

Feedback Literacy as a Dimension of Teacher Professional Development: Exploring in Service Teachers' Capacity to Seek, Interpret, and Use Feedback

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Abstract: Feedback literacy has emerged as a significant construct in higher education research, yet its application to in service teachers' professional learning remains underexplored. This study investigates how practising secondary teachers seek, interpret, and use feedback within their everyday professional contexts, and how these capacities contribute to their professional growth. Drawing on interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), semi structured interviews were conducted with 12 in service secondary teachers (3–10 years' experience) across three phases: narrative elicitation, critical incident reflection, and longitudinal follow up. Analysis yielded three superordinate themes: (1) "making feedback actionable" – describing the interpretive work required to translate evaluative comments into pedagogical adjustments; (2) "relational conditions for seeking feedback" – highlighting trust, vulnerability and collegial safety as prerequisites for proactive feedback engagement; and (3) "feedback as reflective fuel" – revealing how feedback loops sustain or disrupt teachers' professional noticing and self directed improvement. Findings extend Carless and Boud's (2018) feedback literacy framework from student to teacher professional contexts, proposing that teacher feedback literacy comprises four intersecting capacities: evaluative discernment, relational positioning, temporal integration, and self regulatory agency. The study contributes to professional development literature by demonstrating that feedback literacy is not merely a skill to be taught, but a relational and dispositional capacity that develops through sustained opportunities for dialogic engagement with multiple feedback sources. Implications for continuing professional development design include structured feedback dialogue protocols, peer observation with interpretive scaffolding, and institutional cultures that normalise feedback seeking as professional practice rather than deficit remediation.

Keywords: Feedback literacy; teacher professional development; interpretive phenomenological analysis; feedback seeking; professional noticing.

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INTRODUCTION

Feedback has long been recognised as a cornerstone of professional learning. For teachers, feedback arrives through multiple channels: supervisory observations, peer coaching conversations, student evaluation surveys, informal collegial discussions, and increasingly,

performance management systems. Yet a persistent paradox characterises feedback in teacher professional development: substantial feedback is generated, but much of it fails to translate into meaningful pedagogical change (Van der Baan et al., 2025; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This disjuncture between feedback provision and professional uptake has prompted researchers to examine not only what feedback is given, but what capacities enable professionals to receive, interpret and act upon feedback constructively.

The construct of feedback literacy, originally developed within higher education assessment research, offers a promising lens for examining this problem. Carless and Boud (2018, p. 1316) defined student feedback literacy as “the understandings, capacities and dispositions needed to make sense of information and use it to enhance work or learning strategies”. In their formulation, feedback literacy comprises four interrelated components: appreciating feedback as an active process, making judgements about feedback quality, managing affect in response to feedback, and taking action informed by feedback. Subsequent work has extended this framework to teachers, conceptualising teacher feedback literacy as the capacity to “plan, design and manage feedback processes so that students can benefit from feedback effectively” (Carless & Winstone, 2020, p. 2). Boud and Dawson (2023) further operationalised this construct through an empirically derived competency framework encompassing 19 teacher behaviours, grouped into dimensions of design, relational practice, and evaluative judgement.

Despite these advances, the literature on teacher feedback literacy remains predominantly oriented towards teachers as providers of feedback to students, rather than teachers as recipients of feedback within their own professional learning. This is a significant gap. Teachers, like all professionals, develop through engagement with feedback from mentors, peers, institutional evaluations, and self monitoring practices. Yet we know remarkably little about how teachers learn to seek, interpret and use feedback intentionally for their own growth (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025). As Xu and Carless (2017, p. 1317) noted, “the role of teachers in feedback processes is complex and multifaceted,” encompassing not only feedback provision but also “the construction of environments that make feedback processes productive for learners”. What remains undertheorised is the parallel process through which teachers construct for themselves environments that make feedback processes productive for their own professional learning.

This gap is particularly consequential in light of contemporary shifts in teacher professional development. Increasing emphasis is placed on self regulated, sustained professional learning rather than episodic, event based training (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025; Görtzen et al., 2025). Feedback literacy – the capacity to actively engage with performance information – may be a crucial but largely invisible dimension of teachers’ self directed professional growth. Without such literacy, feedback from lesson observations, student surveys, or peer coaching may remain inert data; with it, feedback becomes a generative resource for reflective practice and pedagogical refinement.

