

# The Learning Curve

## Episode 13: Intentional Feedback with Dr. Chris Pastore

[00;00;00;02 - 00;00;13;06] **Jacob Santos**

Welcome to The Learning Curve, a podcast presented by the Academic Commons.

[00;00;13;09 - 00;00;26;05] **Jacob Santos**

Your host for today's episode are myself, Jacob and Demi. Our mission is to illuminate higher education, teaching and learning through the power of shared experiences and research informed practices.

[00;00;26;07 - 00;00;56;15] **Demi Harte**

On this episode of The Learning Curve, we'll be discussing intentional feedback with Chris Pastore, Ph.D.. Stay tuned for practical strategies that will transform how you think about feedback. Shifting it from correction to true student growth. As you listen, consider how small changes in your approach can help learners reflect, improve, and feel genuinely supported. Dr. Chris Pastore is a transdisciplinary educator and faculty development leader whose work spans engineering, sustainability, and research driven classroom practice.

[00;00;56;20 - 00;01;02;18] **Demi Harte**

He is committed to helping both faculty and students learn, reflect, and thrive. Welcome, Chris.

[00;01;02;21 - 00;01;03;09] **Chris Pastore**

Thank you Demi.

[00;01;03;11 - 00;01;14;10] **Jacob Santos**

So, we just gave a little overview, of you, but can you tell us a little about yourself, your academic pursuits, and your role at Thomas Jefferson University?

[00;01;14;12 - 00;01;46;04] **Chris Pastore**

Sure. And, you know, often it depends on who I'm speaking to. Sometimes I'll introduce myself as a musician, sometimes as a miniatures gamer. But I think in this context it is, as Demis said, I teach in the Ken Bach College primarily engineering courses. I also have an administrative function in faculty development to help other colleagues. Work on their classroom experiences and improve learners experience and achievement of learning outcomes.

[00;01;46;06 - 00;01;55;26] **Chris Pastore**

And I also work on smart and healthy cities, with an emphasis on the material side of how do we get sustainable materials to help reduce our impact on the environment.

[00;01;55;27 - 00;02;04;20] **Demi Harte**

Thank you for that. Our first official question is, could you describe your teaching practice in three words?

[00;02;04;23 - 00;02;12;27] **Chris Pastore**

Well, if I'm, aspirational, I would say collaborative, authentic and researched.

[00;02;13;00 - 00;02;20;15] **Jacob Santos**

Those are excellent words. They're any of the three that you want to, dive a little further and explain a little bit for how they relate to yourself?

[00;02;20;18 - 00;02;47;13] **Chris Pastore**

I think the best learning experiences happen when the classroom is collaborative, when it's not me talking to them, but a dialogue as opposed to a monologue happening where the students are engaged in helping to identify learning outcomes and the obstacles that they have to achieving those, levels. The authentic part. I guess it's just a one word version of it's real world based.

[00;02;47;16 - 00;03;13;13] **Chris Pastore**

I like to keep everything very practical and related to real situations that the students might probably will, encounter when they leave the university and researched. I like to choose the methods, the techniques, my approaches based on published research that has been peer reviewed and try to check to see, you know, has someone else really tested this out.

[00;03;13;16 - 00;03;22;12] **Chris Pastore**

Or is it just like learning styles, this myth that has pervaded since the 1970s that people use, even though it's been thoroughly debunked 50 years ago?

[00;03;22;14 - 00;03;46;11] **Jacob Santos**

I love to hear that research is at the center of a lot of what you do. I always had a phrase and I was teaching my students. I would respect the research, plastered on my wall. You talked about the best learning experiences as being collaborative and having students be engaged and real world based. And a big factor in, the real world is feedback, receiving feedback on work that you're doing.

[00;03;46;14 - 00;04;02;18] **Jacob Santos**

And it's a very prominent element of education. Providing learners with good, actionable feedback, is essential to their learning and their growth. So a question I'd, I'd like to start with for you is how has your approach to feedback evolved over the years?

[00;04;02;20 - 00;04;29;08] **Chris Pastore**

Teaching keeps getting harder every year as I learn more about it. When I first started teaching in 1985, my feedback was mostly you did this wrong, you did this wrong, you did this wrong. I would I would highlight and red mark the mistakes. And that was the extent of it. And over time, I began to understand that this the learners got more benefit.

