



Feedback for Learning

Midlothian Council Educational Psychology Service

What do we mean when we talk about feedback?



Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement - but some types of feedback are more powerful than others!

Visual Learning Series
Spotlight 3

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Gathering and assessing feedback are really the only ways that teachers can know the impact of their teaching.



The concept of feedback has a long history and is considered one of the most common features of successful teaching and learning. However, whilst it remains one of the most powerful moderators of effective and meaningful learning, research demonstrates its effects are also amongst the most variable and that some types of feedback are more powerful than others. The recent resurgence of interest in the use of feedback provides us with a welcome opportunity to further identify factors that make it effective and revisit some fundamental questions such as the nature and purpose of feedback, how it's different at different levels of processing and learning, and how it interacts with the attributes of the learner.

As part of the broader visual learning approach, Hattie (2012) suggests that feedback is best understood as an aim to reduce the 'gap' between where a student 'is' and where they are 'meant to be'. As such, feedback is information given to the learner and/or the teacher about the learner's performance relative to learning goals. It should aim to, and be capable of producing improvement in students' learning. Feedback redirects or refocuses either the teacher's or the learner's actions to achieve a goal, by aligning effort and activity with an outcome. It can be about the learning activity itself, about the process of activity, about the student's management of their learning or self-regulation or (the least effective) about them as individuals. This feedback can be verbal, written, or can be given through tests or via information technology. Moreover, it can come from a teacher, student, someone taking on a teaching role or from peers.

To meet student's needs, you need to **get feedback** as well as **give feedback** - it's a two-way street. When students have the chance to tell you what they need, they empower you to revise and rethink your instruction. Such two-way feedback puts students - instead of the curriculum - in the driving seat. For feedback to be received and have a positive effect we need transparent and challenging goals (**learning intentions**), an understanding of a student's current status relative to those goals (**prior knowledge and achievement**), transparent and mutual understanding of the expected standard (**success criteria**) and the commitment and skills of both teachers and students to invest in and implement strategies and understanding relative to such learning intentions and the criteria for success.

In considering the multidimensional nature of feedback Hattie (2012) proposes an accessible 'model of feedback' that outlines a range of dimensions therein relating to the: **focus of feedback** (i.e. *Where am I going? How am I going? and Where to next?*); **levels of feedback** (i.e. *Task, process, self-regulation, self*); **frequency of feedback** and **types of feedback** (e.g. *disconfirmation vs. confirmation, student error, rapid formative feedback, prompts and cues*). The model also considers the dynamic between feedback and a **student's attributes** (e.g. *personality, culture, peer relationships*). This spotlight will further outline the focus and levels of feedback within Hattie's model - an additional spotlight will go on to further inform the remaining dimensions.

Providing effective feedback is a challenging business - research also suggests that it should:

- Be specific, accurate and clear and compare what a learner is doing right now with what they have done before
- Encourage and support further effort and be given sparingly so it is meaningful
- Provide specific guidance on how to improve and not just tell students when they are wrong
- Be supported with effective professional development for teachers
- Be about complex or challenging tasks or goals as this is likely to emphasise the importance of effort and perseverance as well as be more valued by the pupils. Feedback can come from other peers as well as adults.

Have you considered the challenge of implementing feedback effectively and consistently?

What professional development requirements are likely to be necessary for success?

A Model of Feedback (adapted from Hattie & Timperley, 2007)

Three feedback questions

Teachers are aware of, and aim to provide feedback relative to three important feedback questions:

Four feedback levels

Teachers are aware of, and aim to provide feedback relative to four important levels of feedback:

1. Where am I going? *What are the goals?*

Communicate to students the goals of the lesson and note the importance of **learning intentions** and **success criteria**. When students understand their goals and what success looks like - then feedback becomes more powerful. Many students cannot articulate the goals of a lesson - at best they might be performance related (e.g. finish task, make it neat) - rarely are they mastery-related (e.g. understand the content, master the skill). Providing more challenging goals relates to feedback in three significant ways: 1. They inform individuals about the level of performance desired allowing them to track performance towards their targets. 2. Feedback allows students and/or teachers to set further appropriately challenging goals and establish conditions for learning. 3. If there is no challenge then feedback is of little or no value