This study addresses this gap by investigating how in service secondary teachers seek, interpret, and use feedback within their everyday professional contexts. Drawing on interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), which privileges participants’ lived experiences and meaning making processes (Smith et al., 2022), the research explores several specific questions. First, it examines how in service teachers experience and make meaning of feedback received from multiple sources, including supervisors, peers, students, and self evaluation. Second, it investigates what capacities, dispositions and contextual conditions enable or constrain teachers’ active engagement with feedback for professional learning. Third, it considers how feedback literacy manifests in teachers’ professional noticing and pedagogical adjustment over time. By addressing these questions, the study aims to extend feedback literacy theory into the domain of teacher professional development, offering empirical grounding for a reconceptualised framework of teacher feedback literacy that foregrounds teachers’ capacities as feedback recipients and seekers alongside their established roles as feedback providers.

The feedback literacy construct emerged from persistent concerns about assessment feedback's limited impact on student learning. Despite substantial institutional investment in feedback provision, students frequently reported not understanding, not using, or not even reading the feedback they received (Winstone et al., 2017). Carless and Boud's (2018) seminal framing shifted attention from feedback delivery to feedback uptake, positioning students as active agents rather than passive recipients. Their four component model comprises appreciating feedback, which involves recognising feedback as an ongoing, dialogic process requiring student participation rather than a one way transmission, and making judgements, which entails developing the capacity to discern the quality and relevance of feedback across multiple sources. Additionally, the model includes managing affect by regulating emotional responses to evaluative information, whether positive or negative, and taking action through translating feedback into concrete revisions to work or learning strategies.

Subsequent elaborations have expanded this model. Molloy, Boud and Henderson (2020) introduced the concept of "feedback literacy as a shared responsibility", emphasising that productive feedback requires capabilities on both provider and receiver sides. Carless (2022) further articulated how feedback literacy "activates the learner role" in feedback processes, moving beyond passive receipt to proactive engagement. Within teacher education, these ideas have been adapted to conceptualise how teachers design and manage feedback for student learning. Carless and Winstone (2020) proposed three dimensions of teacher feedback literacy: designing feedback processes that cultivate student self regulation, enacting feedback interactions that support student uptake, and managing the relational and emotional dimensions of feedback encounters. Boud and Dawson's (2023) Teacher Feedback Literacy Competency Framework elaborated these dimensions into 19 specific competencies, including designing opportunities for students to generate feedback, modelling effective feedback practices, and creating conditions for students to seek and use feedback.

What is less developed in this literature is attention to teachers' capacities as feedback recipients within their own professional learning. This oversight is noteworthy because teachers inhabit a dual feedback role: they are simultaneously feedback providers to students and feedback recipients from supervisors, peers, students and systemic evaluation systems. The capacities that enable constructive response to feedback in one role may not automatically transfer to the other.

Recent studies have begun to address this gap. Afrilyasanti et al. (2025) examined how feedback exchange among five novice Indonesian teachers fostered self regulated learning and professional growth, finding that peer and instructor feedback shaped both cognitive and emotional dimensions of teacher development. Their study highlighted the need for a sustainable feedback culture that empowers educators, enhances reflective practice, and supports collaborative professional development. Similarly, Canaran, Bayram and Elmas (2023) found that in service language teachers were largely unfamiliar with feedback literacy and perceived themselves as partially effective feedback providers, suggesting limited metacognitive awareness of feedback processes even among experienced practitioners.

To, Tan and Lim (2023) explored how a professional development programme fostered teacher feedback literacy in a Singapore secondary school. Their collaborative action research revealed that the interweaving of experimentation and multiple reflection opportunities was crucial to nurturing teacher feedback literacy. Critically, teachers' development encompassed not only technical feedback skills but also relational capacities, including capabilities to soothe students during peer feedback production and tackle pragmatic constraints. This finding resonates with broader literature on teacher professional noticing (van Es & Sherin, 2021), which emphasises that effective feedback use requires interpreting classroom events in light of pedagogical principles – a cognitive capacity that develops through structured reflective practice.

The capacity to notice professionally relevant information – to “attend to particular events in the classroom, interpret them based on knowledge of teaching and learning, and respond appropriately” (van Es & Sherin, 2021, p. 3) – is increasingly recognised as central to teacher development. Feedback plays a dual role in this process: feedback from others can direct teachers’ attention to previously unnoticed aspects of their practice, while self generated feedback through reflective noticing constitutes a primary mechanism for professional learning.

