹³. According to Bevilacqua, the definition proposed by Henderson et alii emphasises the value of feedback, considering it no longer as an event limited to the transmission of information, but as a process that does not necessarily involve only teachers, but may also include peers or the learners themselves¹⁴. Winstone and Winstone argue that feedback should not be understood as the mere completion of a task, but rather as a meaningful process whose potential enables students to learn and to generate new meanings¹⁵.

Finally, Grion et alii, building on Nicol's ideas, argue that internal feedback originates from "the comparisons that students make between the task they are performing and information from different types of sources, such as books, videos, peers' work, online research, dialogue with teachers and peers, and, more generally, input from the surrounding context, including the set of social and material interactions that have shaped, or continue to shape, the student's knowledge"¹⁶. Their view fits within a broader theoretical framework that recognises learning as a process influenced by relationships and the surrounding environment. Peer interactions generate reciprocal influence, which becomes an opportunity for personal growth. Current research supports the positive effects of peer feedback on students' motivation and performance¹⁷. In this context, feedback, particularly peer feedback, becomes crucial both for supporting learning and as a strategy for continuous self-assessment¹⁸. Peer feedback also plays an essential role in fos-

¹³ M. Henderson et alii, *Designing feedback for impact*, in M. Henderson et alii (a cura di), *The impact of feedback in higher education*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 267–285.

¹⁴ A. Bevilacqua, *Il feedback a scuola. Processi, pratiche e prospettive educative*, Roma, Carocci, 2023.

¹⁵ See D. Winstone, N. Winstone, in A. Bevilacqua, *Il feedback a scuola. Processi, pratiche e prospettive educative*, Roma, Carocci, 2023.

¹⁶ V. Grion et alii, *Ripensare il concetto di feedback: il ruolo della comparazione nei processi di valutazione per l'apprendimento*, in "Education Sciences & Society", 2, 2021, p. 209.

¹⁷ K. J. Topping, *Peer assessment*, in "Theory into Practice", 48, 2009, pp. 20–27; A. Chiappe et alii, *Open assessment of learning: A meta-synthesis*, in "The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning", 17, 2016, pp. 44–61.

¹⁸ D. R. Sadler, *Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems*, in "Instructional Science", 18, 1989, pp. 119–144.

tering students' feedback literacy, that is, the ability to recognise, analyse, and use the feedback they receive to improve their learning¹⁹. However, a student's capacity to produce and receive feedback is influenced by their identity, their past feedback experiences, and the quality of their interpersonal relationships²⁰.

If this interpretation, which aligns with a socio-constructivist perspective, is accepted, then the classroom can be considered the privileged setting for feedback, as it allows daily interactions between teachers and peers. In this regard, Hattie asserts that several studies identify feedback as one of the ten most powerful and effective teaching practices for promoting and ensuring student learning in schools²¹. In this perspective, feedback and peer feedback cannot be regarded merely as spontaneous interactions, but as educational practices that acquire meaning within the teaching-learning process aligned with a formative and participatory view of assessment²². From a pedagogical standpoint, their value lies in the teacher's intentional mediation, which creates the conditions for such exchanges to emerge.

Historically, however, feedback was seen as unidirectional information provided by the teacher to bridge the gap between current and expected performance²³. Over time, this approach has shifted: students are no longer passive recipients but active participants in their learning, capable of developing self-reflective and transversal skills within a life-long learning framework.

This contribution fits within this landscape of definitional plurality, focusing on peer feedback in early childhood education, where studies are still limited²⁴. The aim is to develop a definition of feedback suitable

¹⁹ D. Carless, D. Boud, *The development of student feedback literacy*, in "Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education", 43, 2018, pp. 1315-1325.

²⁰ S. Chen, J. H. Nieminen, *Towards an ecological understanding of student emotions in feedback*, in "Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education", 49, 2024, pp. 693-710; T. Little et alii, *What does it take to provide effective peer feedback?*, in "Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education", 50, 2025, pp. 775-786.

²¹ J. Hattie, *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*, London, Routledge, 2012.

²² C. Corsini, *La valutazione che educa. Liberare insegnamento e apprendimento dalla tirannia del voto*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2023.

²³ D. R. Sadler, *Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems*, in "Instructional Science", 18, 1989, pp. 119-144.

²⁴ P. Zoroaster, E. Restiglian, *Peer feedback in childhood: A systematic review*, in "Italian Journal of Educational Research", 35, 2025, pp. 78-89.

for the early childhood context, oriented toward viewing the child as an active and competent learner²⁵.

For this reason, within a research project that includes among its aims the observation of peer feedback and its categorisation into different types, we chose to deepen the concept of peer feedback by involving several preschool teachers.