[00;04;29;11 - 00;04;54;15] **Chris Pastore**

If I stepped back a little bit and gave them the opportunity to find, let's say the patterns in their work instead of this thing is correct. More like, oh, you've taken the wrong steps each time on similar kinds of problems, whether that be habit, study habit, tendencies, whatever. So what I try to help in feedback is more holistic and said, this is right.

[00;04;54;15 - 00;05;25;07] **Chris Pastore**

This is wrong. Narrative. Keep in mind, I teach engineering courses, right? My students do a lot of numerical solutions, but still I try to keep narrative solutions that ask the students to reflect on the process that they use to get to their answer. And things don't always work. But with the students identifying what worked and what didn't work, and when they identify what didn't work, then I try to get the time with them to suggest alternative approaches to getting to where I would like them to be.

[00;05;25;08 - 00;05;48;13] **Demi Harte**

I think that's so important to try and find the patterns and what is happening in order for them to get better and realize what they need to change. And things are so different now with new technologies and all that type of stuff happening. So it's really important to have that process. So when you're delivering feedback, what is your preferred method?

[00;05;48;13 - 00;05;54;00] **Demi Harte**

Do you do written, verbal or digital and why? Why do you prefer that method?

[00;05;54;02 - 00;06;25;07] **Chris Pastore**

I have a lot of assessments going on one after the other. I tend to go with video feedback because it's much quicker for me to present. I can put it on Canvas and the students can access it, and they told me they like the fact that they can see it more than once if they want that feedback. Sometimes that's not sufficient because I want to be making specific reference to something they've drawn, or an equation and holding up a piece of paper to the camera while I'm talking just doesn't cut it.

[00;06;25;10 - 00;06;36;19] **Chris Pastore**

So sometimes it's written if a student really has a larger opportunity for growth, then I like to make it in person and sit down with them.

[00;06;36;22 - 00;06;50;27] **Jacob Santos**

I love that you have those levels of response really geared towards the learner and what they need in that moment, right? The difference between this can be a quick video response versus okay, they need to see something in writing or even in person.

[00;06;50;29 - 00;07;16;09] **Chris Pastore**

And here the quick video one has an added benefit that sometimes doesn't come across when a student's doing well, to just have that quick video that says, hey Jacob, you did a great job on this. I really like the way you said A-b-c, which I might not do in writing, but if I'm making the videos, I make sure everyone gets a video that can also have a very positive impact, right?

[00;07;16;09 - 00;07;43;00] **Jacob Santos**

Yeah. In this case when we say feedback doesn't necessarily just mean, oh, here's everything you did wrong, right? Feedback can be positive and it's great when you are able to give your students that positive response to what they're doing, because everyone likes to receive positive feedback. And that's a great way of helping build that community in your classroom. Do you have a typical kind of timeline you try to operate by when it comes to giving students feedback on their work?

[00;07;43;02 - 00;08;15;05] **Chris Pastore**

I have an internal goal of never taking more than one week between when an assessment is submitted and feedback is offered, and typically that would be for a larger assessment. I'm happier when I can get things done within 48 hours, because for I believe in frequent small assessments throughout the semester. And if I let them slip more than 48 hours, I'm putting myself in trouble in terms of getting things done by the end of the semester.

[00;08;15;05 - 00;08;24;04] **Chris Pastore**

And I don't want that big backlog at the end of the semester, so I force myself small assessments 48 hours, a large assessment one week.

[00;08;24;08 - 00;08;37;17] **Demi Harte**

So we're going to be shifting a little bit to, implementing feedback. And so could you tell us what strategies you use to make feedback more actionable for students?

[00;08;37;19 - 00;09;13;08] **Chris Pastore**

One of the easy ones for for a large assessment, which is usually where the students are most concerned, although trying to break them of the habit, I want them. I want them to think about every learning experience is valuable, not just the big test or whatever is the opportunity to resubmit things that they have done incorrectly. I always start this with, you can resubmit your assignment, but you must first tell me what did you do wrong and why did you do it wrong?

[00;09;13;11 - 00;09;40;11] **Chris Pastore**

Then you can give me the correct answer, and I let them know I'm going to spend more attention to their explanation of what they did wrong, because I'm trying to get that internal diagnosis from the student. I want them to go through that self-reflection process, and I've seen it happen more than once when they go, oh, I just realized when I looked at this system, I used a left handed coordinate system instead of a right handed coordinate system, whatever it might be.

[00;09;40;13 - 00;10;00;07] **Chris Pastore**

And that threw off everything. And once they recognize that that problem is gone and it doesn't come back. So allowing multiple attempts on assessments, but with this necessary self-reflection element, I think is probably the most actionable that I provide to the students.

[00;10;00;09 - 00;10;24;18] **Jacob Santos**

I love that you have that built in reflection for them, because that was something I always tried to do. If students were submitting test corrections for points back, for example, they had to include where they found that answer and why they probably got it wrong on the test the first time around that it's not just about here. You're submitting the correct, you're resubmitting, you're doing metacognitive thinking about your learning and why you got it wrong and what errors you made.

[00;10;24;21 - 00;10;27;21] **Jacob Santos**

And like you noted up times, they'll find it for themselves.

[00;10;27;21 - 00;10;49;05] **Chris Pastore**

Yes, exactly. I found one fun exercise I did that opened my eyes to this. It was probably about 20 years ago. Students were making little in-class presentations about their work, and there was always some struggle of asking the other learners to make some comments on what they've seen. Right? They just sort of sit there, wait for their turn.

[00;10;49;08 - 00;11;17;10] **Chris Pastore**

So I added an extra question. Once the student had finished their little presentation might have been a five minute presentation. I would ask them, so tell me, what was the worst thing about your presentation? I said, let's not hear it from other people, let's hear it from you. And this shocked them a little bit at first, but they started taking it seriously and their presentation started getting much better after that, just by generate.

[00;11;17;12 - 00;11;31;22] **Chris Pastore**

But to your point, I wasn't guiding them at all, right? I just left it wide open. What was the worst part of your presentation? And they would identify something. And usually it was consistent with my opinion of the worst part of the presentation, and it just led to self improvement.

[00;11;31;26 - 00;11;53;10] **Jacob Santos**

That's excellent. Yeah, I love that. And not only that a reflection on them, but the inclusion of them in that process. Now we talked about this a little bit earlier and you just mentioned your example there that what what did you do wrong in your presentation here. What was what was wrong with your presentation. How do you balance that constructive criticism with encouragement in your feedback?

[00;11;53;10 - 00;12;11;20] **Jacob Santos**

Like for example, you mentioned earlier for students that you feel they have a lot they need to work on. You'll call them for an in-person meeting for feedback. So in situations especially like those or in writing, where comments can kind of come off kind of a certain way, depending how it's read, how do you balance that?

[00;12;11;22 - 00;12;42;03] **Chris Pastore**

Well, I take the approach that every learner can achieve the learning objectives if they choose to. So that's that's my internal motivation. And I also accept that sometimes it's my fault if they're not achieving the learning outcomes. So this is why I put in the effort and put in the time with the students. I never want the students to think that I'm disappointed in them or frustrated with them for not being able to answer the questions correctly.

[00;12;42;05 - 00;12;59;10] **Chris Pastore**

Instead, I say, of course you don't know how to answer this because you never learned it before. Let's try to figure out how we can get you to learn this. And I just sit and I work with each individually when there's challenges and try to find the way to work with that student.

[00;12;59;12 - 00;13;21;23] **Demi Harte**

I think having that philosophy mentality of that, you know, every learner can achieve it and that sometimes maybe you're not you didn't do enough or, you know, what can you do to help? And, I think that's really great because sometimes that can be a little intimidating when you're in a class and you don't know what you're doing and you feel like you keep doing it wrong and you're upsetting the professor, I know I've had situations like that.

[00;13;21;26 - 00;13;34;29] **Demi Harte**

So that's really great that you think in that way. And I'm sure the students feel really comfortable with you. So I'm curious, what do you do when students don't seem to apply the feedback they've received? If you've had that situation come up?

[00;13;35;01 - 00;13;55;26] **Chris Pastore**

Well, of course, I've been teaching for a long time. As you guys pointed out at the beginning. And I even taught elsewhere before I joined Jefferson. So yes, it has happened. Sort of banging my head into the wall. Sometimes I just sit at my desk and sigh and try to figure out what might it be.

[00;13;55;29 - 00;14;33;01] **Chris Pastore**

Sometimes there are factors outside of my control, things going on in a student's life that are just putting them in a place where they can't get themselves to focus on the course. And then all I can do is just be emotionally supportive and try to suggest alternative paths forward. If a student is not taking the feedback, I will reach out to them and ask them, you know, oh, I doesn't look like you used my suggestions on this and try to hear what their reason for that is.

[00;14;33;03 - 00;14;53;10] **Chris Pastore**

I always hate to say this, but it's true. Some students are choosing to fail. Of course, and it's sad when that happens. But again, this is usually because there are external factors that are well beyond the scope of anything that happens in the classroom. But sometimes we just have to accept that. So all I can be is a shoulder to cry on in those kinds of situations.