Entwistle and Rees Davies (2025) examined how cognitive coaching enhanced teachers’ reflective noticing, finding that coaching fosters optimism, reflective growth, and improved teaching practices. Their IPA study of eight secondary teachers identified that non evaluative coaching observations and validation of new methods contributed significantly to increased teacher confidence and self directed improvement. Importantly, participants reported that feedback was most generative when it was dialogic rather than directive – when coaches asked questions that prompted teachers’ own noticing rather than merely prescribing corrections.

Similarly, van Der Baan et al. (2025) investigated how teachers use student evaluation feedback to inform continuing professional development. Their focus groups with 24 higher education teachers revealed that feedback from student evaluations informs teachers’ CPD especially through informal learning, particularly through dialogues with different stakeholders, such as students, peers and colleagues, and their supervisor. Judging feedback quality depended on various factors, such as the experience and role of the teacher, the seniority of students, and whether the feedback was repeated. This finding underscores that feedback interpretation is not a neutral cognitive process but is shaped by teachers’ professional identity, relational positioning, and accumulated experiential knowledge.

A growing body of literature conceptualises professional learning not as passive reception but as active feedback seeking behaviour. Ashford and Cummings’ (1983) organisational psychology model distinguished two feedback seeking strategies: monitoring (indirectly observing the environment for feedback cues) and inquiry (directly asking others for feedback). Applied to teaching contexts, these strategies suggest that feedback literate teachers actively seek out information about their practice, rather than waiting for scheduled evaluations.

This proactive orientation has significant implications for teacher professional development (TPD). Afrilyasanti et al. (2025) observed that novice teachers who actively sought feedback from peers demonstrated accelerated professional growth compared to those who awaited supervisory feedback. However, feedback seeking entails vulnerability and risk: teachers may fear negative evaluation, reputational damage, or confirmation of perceived inadequacies. Accordingly, institutional cultures that normalise feedback seeking as professional practice – rather than deficit remediation – are crucial for enabling teacher feedback literacy development (Görtzen et al., 2025).

Scholarly interest in feedback literacy remains high across Scopus indexed journals, with the field showing consistent growth in publications examining both teacher and student dimensions (R Discovery, 2025). However, empirical studies focusing specifically on in service teachers’ feedback literacy as recipients of professional feedback remain sparse. Table 1 summarises key empirical studies in this emerging area from 2021–2026.

Table 1. Feedback Literacy Studies in Teacher Education (2021–2026)

Study	Context	Participants	Focus	Key Findings
Afrilyasanti et al. (2025)	Indonesian secondary	5 novice in-service teachers	Feedback exchange and SRL	Feedback fosters both cognitive and emotional dimensions of growth; need for sustainable feedback

Study	Context	Participants	Focus	Key Findings
Boud & Dawson (2023)	Multinational higher education	43 experienced educators	Teacher feedback literacy competencies	culture 19-competency framework across design, relational and evaluative dimensions
Canaran et al. (2023)	Turkish K-12	17 English language teachers	Online feedback literacy training	Teachers unfamiliar with feedback literacy; perceived themselves as partially effective providers
Entwistle & Rees-Davies (2025)	Welsh secondary	8 teachers	Cognitive coaching and self-efficacy	Coaching enhances reflective noticing; dialogic feedback most generative
To, Tan & Lim (2023)	Singapore secondary	School-based teachers	PD programme for feedback literacy	Interweaving experimentation with reflection crucial; relational capacities develop alongside technical skills
van Der Baan et al. (2025)	Dutch higher education	24 teachers	Student evaluation feedback for CPD	SET informs CPD primarily through informal dialogue; judgement depends on experience, role, source credibility
Görtzen et al. (2025)	Dutch secondary	23 teachers	Process-oriented feedback literacy	Four teacher groups identified (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced, Constrained); tailoring of PD essential

Synthesis of this literature reveals a consistent pattern: existing studies focus predominantly on teachers' feedback provision to students, or on feedback giving processes within teacher education programmes. Studies examining how teachers actively seek, interpret and use feedback for their own professional learning are considerably fewer. Moreover, existing research tends to treat feedback literacy as a relatively stable set of skills, overlooking the dynamic, contextual, and affect laden nature of teachers' actual feedback engagement.

The present study addresses these gaps by investigating in service teachers' lived experiences of feedback across multiple sources and over time. By attending to teachers' meaning making processes, the research extends feedback literacy theory beyond its current emphasis on higher education assessment contexts into the domain of school based teacher professional learning. Specifically, the study theorises teacher feedback literacy not merely as provision competencies but as a multidimensional capacity encompassing evaluative discernment, relational positioning, temporal integration, and

self regulatory agency – capacities that develop through sustained dialogic engagement with feedback in authentic professional contexts.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022). IPA is particularly suited to investigating how individuals make sense of significant lived experiences, such as receiving and responding to feedback within professional practice. The methodology is idiographic, committed to detailed examination of each participant's unique perspective before cross case analysis; it is also double hermeneutic, acknowledging that researchers interpret participants' interpretations of their experiences. For a study examining teachers' subjective experiences of feedback – an inherently interpretative process involving emotion, judgement, identity and action – IPA offers epistemological and analytical congruence.

3.2 Participant Recruitment and Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who could provide rich, detailed accounts of feedback experiences within professional contexts. Inclusion criteria were: (a) current in service secondary school teacher (any subject area); (b) between three and ten years of teaching experience (to capture teachers beyond early induction but not yet at late career plateau); (c) active engagement with formal feedback processes (lesson observations, performance reviews, peer coaching) within the past 12 months; and (d) willingness to participate in three interview sessions across a 10 week period.

Recruitment occurred through professional networks and teacher social media groups in a metropolitan Australian context. Of 22 expressions of interest, 12 met inclusion criteria and completed all three interview phases. The final sample comprised 12 participants (9 female, 3 male), with teaching experience ranging from three to nine years (mean = 5.8 years). Subject areas included English (n = 4), mathematics (n = 3), science (n = 3), humanities (n = 1), and languages (n = 1). Four participants worked in government schools, five in Catholic schools, and three in independent schools. All names used in reporting are pseudonyms.

This sample size aligns with IPA conventions, which prioritise depth over breadth; Smith et al. (2022) recommend samples of 6–15 participants for doctoral and professional research, as larger samples risk losing the idiographic commitment central to IPA.

Data Collection

Data were generated through three phase semi structured interviews conducted at intervals informed by the research questions and IPA's iterative design.

Phase 1: Narrative elicitation (60–90 minutes). The first interview employed a narrative approach, inviting participants to tell the story of their most significant feedback experience in the past year. Prompts included: "Can you describe a time when you received feedback that really made a difference to your teaching – or a time when feedback didn't seem helpful at all?" and "Tell me about a typical feedback conversation with your supervisor or a peer." This phase established rapport and captured spontaneous, unprompted accounts.

Phase 2: Critical incident reflection (45–60 minutes). The second interview focused on a specific feedback episode participants had identified as professionally consequential. Using a critical incident technique (Butterfield et al., 2005), participants were asked to describe the incident in concrete detail and then respond to probes addressing: (a) what they noticed in the feedback; (b) how they judged its credibility and relevance; (c) what emotions arose and how these were managed; and (d) what actions, if any, resulted. This phase also included exploration of participants' typical feedback seeking behaviours and perceptions of organisational feedback culture.

Phase 3: Longitudinal follow up (30–45 minutes). Conducted approximately six weeks after Phase 2, the third interview revisited themes from previous sessions and invited participants to reflect on any changes they had noticed in their feedback engagement following the previous interviews. This phase also elicited participants' broader reflections on feedback literacy as a professional capacity.

All interviews were conducted via secure videoconference (due to geographical dispersion of participants), audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were returned to participants for member checking, with minor clarifications made in three cases.

Analytical Procedure

Analysis followed the six stage IPA procedure outlined by Smith et al. (2022),

Stage 1: Reading and re reading. Each transcript was read multiple times before annotation, to develop holistic familiarity with each participant's account.

Stage 2: Initial noting. Exploratory comments were made on three levels: descriptive (what the participant described), linguistic (use of metaphor, repetition, hedges, emphasis), and conceptual (connections to theoretical constructs, emergent puzzles).

Stage 3: Developing emergent themes. Initial notes were transformed into emergent theme statements that captured essential qualities of each passage while remaining grounded in participants' language. This stage involved oscillation between particular details and the whole account.

Stage 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes. Themes from Stage 3 were clustered according to patterns of convergence, divergence, and superordination. Abstraction (identifying patterns across related themes), subsumption (identifying a higher order theme that subsumes lower level ones), and polarisation (identifying oppositional themes) were used to map theme relationships.

Stage 5: Moving to the next case. Each case was analysed in its own right before cross case analysis, preserving idiographic integrity. Cases were analysed in the order of interview completion, with bracketing notes on emergent expectations carried forward.