The choice to involve teachers reflects the *teacher voice* perspective, which views teachers as active and reflective “researchers” capable of contributing to the construction of new meanings and knowledge²⁶. This approach, emphasizing the relationship between researcher and teacher, highlights the teacher’s role as an agent of educational innovation, able to bridge theory and practice.

2. Method

This qualitative study was developed from the idea that the definitions of feedback found in the literature often employ terminology that is too specific or are primarily oriented toward older age groups.

Starting from the aim of the research, which sought to co-construct a definition of feedback together with preschool teachers, one that could be used both by the teachers themselves and by researchers working with this age group, the following research questions were formulated:

- RQ.1 What representations of peer feedback do preschool teachers hold?
- RQ.2 How can teachers’ representations contribute to the formulation of a shared definition of peer feedback?
- RQ.3 What is teachers’ perception of the training they have received on peer feedback, and which training approaches do they consider most effective for further developing their understanding of it?

²⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, New York, United Nations, 1989.

²⁶ D. Iliško et alii, *Teachers as researchers: Bringing teachers’ voice to the educational landscape*, in “Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability”, 12, 2010, pp. 51-65.

S. Zepeda et alii, *Leading school culture through teacher voice and agency*, London, Routledge, 2022.

A. K. Döring et alii, *Giving voice to educators*, in “European Journal of Psychology of Education”, 39, 2024, pp. 3607-3631.

2.1 Data Collection

The methodological choices guiding data collection were multiple. First, the use of semi-structured interviews addressed the need to co-construct a definition of peer feedback suitable for an educational context²⁷. Semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate for socio-pedagogical content, which rarely emerges in rigid or overly open formats that can hinder data interpretation.

The semi-structured interview was considered a strategy to facilitate the co-creation of meaning between interviewer and interviewee and as a useful tool for building a body of knowledge based on the lived experiences of participants²⁸. In qualitative semi-structured interviews, the interviewee is regarded as “a participant in the creation of meaning”²⁹. Accordingly, in the present study, the term *interlocutor* was adopted to refer to the person participating in the interview, emphasising the dimensions of cooperation, uniqueness, and dialogue inherent in the process. Furthermore, the definition of *responsive interviewing* as proposed by the same authors frames the interview as a dynamic process³⁰.

The guiding questions, common to all interviews, provided a general framework to explore, but the course of the interview was adapted according to individual differences. In this way, the interview could take the form of an empathetic and non-judgmental conversation, reducing the risk of generating anxiety or stress that might cause the interlocutor to withdraw.

Another methodological decision concerned the research sample, which was drawn from preschool teachers already participating in an ongoing research project. The selection was determined by the resources available at the time of the study. This convenience sample facilitated the recruitment of volunteers, allowing consent to be obtained more easily and enabling the interviews to be conducted primarily face-to-face³¹.

²⁷ L. Cohen, L. Manion, K. Morrison, *Research methods in education*, London, Routledge, 2018.

²⁸ B. Diccio-Bloom, B. F. Crabtree, *The qualitative research interview*, in “Medical Education”, 40, 2006, pp. 314–321.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 314.

³⁰ H. J. Rubin, I. S. Rubin, *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2005.

³¹ G. Benvenuto, *Stili e metodi della ricerca educativa*, Roma, Carocci, 2015.

The research involved five preschools: four in the Veneto region of Italy and one in Essex County, England. Specifically, the five preschools are located in: one in the province of Vicenza, one in the province of Venice, two in the province of Padova, and one in Thaxted, England.

The preference for conducting interviews in person, considered more empathetic and constructive than remote connections, significantly influenced sample selection, particularly in the case of the English preschool, given the researcher's limited stay abroad. Only two interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom.

In total, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted (seven with Italian preschool teachers and four with English preschool teachers) between December 2024 and June 2025. Each interlocutor was provided with and asked to sign a consent form for the processing of personal data, accompanied by a project introduction letter detailing the research objectives, interview recording procedures, and data dissemination. All data were anonymised during analysis to ensure participant privacy.

Interview timing, location, and duration, approximately 20 minutes on average, were agreed upon with each interlocutor. The research project, including semi-structured interviews, was approved by the Departmental Ethics Committee of the University of Padova.

The interview setting was arranged to avoid interruptions or distractions that could affect the process, with nearly all interviews conducted within the preschool facilities. Throughout the interviews, the researcher aimed to demonstrate empathy, a positive attitude, and active listening³².

The interview was structured in two sections: an introductory part to collect basic personal information about the interlocutors, and a second part focused on exploring the topic under study. The general questions posed by the interviewer explored several areas, including the tools used to support children's learning, the definition of feedback, concrete examples of feedback use in the classroom, the advantages and limitations of feedback in this age group, and training received on the topic.

Table 1 provides a schematic overview of the first section, detailing the characteristics of the interlocutors.

³² S. Mantovani (a cura di), *La ricerca sul campo in educazione. I metodi qualitativi*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 1998.

2.2 Data Analysis

The first step in coding the eleven interviews was transcription using an automatic digital tool. Once this step was completed, all interviews were anonymised by removing the names of people or places mentioned by the interlocutors during the recordings, thereby ensuring their anonymity. Interviews conducted in English were also translated into Italian to facilitate the coding. Overall, a corpus of 21,800 words was obtained.

Content analysis was performed using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti, following an inductive, bottom-up approach³³. Before beginning the coding process, the researcher read all the collected data multiple times, and segments of text deemed relevant to the research were selected for analysis. Each text segment was coded using codes and categories, from which the reference codebook was subsequently developed³⁴. If a text segment was related to multiple codes, it was coded under all relevant codes. Two researchers conducted the analysis, and some codes were merged after agreement (for example, “return” was combined with “rebound”).

This process led to the identification of 85 codes and 13 groups across 165 quotations.

Table 2 below presents the thematic and content analysis, along with the frequency observed for each identified code.

3. Results

The following section presents the data obtained from the eleven interviews conducted. In addition to addressing the research questions, further reflections that emerged during the interviews are also highlighted.

All eleven interlocutors selected for the interviews have been working in the educational field for at least ten years and are currently employed in preschool settings (ten as teachers and one as a coordinator).

³³ M. Vaismoradi, H. Turunen, T. Bondas, *Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study*, in “Nursing and Health Sciences”, 15, 2013, pp. 398–405.

B. G. Glaser, A. L. Strauss, *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago, Aldine, 1967.

³⁴ A. Strauss, J. Corbin, *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1998.

Most of the interlocutors have a pedagogical background, while two hold degrees in psychology. Three of the eleven participants have worked in education for more than 40 years.

3.1 RQ.1 What representations of peer feedback do preschool teachers hold?

To address the first research question, interlocutors were initially asked which tools they used in children's learning. The eleven teachers listed a variety of tools employed in educational work: listening to children (n = 3 occurrences), constant communication (n = 1 occurrence), use of different types of materials (n = 3 occurrences), observation (n = 4 occurrences), arrangement of the setting (n = 2 occurrences), books (n = 2 occurrences), documentation (n = 1 occurrence), music (n = 1 occurrence), workshops (n = 1 occurrence), grouping children heterogeneously (n = 1 occurrence), worksheets (n = 1 occurrence), free play (n = 1 occurrence), collaboration with the teaching team (n = 1 occurrence), and interaction with families (n = 1 occurrence). Finally, one interlocutor considered the child themselves as a valuable resource (n = 1 occurrence).

An interesting aspect of the responses was that almost all interlocutors (90.9%) did not mention feedback. Only in one case was it recognised and considered as a tool used daily in the classroom with children.

Subsequently, teachers were asked what they perceived as the advantages and limitations of peer feedback when working with children aged 3-6 years. Most interlocutors (72.7%) initially emphasised the positive value of feedback at any age, considering that there were no significant limitations. However, some potential limitations emerged during the interviews.

Among the identified advantages, feedback at this age was noted to serve as support for peers (n = 4 occurrences), as emotional support (n = 1 occurrence), as an opportunity for comparison (n = 3 occurrences) or as catalyst for change (n = 1 occurrence). Also, it can be delivered through effective communication between children (n = 6 occurrences) and greater honesty (n = 2 occurrences).

Regarding limitations, three main areas were identified: linguistic-cognitive, emotional, and cultural.

According to the interlocutors, language at this age may still be unclear. Teachers reported potential limitations such as negative formulation (n = 1 occurrence), incoherent construction (n = 1 occurrence), and

limited knowledge of concepts ($n = 5$ occurrences) on the part of the children. Furthermore, other teachers highlighted the emotional sphere, a central and decisive aspect in this stage of development, noting that children's age ($n = 4$ occurrences), limited emotional development ($n = 2$ occurrences), embarrassment ($n = 2$ occurrences), and sensitivity ($n = 2$ occurrences) may significantly affect both the production and reception of feedback. Finally, an Italian teacher emphasised the intercultural aspect, observing that classrooms often include children from diverse cultural backgrounds, which can create communication difficulties among children and consequently affect the understanding of feedback.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate, in percentage terms, the advantages and limitations of peer feedback among children aged 3-6 years, as identified by the interlocutors.

3.2 RQ.2 How can teachers' representations contribute to the formulation of a shared definition of peer feedback?

Regarding the second research question, which aimed to explore teachers' representations of peer feedback in order to co-construct a shared definition with them, data analysis allowed for an in-depth understanding of their perspectives. Some interlocutors consider peer feedback to be a valuable resource that, when used among children, facilitates communication, comparison, and change. Others, however, believe that due to children's limited knowledge, feedback may not be used or applied correctly, making adult intervention necessary.