[00;14;53;14 - 00;15;12;10] **Jacob Santos**

I like how you highlight, even though it's not, directly, related to like the feedback topic here, but the role of the educator sometimes going beyond the classroom a little bit, that is that shoulder to cry on. That was that was always something I tried to express to my students as well.

[00;15;12;10 - 00;15;34;21] **Chris Pastore**

I think we're we're all advisors, even if it's not technically our job. Yeah, I think it's I know you've taught at different levels, Jacob, but at the university, I think all of us are at some level, some kind of advisor for our students. And so, and honestly, that's one of the really nice things about Jefferson is it really feels like the students are open to that.

[00;15;34;21 - 00;15;44;07] **Chris Pastore**

I always say it's like it's a big family here with all the pros and cons of a big family, but it's a big family and you should always feel free to talk to each other.

[00;15;44;09 - 00;16;08;16] **Jacob Santos**

Sure. So on that topic, I'm like kind of big. We're all big family. Like with the good and the bad that come with it. Do you invite feedback from your students on how you're teaching? I know there's the general at the end of the semester, there's a feedback form that students will fill out. But do you ever invite feedback other time during the course, and if so, or even just at the end, how do you use that feedback?

[00;16;08;19 - 00;16;38;24] **Chris Pastore**

Yeah, I try to hit that at two levels. At the end of most classes, not all of them, but most classes. I'll use you. I know you're familiar with the Muddiest point approach. I'll ask the students to give me in one sentence or two what was the least clear part of today's class, and I'll collect them and if I see 4 or 5 students pointing to the same thing, I know that that's on me.

[00;16;38;26 - 00;17;05;00] **Chris Pastore**

And what I'll typically do is make a little video, put it online as a supplement to help clarify that thing that I didn't communicate clearly during that class session, but about halfway through the semester, I will just ask them. I'll turn the class in to just an open conversation. How are things going? What can I do better to serve your needs and I have to be open with them for a little while.

[00;17;05;00 - 00;17;25;15] **Chris Pastore**

It takes a few minutes before they're feeling free enough to actually say what's on their mind, but sometimes they'll say, you know, oh, you talked too fast, or there was too much homework or there wasn't enough homework. Sometimes you get and you can collect that kind of feedback and see where things are going, and I try to make course adjustments every semester.

[00;17;25;18 - 00;17;44;01] **Chris Pastore**

Fortunately, this is sort of an optimism for the younger faculty. There's less and less corrections I need to make as time goes on, because I've been adjusting a little bit every time, and I keep those adjustments the next time through. So those changes get a little bit simpler with time, because I've been listening for so long.

[00;17;44;02 - 00;17;45;29] **Demi Harte**

I love that use of muddiest point.

[00;17;46;06 - 00;17;59;14] **Chris Pastore**

I have this huge library of little two minute videos for all of my classes that are just always available. So when the muddiest point comes up and I say, oh, I already did that one. No need to spend two minutes making a new one.

[00;17;59;17 - 00;18;12;03] **Demi Harte**

Yeah. No, that's that's true. Yeah. Just a folder to pull from. So that's, that's great for you as well to just have that available. So how do you model a culture of feedback in your classroom?

[00;18;12;04 - 00;18;35;19] **Chris Pastore**

Hopefully it's just from communication with the students. Again, the one big concept I mentioned earlier, telling the students, you're here because you don't know this, right? So that I hope and I feel it does opens the doors for many of the students to say it's okay for me to be uncertain. So of course I'll get feedback because I don't know this yet.

[00;18;35;26 - 00;19;01;13] **Chris Pastore**

You don't know this yet. You're going to know this soon. And allowing them to redo assessments is saying here this feedback is to help improve you, not to criticize you because you can do it again. So it's only here to help you improve your achievement of learning outcomes. And I think that opens up the door to be more receptive to feedback.

[00;19;01;13 - 00;19;14;23] **Jacob Santos**

So as we come close to the end of our wonderful conversation on feedback, we've got about two questions left for you and what what I'd like to ask is, what is one piece of feedback you have received that has made a lasting impact on you?

[00;19;14;25 - 00;19;45;25] **Chris Pastore**

I received a piece of feedback that wasn't in a classroom setting. I was a young buck, second year teaching in some committee meeting, and I was full of vim and vigor, and one of my senior colleagues turned to me and said, Chris, you just trying to make this meeting last longer by arguing every side. And the room got silent and everyone turned to look at me, and I started looking inside and realized, oh my God, I am.