Stage 6: Looking for patterns across cases. Cross case analysis identified shared themes while attending to particularity. Superordinate themes were established when present in at least 8 of 12 cases with rich experiential texture.

Throughout analysis, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal documenting analytical decisions, personal reactions, and potential biases. Peer debriefing occurred at two points with a qualitative research colleague familiar with IPA but not involved in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the researchers' institutional Human Research Ethics Committee. Participants received plain language statements and signed consent forms prior to each interview phase. Given the potential sensitivity of discussing evaluative feedback, participants were reminded they could decline to answer any question or withdraw without consequence. Debriefing resources (professional counselling contacts) were provided. Data were de identified and stored on encrypted university servers accessible only to the research team.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis yielded three superordinate themes, each with constituent sub-themes. Table 2 presents the theme structure with illustrative participant excerpts.

Table 2. Superordinate Themes and Sub-themes with Participant Excerpts

Superordinate Theme	Sub-themes	Exemplar Excerpt (pseudonym)
1. Making feedback actionable	1.1 Translating evaluative language into pedagogical	"They said 'improve your questioning techniques' but that could mean anything. I had to work out

Superordinate Theme	Sub-themes	Exemplar Excerpt (pseudonym)
2. Relational conditions for seeking feedback	specificity	for myself what that actually looked like in my classroom.” (Sarah, 5 years, English)
	1.2 Distinguishing signal from noise	“You get so much feedback – from the principal, from students, from your own videos. Learning what to actually attend to... that’s the skill, isn’t it?” (Michael, 7 years, Mathematics)
	1.3 Relating feedback to existing professional knowledge	“Sometimes I get feedback and I think – I already know that. But then I ask myself, well, if I know it, why aren’t I doing it?” (Priya, 4 years, Science)
	2.1 Trust as prerequisite for authentic engagement	“I don’t ask for feedback from someone if I don’t trust how they’ll give it. I need to know it won’t be used against me.” (James, 6 years, Humanities)
	2.2 Vulnerability and professional identity	“Asking for feedback feels like admitting you don’t know what you’re doing. Especially when you’re supposed to be the expert in the room.” (Emma, 8 years, English)
	2.3 Feedback-seeking as learned practice	“I’ve had to teach myself to ask, not just wait. But I still have colleagues who never ask. They just wait for the annual review.” (Thomas, 9 years, Mathematics)
3. Feedback as reflective fuel	3.1 Prompting professional noticing	“A student once said ‘you talk too fast when you’re excited’ – and after that, I started noticing my pacing. I’d never thought about it before that.” (Lisa, 3 years, Science)
	3.2 Sustaining or disrupting improvement cycles	“Sometimes feedback just stops. You get the report, it’s ‘satisfactory’, and that’s it. No follow-up, no conversation. That’s not professional development, that’s just... checking a box.” (Robert, 5 years, Languages)
	3.3 Self-generated feedback through reflective noticing	“I’ve started recording myself. That’s been more useful than any observation – because I can see what I actually do, not what I think I do.” (Michelle, 7 years, English)

Theme 1: Making Feedback Actionable

The first superordinate theme concerned the interpretive work participants undertook to transform feedback into usable professional knowledge. A consistent finding was that even well-intentioned feedback often arrived in forms that resisted straightforward application.

Translating evaluative language into pedagogical specificity. Participants repeatedly described receiving feedback that was “vague” (Sarah), “broad” (James) or “not specific enough to act on” (Priya). Sarah, an English teacher with five years’ experience, recounted being told to “improve your questioning techniques” in a lesson observation: “That could mean anything – open questions, closed questions, wait time, follow-ups. I had to work out for myself what that actually looked like in my classroom” (Sarah). This translation work – moving from evaluative judgement to pedagogical refinement – emerged as a non-trivial cognitive capacity. Participants who were more successful at this translation tended to engage in what Michael described as “mental rehearsal”: imagining how a suggested change would actually play out in their specific classroom context.

Distinguishing signal from noise. As Michael noted, “You get so much feedback – from the principal, from students, from your own videos. Learning what to actually attend to... that’s the skill, isn’t it?” Multiple participants described feedback overload as a genuine

impediment to professional learning. Rather than feeling supported by multiple feedback streams, some experienced confusion about which feedback to prioritise. Emma captured this tension: “If everyone tells me different things, I just end up doing nothing because I don’t know which direction to go.” This finding suggests that feedback literacy includes not only capacities for *receiving* feedback but also *selective attention* – the ability to filter, prioritise and sequence multiple feedback inputs.