At this age, friendships and peer relationships are highly significant. Being among peers provides children with opportunities to support one another. However, it is important to model supportive behaviors, as they may not know how to do so independently. (P1)

Older or more capable children can serve as models and provide feedback to their peers, making learning more attainable. If someone just above you is doing something that you, as a human being, can also do, then you can reach it. ... All adults can stand on one leg, and all adults can jump over the puddle, and that seems unattainable to children. But when they see someone in their peer group, even slightly older, they have hope. So when they receive support and feedback from those children, everything seems more achievable. (P2)

Based on these responses, during the interview, interlocutors were asked what, in their opinion, could constitute an acceptable definition of peer feedback suitable for representing preschool-aged children.

To understand how their interpretations contributed to the construction of a definition of peer feedback, some of their statements are presented below.

It is a moment of growth for them; there is a positive back-and-forth. It is the ability to listen to one another. (P3)

It is commenting on what another person has done. I would say it probably involves looking at a situation or an activity, observing what the other person is doing, processing what they do, and then telling them whether you think they did the right thing (P1)

It is a bounce between what comes from one child and reaches another, and depending on how the other responds, it bounces back to the child who started this dynamic. (P4) [As adults], we can refrain from intervening and count to 60, and in 90% of cases, when the teacher does not intervene, the child self-regulates and finds the way. Peer feedback is precisely leaving space for this adjustment between them, because, in my opinion, many times we intervene too early and do not allow feedback among them. Instead, by counting a bit and waiting a bit, they spontaneously correct themselves. They find the right path, retrace the steps, maybe go back, then return to the process and self-correct and help themselves. (P5)

It is a kind of tool to help us reflect. [...] Reflect on your personal practice, on what you are doing and on what others are doing. (P6)

Feedback is also given during the activity 'no,' stopping sometimes and indicating how things are proceeding. (P5)

In summary, from the analysis of the collected data, it can be stated that the teachers involved in the project, based on their knowledge, practices, and professional competencies, considered peer feedback as: a tool for reflection (n = 2 occurrences), a comment (n = 2 occurrences), constructive advice (n = 1 occurrence), an evaluation (n = 2 occurrences), a learning tool (n = 1 occurrence), an assessment tool (n = 1 occurrence), a bounce (n = 2 occurrences), an insight (n = 1 occurrence), a space for adjustment (n = 2 occurrences), and the ability to listen to each other (n = 1 occurrence).

All the collected material led to the development of a shared definition between the researcher and the teachers, capable of capturing the essence of the studied age group while valuing the preschool educational context. The definition places the child at the centre as an active and competent subject, capable of reflecting, processing information, and expressing opinions. According to this definition, within peer relationships, the child is safeguarded in their right to be heard and understood. From this perspective, peer feedback is not only a tool to promote learning but also a means to foster democratic participation and uphold

children's rights³⁵. The definition presented below was developed using terminology that is accessible to education professionals and applicable to real school contexts.

Peer feedback in early childhood (ages 3-5/6) is a spontaneous and dynamic exchange process between children that allows assessment and development of individual and collective knowledge. It is a "rebound" between you and me, a lively interaction in which children listen to, compare with, and regulate each other. In this exchange, children support each other in "doing the right thing," helping one another understand how to improve, correct, or explore new paths. It is a reciprocal, spontaneous, and continuous adjustment that fosters growth, reflection, and autonomy. Peer feedback is also a valuable assessment tool because it helps reflect on and support the learning process, valuing each child's contribution and perspective. It can manifest as a response that one child receives from another: it may be intentional or spontaneous, have a direct purpose or not, and may also include emotional aspects. Every gesture, word, or expression can become a signal, an insight that guides, reassures, stimulates, and encourages reflection among children. Peer feedback is a versatile and multifunctional educational resource.

In addition to defining peer feedback, the interlocutors also provided concrete examples of situations in which they observed feedback exchange among children. Spaces such as the library, the psychomotor room, the symbolic play corner, and the graphic-painting play corner were identified by the interlocutors as privileged environments for observing and promoting peer feedback. Furthermore, laboratory activities and free play were considered particularly suitable for facilitating moments of exchange, cooperation, and mutual assistance among children.

Finally, some reflections emerged regarding the characteristics of peer feedback, highlighting the role of nonverbal communication.

The importance of observing this form of communication was emphasised, as it is particularly significant and frequently used among pre-school-aged children.

³⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, New York, United Nations, 1989.

3.3 RQ.3: What is teachers' perception of the training they have received on peer feedback, and which training approaches do they consider most effective for further developing their understanding of it?

A final theme that emerged from the interviews concerns the training received regarding peer feedback. In light of current literature and the limited research on feedback practices in early childhood, the question of training was raised (ages 0-6) (Zoroaster & Restiglian, 2025).

