Giving Effective Feedback 💬

Purpose:
> To develop skills in giving students better quality feedback on their learning.

Identifying feedback practices

Ponder the prompts and identify how you tend to give feedback - and consider alternatives with your colleagues.

What you need:

- people grouped in planning or teaching teams of 3-6 teachers
- 1 copy of page 1 per pair of teachers
- 1 copy of pages 2 & 3 (back-to-back) for each teacher
- whiteboard and marker for brainstorm.

Step 1:

- Individually COMPLETE "Identifying Effective Feedback Practices" (page 2), while you
engage in discussion about the prompts with a colleague.

Step 2:

- READ "Giving Effective Feedback" (page 3).
- PAIR and DISCUSS:
  - Why are you giving feedback?
  - Does your feedback shape learning and/or teaching?
  - When could you give formal oral feedback that helps learning?
  - What would happen if you gave "comment only" written feedback?
  - What form does your feedback take: rewards or targeted comments?
    Should the balance change?
  - Is your feedback an example of assessment FOR learning?

Step 3:

- In the whole group, BRAINSTORM ways of giving effective feedback to students on their learning.

Identifying Effective Feedback Practices

Prompts to Ponder	My response
1. How do I talk about giving written feedback: am I "marking", "correcting", "grading", "assessing", or what? What does this say about my thinking?	
2. In what mode do I give feedback: oral? written? visual rewards (stickers)? How do I give feedback? pen colour? typed? emailed? sticky note? other?	
3. What types of written annotations do I make: ticks? circling? comments? questions? question-marks? grades? marks? underlines? other?	
4. For written/descriptive feedback, what typical comments do I write? List 3 recent comments.	
5. How timely is my feedback? Instantaneous? Same day? Next day? Next week? When I can?	
6. Do I sometimes (often?) predict a student's performance on their track record? What evidence am I using?	
7. Are there particular things I always watch out for? These are [what] … ?	
8. Do I use criteria and/or rubrics for feedback? