Types of feedback

Oral and written feedback

Oral feedback

Oral feedback usually occurs during a task. It is sometimes underestimated because it is less formal, but it can be a very powerful and effective tool as it can be provided easily in the 'teachable moment' and in a timely way.

Asking "What do you notice about _____?" or "How does this match the criteria?" stimulates students' thinking about their learning.

Written feedback

Written feedback tends to be given after a task.

Effective written feedback provides students with a record of what they are doing well, what needs improvement and suggested next steps. Students and teacher might use a log to monitor whether and how well the student has acted on the feedback.

Written feedback needs to be:

- timely so that it is paired as closely as possible with the event
- written in a manner that is understandable for the student
- actionable so that the student can make revisions.

Written feedback needs to include:
- where the student has met the learning intentions and/or success criteria
- where the student still needs to improve
- a way to think through the answer for themselves.

Feedback during and after learning

Feedback during learning

Feedback during learning allows students to take feedback on board immediately and to try to realise improvement during the learning process.

This is often more effective and productive to the learning experience than end-of task feedback measures (usually summative), which require students to remember the feedback and apply the recommended strategies to a future task.

Feedback after learning

Too often feedback that is provided to students after learning has concluded is not used by the students to improve their work. This often results in teachers making the same comments over and over again and wondering why the student has not transferred the information to another context. For such feedback to influence subsequent learning, students must remember it, translate it into advice that is transferable across tasks, and apply it the next time they encounter a task in which this learning could apply. Generally, while strong students can often do this, struggling students find it more difficult.

Feedback during and after learning should:

- focus on what is being learnt (learning intention) and how students should go about it (success criteria)

- provide information on how and why the student has or has not met the criteria

- provide strategies to help the student to improve.

Evaluative feedback and descriptive feedback

Evaluative feedback

Evaluative feedback, in the form of grades or brief general comments, (e.g. "well done"), provides some information about learning, but does not convey the information and guidance that students can use to improve.

It can make the good students feel better (and at times complacent) and the less able students feel worse (and more certain that they will never be able to succeed).

In attempting to create a positive climate for learning, many teachers increase the level of praise that they give during feedback sessions.

Research shows, however, that praise needs to be realistic if the feedback is to be more meaningful. Regular, excessive praise often does more harm than good, leading to delusion or even frustration and resentment. To be really effective, praise needs to confirm a child's own sense of reality.

The impact of feedback on learning achievement has been found to be low when it is focussed on *praise, rewards and punishment* (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Descriptive feedback

Effective feedback provides students with detailed, specific information about improving their learning.

This *descriptive* feedback is:

- linked to the learning that is expected (Where am I going?)
- addresses faulty interpretations and lack of understanding (How am I going?)
- provides students with visible and manageable 'next steps' based on an assessment of the work at hand and an image of what 'good work looks like' so that they can begin to take on the responsibility of self-assessing and self-correcting. (Earl, 2003). (What do I need to do to improve and how do I do it?)**.**

An example of descriptive feedback:
That's a good introduction because you have covered the main points we discussed at the beginning. Now … which points do you think you should expand on?

Informal feedback and formal feedback

Informal feedback

'Check ins' are vitally important to providing effective feedback.

'Check ins' occur when the teacher visits students as they are engaged in a task to make sure they are on the right track. 'Check ins' can quickly and effectively steer students in the right direction or enhance learning.

'Check ins' can also occur when students approach the teacher to seek feedback. For longer projects these could be determined in advance with allocated times for students to 'check in'.

Formal feedback

Formal feedback can be provided through structured conferences with specific goals.

Teachers can meet with a few students a day or a week depending on specific projects, deadlines, and individual student needs.

It is important to set up these conferences in a structured way with a focus on individualised goals so both teacher and student make good use of their time.

Hints for student-teacher conferences:

- Look at student work beforehand
- Use a checklist or feedback form that students can use as a reference for making revisions
- Focus on two to three items that need work and show how to improve them
- Make time for the student to ask questions and give input.

When teachers use formal conferencing along with informal feedback, students are better protected from failure and set up for success.

Peer feedback and self-feedback (reflection/evaluation)

Peer feedback

The use of structured peer conferences can provide students with the opportunity to give and receive feedback about ongoing work, especially when the focus is on improvement rather than grading.

A positive aspect of the peer feedback process is that students get to see other students' work which can also deepen understanding of the learning goals.

Left to their own devices to give feedback many students will use the time to chat, criticise the other students' work or get nothing done.

Teachers need to:

- model and role play how to give feedback in a constructive way
- explicitly teach students how to provide effective feedback to each other
- hold students accountable for the comments, suggestions and feedback they give one another
- use scaffolds like peer feedback forms, which can be checked by the teacher to provide more structure to peer conferences. This also keeps students focussed on giving the right kinds of feedback and lets them know what the expectations are for peer conferences.

Once students have had time to practice, know what the requirements are, and are aware of expectations, peer conferences can be an integral part of the feedback process.

As with teacher feedback, peers can offer suggestions and comments on:

- what has been done well in relation to the learning intention/success criteria
- what still needs to be done in order to achieve the learning intention/success criteria
- how to achieve that improvement.

Self-feedback (reflection/evaluation)

This is the ultimate goal of feedback for learning.

During the provision of feedback, teachers have the opportunity not only to provide direction for the students, but to teach them, through explicit modelling and instruction, the skills of self-assessment and goal setting, leading them to become more independent.

To help students reach autonomy teachers can:

- explicitly identify, share, and clarify learning goals and success criteria
- model the application of criteria using samples
- provide guided opportunities for self-feedback
- teach students how to use feedback to determine next steps and set goals
- allow time for self-feedback/reflection.

References

Earl, L. (2003). *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximise Student Learning.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(1), 81-112.