The aim was to verify whether participants had attended university courses that explicitly addressed this topic or had participated in training offered by private organisations and associations.

The majority of interlocutors reported negative responses. Only in two cases did participants indicate that they had received training on the topic: one through a university program and the other through training related to laboratory-based activities. In the latter case, however, the interlocutor stated that the term “feedback” was never explicitly used during the course but was only implied.

Conversely, six participants reported that they had not received any training on this topic. Finally, three teachers did not provide a clear response to the question. In summary, these results provide an answer to RQ3, showing that training on peer feedback, as perceived by teachers, is insufficient.

Discussions with the interlocutors also highlighted some indications regarding the most suitable and effective modes of delivering training for teachers. Among these, the most frequently mentioned were laboratory-based methods ($n = 2$ occurrences) and peer sharing following participation in training programs ($n = 2$ occurrences).

Finally, one teacher emphasised the value of a closer relationship between universities and schools, noting that greater collaboration through projects and initiatives on these topics would be useful and enriching for both the educational and academic communities.

4. *Discussion*

The present study explored early childhood teachers' knowledge of peer feedback, highlighting its advantages, limitations, and the possibility of formulating a definition suited to the preschool context. Although the topic of feedback is widely addressed in the literature, studies

specifically focusing on the 0–6 age group remain limited³⁶. Existing research mainly concentrates on secondary school and higher education, emphasising the role of feedback as a tool to support learning by promoting self-reflection and self-assessment³⁷.

The teachers interviewed reported that they had not received adequate training on this topic during their educational preparation, with the exception of experiences related to university research projects. No significant differences were observed between the training experiences of Italian and English teachers; in both cases, the training received was considered insufficient. Inadequate preparation of preschool teachers can considerably affect children's ability to give and receive feedback, as well as their opportunity to develop cooperative and democratic learning environments that promote active participation. Without proper training, teachers might fail to value exchanges between children, substituting themselves in various situations and thereby discouraging autonomy and social learning. To foster autonomy and social learning, it is therefore necessary to provide teachers with direct experiences of peer feedback, as well as initial and ongoing training opportunities, both during their teaching placements and throughout their professional careers.

Another interesting aspect was exploring teachers' representations of what constitutes feedback. While the literature primarily links feedback to an evaluative dimension, in this study, only one interlocutor identified feedback as a form of evaluation. More commonly, terms such as comparison, bounce, adjustment, and advice emerged, which, from an educational perspective, seem more suitable for the preschool context. This difference between literature and practice underscores the need for further investigation of feedback in preschool, emphasising relational and cooperative aspects rather than solely evaluation.

The fact that peer feedback was not spontaneously mentioned at the beginning of the interviews suggests that it is not a common tool in

³⁶ P. Zoroaster, E. Restiglian, *Peer feedback in childhood: A systematic review*, in "Italian Journal of Educational Research", 35, 2025, pp. 78–89.

³⁷ M. Castoldi, *Valutare a scuola: dagli apprendimenti alla valutazione di sistema*, Roma, Carocci, 2012;

G. Benvenuto, *Mettere i voti a scuola: introduzione alla docimologia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013;

V. Grion, A. Serbati (a cura di), *Valutare l'apprendimento o valutare per l'apprendimento?*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2018.

everyday practice, unlike worksheets, which are still widely used despite the pedagogical limitations highlighted in the literature.

Finally, despite some statements from the interviews, such as “feedback is any response a person receives about an action they are performing,” “it may not have a direct purpose,” or “we find it everywhere”, being partially correct, it was essential to develop a clear and simple definition, making intentional and precise terminological choices. The definition was constructed considering the words of the teachers and the advantages and limitations they highlighted, ensuring it was specific to early childhood, as well as aligning with the educational context and developmental characteristics of children. At the same time, this definition aims to promote democratic participation in respect of children’s rights³⁸.

Developing a definition of peer feedback represents a first step toward establishing training guidelines for preschool teachers. It also paves the way for future research to explore how peer feedback occurs in daily practice, its characteristics, and the most effective teaching strategies to support its production and reception among children aged 3–6 years.

In light of the findings, peer feedback can be understood not only as a spontaneous relational practice, but as a pedagogical device that acquires meaning within the educational relationship specific to the school context. The value of feedback also depends on teachers’ ability to recognise it, support it, and intentionally guide it within teaching and learning processes. In this sense, feedback represents a central element of pedagogical action.

5. Conclusions

With our study, in addition to highlighting preschool teachers’ representations of the concept of peer feedback and contributing to the scientific literature with a specific definition of peer feedback suitable for early childhood; we also brought attention to an issue that has been scarcely addressed in current literature.