[00;19;45;25 - 00;20;02;01] **Chris Pastore**

I'm just arguing to argue so they can hear me, because I want them to know that I'm here, even though I'm the new kid on the block. And, that had a huge impact on me. It changed my attitude towards faculty meetings from then on for the rest of my career.

[00;20;02;02 - 00;20;09;15] **Demi Harte**

And it's great that you, you host these, weekly meetings now with, faculty.

[00;20;09;17 - 00;20;40;14] **Chris Pastore**

Yeah. If we want to plug the talking teaching, as it were. That's thanks Demi. Yeah. Every week I have this session called talking teaching where we just get together to talk about stuff, things related to teaching. And that came from the literature, where years ago I was doing a little project on this, and I had read a couple of papers that showed faculty who talk about teaching tend to get better at teaching, and it didn't matter what they were talking about.

[00;20;40;16 - 00;20;55;26] **Chris Pastore**

So I tried to create this community where people can just come and talk about teaching experiences, and hopefully it's just helping them get better at their job just by sharing and learning that there's other people who also want to know about teaching.

[00;20;55;28 - 00;21;14;23] **Demi Harte**

Yeah. No, I think it's a great way for people to just, you know, even listen, or if they're having a difficult time with their classroom when they go and they listen to other people and they can relate to others and, and learn more. So it is it's definitely impactful and definitely worth attending. For anyone who hasn't attended yet.

[00;21;14;26 - 00;21;37;06] **Chris Pastore**

One of the big things is if you can acknowledge that you've made a mistake, you can get beyond it. And that's tough for faculty. We're supposed to be the smartest person in the room, right? That's that's why we're hired. It's sometimes difficult for us to recognize when we've made a mistake in a classroom. And if we can share with each other that.

[00;21;37;06 - 00;21;49;29] **Chris Pastore**

Oh, yeah, I made this mistake. Someone else's. Oh, I did that before, too. It's it's very liberating. And it allows us to move forward in a positive way instead of being defensive about our activities.

[00;21;50;01 - 00;22;01;12] **Demi Harte**

Yeah, I think a lot of people maybe have problems with admitting they're wrong. Right. And especially when you're in a teaching position, you're like, I am teaching this. I know this. And then you realize, oh, I'm still learning myself.

[00;22;01;14 - 00;22;02;18] **Chris Pastore**

Absolutely.

[00;22;02;21 - 00;22;18;03] **Demi Harte**

So we are here on our last question. And so we wanted to ask, what 1 or 2 pieces of advice would you give to educators who are struggling to provide feedback to learners?

[00;22;18;06 - 00;22;53;05] **Chris Pastore**

Well, I think I mean, this is it's a tough to put in small words, but the important thing is to identify what is the purpose of your feedback? Is it to correct the student, or is it to guide the student? It's easier to correct the student, but it's probably not as useful to the class experience. So if you accept that feedback is intended to guide, then you should think about how do I phrase that feedback?

[00;22;53;05 - 00;23;14;23] **Chris Pastore**

Try to identify what might have gone wrong in the students thought processes that generated the answer, as opposed to saying it's wrong and suggest ways in which they could improve it, not giving them the right answer. But you know, have you considered applying this principle to the answer? It might give you a more robust solution, things of that.

[00;23;14;23 - 00;23;29;14] **Chris Pastore**

And it's it's harder than just putting the right extra something. But if you can find ways to guide the student to the right answer as your feedback, the students more likely to accept that feedback and act upon it, I believe.

[00;23;29;16 - 00;23;45;06] **Jacob Santos**

I hope that people listening have been a little inspired by the wisdom that was shared today. That brings us to the end of our interview. Doctor Chris Star, thank you for taking the time out of your day to be here with us and sharing your knowledge and expertise.

[00;23;45;09 - 00;23;52;24] **Chris Pastore**

It was a pleasure, Jacob. Danny, both. Thank you very much for inviting me.

[00;23;52;26 - 00;24;14;27] **Demi Harte**

Thank you for joining us this month. On The Learning Curve. You can find more information and resources related to this episode at [academiccommons.jefferson.edu/thelearningcurve/](https://academiccommons.jefferson.edu/thelearningcurve/) and we hope to see you at some upcoming Academic Commons workshops. If you would like to be featured on a future episode of The Learning Curve, please contact us using the button on our show page.

[00;24;15;03 - 00;24;15;28] **Demi Harte**

Thanks for tuning in.