Relating feedback to existing professional knowledge. A third sub-theme concerned the relationship between incoming feedback and teachers’ existing pedagogical frameworks. Priya’s observation – “Sometimes I get feedback and I think – I already know that. But then I ask myself, well, if I know it, why aren’t I doing it?” – illustrates the gap between declarative knowledge (“I know this pedagogical principle”) and enacted practice (“I’m not consistently doing it”). Participants who productively engaged this gap used feedback not as novel information but as an external prompt to interrogate their own implementation consistency.

Theme 2: Relational Conditions for Seeking Feedback

The second superordinate theme addressed the interpersonal and institutional conditions that enabled or constrained teachers’ active feedback-seeking. Across all 12 cases, participants described feedback-seeking as emotionally and relationally complex.

Trust as prerequisite for authentic engagement. James’s statement – “I don’t ask for feedback from someone if I don’t trust how they’ll give it. I need to know it won’t be used against me” – reflected a near-universal sentiment. Trust operated on two levels: trust in the feedback *giver* (competence, benevolence, integrity) and trust in the feedback *system* (confidentiality, consequences, developmental purpose). Participants who described highly trusting relationships with supervisors or peers reported seeking feedback more frequently and more candidly. Conversely, where trust was absent, teachers described withholding requests, self-censoring in feedback conversations, or treating mandatory feedback processes as performative compliance.

Vulnerability and professional identity. Emma’s comment – “Asking for feedback feels like admitting you don’t know what you’re doing. Especially when you’re supposed to be the expert in the room” – highlights the identity-threatening dimension of feedback-seeking. Several participants, particularly those in early-mid career (years 3–6), described a tension between professional identity as “competent practitioner” and the vulnerability inherent in seeking improvement-oriented feedback. This tension was less pronounced for teachers who had experienced supportive mentoring relationships earlier in their careers, suggesting that feedback literacy development may be shaped by early professional socialisation.

Feedback-seeking as learned practice. Thomas’s observation – “I’ve had to teach myself to ask, not just wait” – points to feedback-seeking as a disposition that can be deliberately cultivated. However, this learning was rarely formal. Participants described learning to seek feedback through trial and error, observing peers who modelled active feedback-seeking, or in a few cases through professional reading. No participant reported receiving explicit instruction in feedback-seeking during initial teacher education or formal professional development. This suggests a significant gap in current provision: feedback literacy is expected but not taught.

Theme 3: Feedback as Reflective Fuel

The third superordinate theme concerned the role of feedback in catalysing and sustaining teachers’ professional noticing – the capacity to attend to, interpret and respond to classroom events in learning-oriented ways.

Prompting professional noticing. Lisa’s experience – “A student once said ‘you talk too fast when you’re excited’ – and after that, I started noticing my pacing. I’d never thought about it before that” – illustrates how feedback from unexpected sources (here, a student comment) can redirect attention to previously unnoticed aspects of practice. This

“noticing shift” (cf. Liu, 2025) was repeatedly described by participants as a pivotal moment in their professional learning. Critically, the feedback itself did not need to be elaborate or technical to be impactful; it simply needed to be *noticeable* within the flow of practice.

Sustaining or disrupting improvement cycles. Robert’s frustration – “Sometimes feedback just stops. You get the report, it’s ‘satisfactory’, and that’s it. No follow-up, no conversation” – identifies a structural feature of many feedback systems: they are episodic rather than iterative. Participants who experienced continuous, dialogic feedback – multiple touchpoints around a focal improvement area – described sustained professional growth. Those whose feedback arrived as isolated events described what Robert called “feedback drop-off”: initial engagement followed by dissipation as other priorities intervened. This finding has implications for the *temporal* dimension of feedback literacy: the capacity to maintain improvement focus across time, connecting feedback from multiple episodes into a coherent developmental narrative.

Self-generated feedback through reflective noticing. Michelle’s practice – “I’ve started recording myself. That’s been more useful than any observation – because I can see what I actually do, not what I think I do” – represents an advanced form of feedback literacy: the capacity to generate one’s own feedback through intentional reflective practices. Several participants described using video self-analysis, student work analysis, or systematic journaling as sources of self-generated feedback. Notably, these practices were self-initiated rather than institutionally mandated, suggesting that feedback literacy may manifest most fully when teachers take ownership of their own learning evidence.