Our analysis revealed that, although feedback is recognised as an effective learning tool, many teachers receive little specific training and apply it with limited awareness, risking substituting themselves for the

³⁸ J. Dewey, *Democracy and education*, New York, The Free Press, 1916; United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, New York, United Nations, 1989.

children in their interactions. It is therefore essential that teachers can actively experience feedback throughout the educational process.

Investment in training is needed not only in relation to feedback but also regarding classroom practices and observational strategies. The relationship between a teacher's observational competence and the use of feedback is considered essential for this age group. Being able to observe rather than merely look ensures professional competence; however, observation requires time and resources, which are not always available in the school context. Interviews revealed reflections on the difficulty teachers face in dedicating energy and time to observation due to the many aspects they must manage daily. As one teacher reported: "In reality, we are always so busy. I think sometimes it is difficult to take time for things like this" (P6).

This research represents a preliminary study and opens the way to future avenues of investigation and in-depth exploration of feedback in early childhood. In this sense, the semi-structured interview proved to be a fundamental tool, as it allowed us to learn from and with the interlocutors.

We thank the preschool teachers for their participation in this study, which was essential for developing a definition of peer feedback suitable for the specific characteristics of the 3-6 age group. We are aware that each word carries a precise meaning, and different choices could have led to a different definition. Since words and language contribute to creating meanings and new culture, we considered it important to elaborate a definition that values the child dimension, still underexplored in relation to this topic, and is practically usable in the school context without appearing too technical or sterile to teachers.

Finally, our research has prompted reflection on the importance of the school-university relationship, suggesting that structured collaboration would allow teachers to access updated knowledge and develop a more informed reflection on daily educational practices. At the same time, involving preschools would provide the academic world with the opportunity to engage with the practical setting, enriching research with observations and needs directly expressed by professionals in the field.

References

- Bevilacqua A., *Il feedback a scuola. Processi, pratiche e prospettive educative*, Roma, Carocci, 2023
- Benvenuto G., *Mettere i voti a scuola: introduzione alla docimologia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013

- Idem, *Stili e metodi della ricerca educativa*, Roma, Carocci, 2015
- Black H. S., Stabilized feed-back amplifiers, in “*Electrical Engineering*”, 53, 1934, pp. 114-120
- Bloom B. S., Learning for mastery, in “*Evaluation Comment*”, 1, 1968, pp. 1-12
- Butler R., Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: The effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and performance, in “*British Journal of Educational Psychology*”, 58, 1988, pp. 1-14
- Carless D., Boud D., *The development of student feedback literacy*, in “*Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*”, 43, 2018, pp. 1315-1325
- Chen S., Nieminen J. H., *Towards an ecological understanding of student emotions in feedback*, in “*Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*”, 49, 2024, pp. 693-710
- Chiappe A. et alii, *Open assessment of learning: A meta-synthesis*, in “*The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*”, 17, 2016, pp. 44-61
- Cohen L., Manion L., Morrison K., *Research methods in education*, London, Routledge, 2018
- Corsini C., Mettere i voti a scuola: una pratica da rivedere?, in G. Benvenuto (a cura di), *Mettere i voti a scuola. Introduzione alla docimologia*, Roma, Carocci, 2013.
- Idem, *La valutazione che educa. Liberare insegnamento e apprendimento dalla tirannia del voto*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2023
- Dewey J., *Democracy and education*, New York, The Free Press, 1916
- Dicicco-Bloom B., Crabtree B. F., *The qualitative research interview*, in “*Medical Education*”, 40, 2006, pp. 314-321
- Döring A. K. et alii, *Giving voice to educators*, in “*European Journal of Psychology of Education*”, 39, 2024, pp. 3607-3631
- Glaser B. G., Strauss A. L., *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*, Chicago, Aldine, 1967
- Grion V. et alii, *Ripensare il concetto di feedback: il ruolo della comparazione nei processi di valutazione per l'apprendimento*, in “*Education Sciences & Society*”, 2, 2021, pp. 205-220
- Grion V., Serbati A. (a cura di), *Valutare l'apprendimento o valutare per l'apprendimento?*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2018
- Hattie J., *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*, London, Routledge, 2012
- Hattie J., Timperley H., *The power of feedback*, in “*Review of Educational Research*”, 77, 2007, pp. 81-112
- Henderson M. et alii, *Designing feedback for impact*, in M. Henderson et alii (a cura di), *The impact of feedback in higher education*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, pp. 267-285
- Iliško D. et alii, *Teachers as researchers: Bringing teachers' voice to the educational landscape*, in “*Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*”, 12, 2010, pp. 51-65
- Little T. et alii, *What does it take to provide effective peer feedback?*, in “*Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*”, 50, 2025, pp. 775-786
- Mantovani S. (a cura di), *La ricerca sul campo in educazione. I metodi qualitativi*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 1998

79 – *Teacher voice on peer feedback in early childhood:
towards a shared definition*

