

## Feedback on Professional Portfolios and Assignments

1. Work individually. Study the following transcript of a conversation between participants on a professional development course. If their tutors could see it, what messages about their own feedback practices would they get from it? Make notes and be ready to share your ideas.

**Sara:** *Hi, Leo. I haven't seen you for a while. Have you had your portfolio back yet?*

**Leo:** *Yes, and I'm not too pleased with the feedback, to be honest.*

**Sara:** *I thought something was bugging you. Whose group are you in?*

**Leo:** *I'm with Marina. How about you?*

**Sara:** *I'm in Paul's group. He's been really good to work with so far. What's bothering you about the feedback you got from Marina?*

**Leo:** *Well, she seems to think she's addressing one of her students, not a teacher with 15 years experience.*

**Sara:** *How do you mean?*

**Leo:** *She wrote stuff like "I'm surprised at you for jumping to conclusions!" .... you know... with exclamation marks all over the place.*

**Sara:** *Maybe she just wanted to grab your attention....*

**Leo:** *Well, she certainly managed that. And all that red ink! I felt as though I was a naughty schoolboy again!*

**Sara:** *I wouldn't like that either. If Paul makes a comment in the margin of my work, he uses pencil – I can even rub it out if I don't agree with it.*

**Leo:** *That's a lot better. Does he write much?*

**Sara:** *Not a great deal, but I like the way he uses questions to make us think.*

**Leo:** *Questions? Sounds interesting. Marina just seems to pass judgment in a few words, and that's not much use to me. I thought this course was about professional development not judgment!*

**Sara:** *Well, it's supposed to be...*

**Leo:** *And another thing .... She does that thing that I used to hate when tutors came to observe us on teaching practice .... you know ...a few good things are mentioned first, and then there's a great long list of things that are wrong, according to her at least. She even missed the point with some of her remarks.... made me wonder if she'd really read everything properly!*

**Sara:** *Can't you talk to her about it? She seems quite approachable?*

**Leo:** *Fat chance! She gave us her mobile number but it's always switched off when I ring. And I haven't set eyes on her for weeks.*

**Sara:** *Can't you e-mail her?*

**Leo:** *I suppose I could, but it would be a long message. There's so much I'd like to talk out with her.*

**Sara:** *I can see why you're feeling sore.*

**Leo:** *Thanks.... You know I put so much work into that portfolio. It took me ages to get it all together and I was quite proud of myself when I handed it in.*

**Sara:** *Leo, don't let it get you down. I'm sure you're a good teacher when it comes to the classroom. You have so many good ideas.*

**Leo:** *Right now, it doesn't feel like that to me. I feel as though I've missed the point in so many of the things on the course .... otherwise she wouldn't have been so critical, would she?*

**Sara:** *Come on, you're taking it too much to heart. Let me get you a cup of tea.*

2. In groups of 4-5, compare your findings and then draw up a list of recommendations to include in a set of guidelines to tutors giving feedback on portfolios and other written assignments in the context of a professional development programme.

*This activity is based on a real conversation that I overheard in a college refectory. I wrote down an approximate version of it immediately after I got back to my desk. I was interested in it because of its rich messages to the trainer concerned. All the names have been changed to ensure anonymity. Every time I use it on a trainer development course it gives rise to a great deal of productive discussion. (Rod)*