1. Task and product

Feedback at this level is powerful if it is more information focused (e.g. correct or incorrect) - leads to the learner acquiring more or different information and builds more surface level knowledge. This type of feedback is most common in classrooms and is often referred to as 'corrective feedback' - most students see feedback in these terms. It is commonly given in classrooms through teacher questioning, through comments on assignments, it is often specific and not generalizable, and it is more often the nature of whole class feedback - and can be particularly powerful with novice learners. Examples include: indicating correct/incorrect responses; asking for more or different responses; providing more or different information relevant to the task and building more task knowledge. This feedback is **critical** and serves as a foundation upon which to build feedback around **process** and **self-regulation** levels.

2. How am I going? *What progress is being made towards the goals?*

This question highlights the notion of progress feedback or feedback relative to the starting or finishing point of a task - expressed in relation to some expected standard, or to prior performance, or to success and failure on a specific part of a task. This is where it is most valuable to provide **rapid formative feedback** - particularly relative to the criteria of success rather than comparative to where other students are. There are **five** broad strategies that teachers can use in this phase to make learning more efficient and effective relative to 'how am I going?': clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success; facilitating effective classroom discussions, questions, and learning tasks; providing feedback that moves learners forward; encouraging students to see themselves as the owners of their own learning; and activating students as instructional resources for one another.

2. Process

Feedback at this level is used to create the product or to support completion of the task at hand. Such feedback can lead to: providing alternative processing strategies, reducing cognitive load, developing learning strategies, better error detection, prompts for more effective information gathering, noticing relationships between ideas, and employing broader task strategies. Examples include: helping to provide connections between ideas, providing strategies for identifying errors, learning how to explicitly learn from mistakes, and providing cues about different strategies or errors. Feedback at the process level appears to be more effective for enhancing deeper learning - there can also be a strong interactive effect between strategy and process feedback and feedback aimed at more surface level learning - the latter assisting in improving task confidence and self-efficacy - which in turn provides more resources for more effective and innovative information and strategy searching.

3. Where to next? *What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?*

This question highlights how feedback can assist in choosing the next most appropriate challenges and allow the learner to develop more self-regulation over the learning process, greater fluency and automaticity, different processes and strategies to work on the tasks, deeper understanding and more information about what is and what's not understood. The aim is to not only provide them with the answer to 'where to next', but also to teach them the skills to formulate their own answers to this question.

3. Self - Regulation

Feedback at this level is focused upon supporting students to monitor their own learning processes. This can: enhance student skills in self-evaluation; provide them with more confidence in task engagement; assist students to both seek and accept feedback; enhance a willingness to invest effort in both seeking and dealing with feedback information. When students can monitor and self-regulate their learning they can use feedback more effectively to reduce discrepancies between where they are in their learning and the desired outcomes or successes of their learning. Such feedback (e.g. reflective or probing questions) can guide the learner on the 'when', 'where', and 'why' of selecting and employing task and process level knowledge and strategies.

Teachers are aware of the importance of praise, but do not mix praise with feedback information



4. Self

This fourth feedback level is directed to the self (e.g. 'well done', 'great student') and is more commonly known as praise. Praise is often used to comfort and support, is welcomed and expected by most students, is ever present in classrooms—but it so often directs attention away from feedback related to the task, process or self-regulation. The major message is to provide praise—but not to give it in such a way that it dilutes the power of feedback - keep **praise** and **feedback** about the learning separate. Praise usually contains little task related information and is **rarely** converted into more engagement, commitment to the learning goals, enhanced self-efficacy, or understanding about the task. By incorporating praise with other feedback information the learning information becomes diluted as praise includes little information about task performance and little help in answering the three feedback questions - **Where am I going?**, **How am I going?**, and **Where to next?**

Recommended reading:

- Dylan William (2011) Embedded Formative Assessment
- John Hattie (2012) Visible Learning for Teachers
- Educational Leadership, September (2012) | Volume 70 | Number 1 | Feedback for Learning
- Hattie, J.A.C., & Timperley, H (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81-112.