Nicol D., *Unlocking generative feedback via peer reviewing*, in V. Grion, A. Serbati (a cura di), *Assessment of learning or assessment for learning?*, Lecce, Pensa MultiMedia, 2018, pp. 73-85

Idem, *The power of internal feedback: Exploiting natural comparator processes*, in "Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education", 46, 2020, pp. 756-778

Nigris E., Balconi B., Zecca L., *Dalla progettazione alla valutazione didattica*, Milano, Pearson, 2019

Ramaprasad A., On the definition of feedback, in "Behavioral Science", 28, 1983, pp. 4-13

Rubin H. J., Rubin I. S., *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2005

Sadler D. R., Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems, in "Instructional Science", 18, 1989, pp. 119-144

Shannon C. E., Weaver W., *The mathematical theory of communication*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1949

Skinner B. F., *Science and human behavior*, New York, Macmillan, 1953

Strauss A., Corbin J., *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1998

Thorndike E. L., *The law of effect*, in "The American Journal of Psychology", 39, 1927, pp. 212-222

Topping K. J., *Peer assessment*, in "Theory into Practice", 48, 2009, pp. 20-27

United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, New York, United Nations, 1989

Vaismoradi M., Turunen H., Bondas T., *Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study*, in "Nursing and Health Sciences", 15, 2013, pp. 398-405

Wiener N., *The human use of human beings: Cybernetics and society*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989

Zepeda S. et alii, *Leading school culture through teacher voice and agency*, London, Routledge, 2022

Zoroaster P., Restiglian E., *Peer feedback in childhood: A systematic review*, in "Italian Journal of Educational Research", 35, 2025, pp. 78-89

Figure 1. *Advantages of peer feedback*

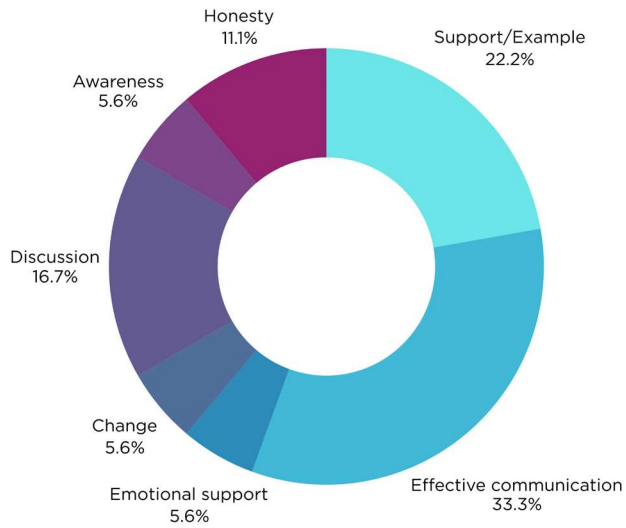
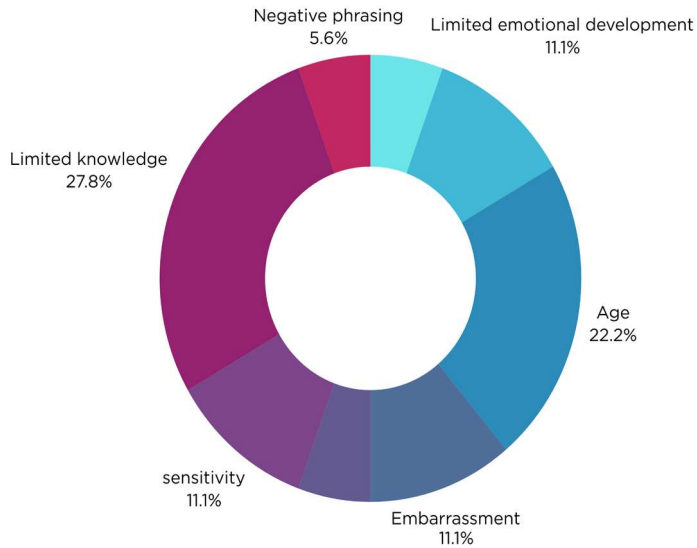


Figure 2. *Limitations of peer feedback*



81 – *Teacher voice on peer feedback in early childhood:
towards a shared definition*