Developmental Pathway Model

Integrating the three themes reveals an emergent developmental pathway.

Stage 1: Passive receipt – Teacher receives scheduled feedback (observation, review) without active seeking; limited interpretation; feedback often remains unenacted.

Stage 2: Evaluative processing – Teacher begins to judge feedback quality and relevance; distinguishes useful from less useful feedback; may seek clarification.

Stage 3: Relational seeking – Teacher actively requests feedback from trusted sources; initiates feedback conversations; manages vulnerability and affect.

Stage 4: Self-generated noticing – Teacher develops capacity to notice own practice without external prompt; uses tools (video, journals) for self-feedback.

Stage 5: Integrated practice – Feedback becomes routine, dialogic, and iterative across multiple sources; teacher maintains improvement focus across time.

Movement through these stages is not linear or unidirectional. Participants described regressions (e.g., after negative feedback experiences), plateaus (e.g., when organisational feedback processes became perfunctory), and accelerations (e.g., when placed in trusting collegial relationships). The model suggests that feedback literacy development for teachers is best understood not as skill acquisition but as *relational-cognitive maturation* within supportive professional ecologies.

Extending Feedback Literacy Theory to Teacher Professional Contexts

This study contributes to feedback literacy theory by extending the construct from its origins in student assessment to the domain of teacher professional learning. Carless and Boud’s (2018) original framework – appreciating feedback, making judgements, managing affect, and taking action – was developed to explain how students productively engage with feedback on their academic work. The present findings suggest that while these four dimensions remain relevant for teachers as feedback recipients, they require substantial re specification.

First, appreciating feedback in teacher professional contexts entails not only recognising feedback’s value but also navigating multiple, sometimes competing, feedback sources (supervisors, peers, students, self). As Michael observed, “You get so much feedback... learning what to actually attend to... that’s the skill.” Teacher feedback literacy

thus includes a selective attention capacity that Carless and Boud's original model did not foreground.

Second, making judgements about feedback quality in teaching contexts is complicated by the interpretive gap between evaluative language and pedagogical specificity. Sarah's experience of being told to "improve your questioning techniques" without concrete guidance represents a common phenomenon in teacher evaluation systems. Feedback literate teachers in this study developed translational competence – the capacity to infer pedagogical implications from generalised evaluative statements. This capacity draws on professional knowledge, practical wisdom, and the willingness to interrogate one's own practice against external suggestions.

Third, managing affect in response to feedback intersected powerfully with professional identity. Emma's confession that "asking for feedback feels like admitting you don't know what you're doing" reveals that feedback in teaching contexts is not neutral information but identity relevant evaluation. This finding aligns with research on teacher vulnerability (Lasky, 2005) and suggests that teacher feedback literacy development must attend to identity work alongside cognitive skill development.

Fourth, taking action from feedback was mediated by the temporal structure of professional learning opportunities. Participants whose feedback was isolated and unsustained experienced "feedback drop off"; those in iterative, dialogic feedback relationships sustained improvement focus across time. This temporal dimension – the capacity to integrate feedback across episodes – is not explicit in Carless and Boud's student focused model, but emerged as centrally important in teacher professional contexts.

Towards a Re specified Framework: Four Capacities of Teacher Feedback Literacy

On the basis of these findings, I propose a re specified framework for understanding teacher feedback literacy as a dimension of professional development. Teacher feedback literacy comprises four intersecting capacities:

1. Evaluative discernment. The capacity to judge the quality, credibility and relevance of feedback from multiple sources; to distinguish useful from less useful feedback; and to prioritise among competing feedback inputs. This capacity extends Carless and Boud's "making judgements" dimension by emphasising the multiplicity of feedback sources in teaching and the cognitive work of selecting, filtering and sequencing.

2. Relational positioning. The capacity to navigate the interpersonal and institutional conditions that enable feedback seeking; to manage vulnerability and identity threat; to build and maintain trusting relationships with feedback givers; and to pursue feedback proactively despite emotional discomfort. This capacity extends "managing affect" by recognising that affect in feedback is not merely individual but relational – shaped by trust, power, and professional culture.

3. Temporal integration. The capacity to sustain improvement focus across time; to connect feedback from multiple episodes into a coherent developmental narrative; to maintain momentum when feedback is absent or episodic; and to resist the dissipation of learning that occurs when feedback is isolated. This capacity was not present in Carless and Boud's original model but emerged as essential for sustained professional growth.