Table 1. *Profile of the interlocutors*

Educational Qualification	Current Role	Past Roles	Years of Professional Experience in Education	Preschool's geographical context	Preschool type
Bachelor of Education	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$0 \leq x \leq 10$ anni	English	Private
Bachelor of Education	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$10 \leq x \leq 20$ anni	English	Private
Bachelor of Education	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$0 \leq x \leq 10$ anni	English	Private
Bachelor of Education	Coordinator	Preschool teacher	$0 \leq x \leq 10$ anni	English	Private
Secondary School Diploma in Education	Teacher	Primary school teacher / Collaborator at the documentation center / School coordinator	> 40	Italian	Public
Bachelor's Degree in Technical and Psychological Sciences	Teacher	Collaborator in a law firm / Primary school teacher	$30 \leq x \leq 40$ anni	Italian	Public
Integrated Master's Degree in Primary Education	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$10 \leq x \leq 20$ anni	Italian	Public
Bachelor's Degree in Psychology	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$20 \leq x \leq 30$ anni	Italian	Public
Secondary School Diploma in Education	Teacher	Preschool teacher	$0 \leq x \leq 10$ anni	Italian	Public
Master's Degree in Theory and Methodology of E-Learning and Media Education	Teacher	Collaborator of the school principal / Digital technician / Tutor for the course degree in Primary Education	> 40	Italian	Public
Master's Degree in Educational Sciences	Teacher	Primary school teacher / Digital technician	> 40	Italian	Public

Table 2. *Thematic and content analysis - part 1*

Category	Description	Code	Frequency	Percentage of the selected sample
Training	Current educational qualification	High school diploma	2	18.2%
		Bachelor's degree	9	81.8 %
		Master's degree	2	18.2%
		Single-cycle master's degree	1	9.1%
		Master's program / Training course	6	54.6 %
Role	Current role	Preschool teacher	10	90.9 %
		Coordinator	1	9.1%
Experience	Previous work experience	Tutor	1	9.1%
		Teacher	8	72.7%
		School administrator assistant	1	9.1%
		School representative	1	9.1%
		Digital technician	2	18.2%
		Collaboration with documentation centers	1	9.1%
		Primary school teacher	1	9.1%
		Law firm collaborator	1	9.1%
Educational tools	Tools/practices used by participants to support learning	Feedback	1	9.1%
		Listening	3	27.3%
		Communication	1	9.1%
		Materials	3	27.3%
		Observation	4	36.4%
		Preschool worksheets	1	9.1%
		Setting	2	18.2%
		Books	2	18.2%
		Documentation	1	9.1%
		Music	1	9.1%
		Lab activity	1	9.1%
		Heterogeneous groups	1	9.1%
		Themselves (the children)	1	9.1%
		Digital platform	2	18.2%
		Free play	1	9.1%
		Team debriefing	1	9.1%
		Meeting with parents	1	9.1%
Definition of feedback	Definition of feedback for teachers	Comment	2	18.2%
		Constructive advice	1	9.1%
		Assessment	2	18.2%
		Reflection tool	2	18.2%
		Learning tool	1	9.1%
		Assessment tool	1	9.1%
		Rebounce	2	18.2%
		Illumination	1	9.1%
		Adjustment space	2	18.2%
Examples of feedback	Examples of how/when teachers observe feedback	Ability to listen to oneself	1	9.1%
		Library	1	9.1%
		Psychomotricity	1	9.1%
		Autonomous play	1	9.1%

*83 – Teacher voice on peer feedback in early childhood:
towards a shared definition*

Table 2. *Thematic and content analysis - part 2*

		Graphic-pictorial play	1	9.1%
		Symbolic play	1	9.1%
		Workshop activity	1	9.1%
Advantages of peer feedback	Advantages of peer feedback according to teachers	Support / Example	4	36.4%
		Effective communication	6	54.6 %
		Emotional support	1	9.1%
		Change	1	9.1%
		Discussion	3	27.3%
		Awareness	1	9.1%
		Honesty	2	18.2%
Limitations of peer feedback	Limitations of peer feedback according to teachers	Unclear construction	1	9.1%
		Limited emotional development	2	18.2%
		Age	4	36.4%
		Embarrassment	2	18.2%
		Native language	1	9.1%
		Sensitivity	2	18.2%
		Limited knowledge	5	45.5%
Characteristics of feedback	Characteristics of feedback according to teachers	Negative formulation	1	9.1%
		Feedback type	1	9.1%
		Negative feedback	2	18.2%
		Peer feedback	1	9.1%
Training on feedback	Training received or not received on feedback	Non-verbal feedback	1	9.1%
		Training received	2	18.2%
Ideas for training on feedback (for teachers)	Suggested methods for delivering training on feedback	Training not received	6	54.6 %
		University partnership program	1	9.1%
		Workshops	2	18.2%
		Collaboration with families	1	9.1%
Reflections	Additional reflections emerged during the interview	Colleague exchange	2	18.2%
		Body language	1	9.1%
		Time	4	36.4%
		Observational habits	4	36.4%
		School report-back	1	9.1%
		Language	3	27.3%
		Collaboration with university	4	36.4%
		Self-reflection	2	18.2%
		Praise	2	18.2%
		Updates	1	9.1%
Background of participants	Participants' background: Italy / England	Discussion with colleagues	2	18.2%
		IT (Italy)	7	63.6%
		UK (United Kingdom)	4	36.4%