4. Self regulatory agency. The capacity to generate one's own feedback through intentional reflective practices (video analysis, student work study, systematic noticing); to set professional learning goals based on self generated feedback; and to take ownership of one's professional learning evidence. This capacity represents the most advanced expression of feedback literacy in the developmental pathway model (Figure 2) and aligns with prior work on self regulated learning in professional development (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025).

Implications for Continuing Professional Development Design

These findings have practical implications for the design of teacher professional development. Structured feedback dialogue. The study suggests that feedback literacy develops not through didactic instruction but through sustained dialogic engagement with feedback. Professional development programmes should therefore allocate time for structured feedback conversations – not simply more feedback delivery, but deliberate opportunities for teachers to interpret, question and negotiate feedback meaning. Peer observation protocols that include pre observation goal setting, focused observation, and dialogic post observation conversation (Entwistle & Rees Davies, 2025) provide one model.

Scaffolding the translation work. Given the interpretive gap between evaluative feedback and pedagogical action, professional development should explicitly scaffold teachers' translation work. This might involve: (a) modelling how to ask clarifying questions ("When you said X, what would that look like in practice?"); (b) providing structured frameworks for linking feedback to specific classroom strategies; and (c) collaborative planning sessions where teachers translate feedback into concrete action plans.

Normalising feedback seeking as professional practice. Institutional cultures that treat feedback seeking as routine professional practice – rather than deficit remediation – are essential for enabling the relational conditions identified in Theme 2. Leaders can normalise feedback seeking by: (a) modelling active seeking themselves; (b) making feedback processes transparent and low stakes; (c) separating feedback for development from feedback for accountability; and (d) explicitly valuing teachers who seek feedback as professionally mature rather than as inadequate.

Building feedback literacy into initial teacher education. The finding that no participant received explicit instruction in feedback literacy suggests a significant gap in current provision. Teacher education programmes should incorporate explicit attention to feedback literacy as a professional capacity – not only how to give feedback to students, but how to seek, interpret and use feedback for one's own growth.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The sample comprised secondary teachers in one Australian metropolitan region; findings may not generalise to primary, early childhood, or non Western contexts where feedback cultures differ. The cross sectional design captured participants' retrospective accounts; longitudinal research following teachers across multiple feedback cycles would strengthen causal inferences about developmental pathways. Self selection bias is possible – teachers who consented to participate may differ systematically from those who did not in their engagement with feedback. Finally, while IPA is suited to exploring lived experience, it does not claim generalisability; future research might test the proposed framework through larger scale quantitative or mixed methods designs.

Future research directions include: (a) examining how teacher feedback literacy develops across the career span, from pre service through to experienced leadership; (b) investigating how organisational feedback culture shapes individual feedback literacy development; (c) exploring feedback literacy in non Western cultural contexts where feedback norms may differ; and (d) designing and testing professional development interventions specifically targeting the four capacities of evaluative discernment, relational positioning, temporal integration, and self regulatory agency.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how in service secondary teachers seek, interpret, and use feedback within their everyday professional contexts, and how these capacities contribute to their professional growth through feedback literacy. Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, we heard teachers articulate the interpretive work required to

translate evaluative feedback into pedagogical action; the relational conditions – trust, vulnerability, collegial safety – that enable or constrain active feedback seeking; and the pivotal role of feedback in sustaining professional noticing and reflective cycles over time.

The findings extend Carless and Boud's (2018) feedback literacy framework into the domain of teacher professional development. We propose that teacher feedback literacy comprises four intersecting capacities – evaluative discernment, relational positioning, temporal integration, and self regulatory agency – that develop not as stable skills but as relational cognitive maturation within supportive professional ecologies. For many participants, these capacities were developed despite, rather than because of, formal professional development provision.

The implications for teacher education and continuing professional development are clear: we cannot assume that feedback literacy will emerge spontaneously from professional experience. If feedback is truly to function as a professional learning tool – and not merely an administrative artefact – then teachers need explicit, sustained, and relationally grounded opportunities to develop the capacities required to make feedback productive. This means designing professional development that does not simply deliver more feedback, but that actively cultivates teachers' evaluative discernment, supports their navigation of vulnerability in seeking feedback, sustains their improvement focus across time, and empowers their self generated reflective noticing. In an era of increasing accountability and proliferating performance data, feedback literacy is not a luxury – it is an essential dimension of teacher professional development.

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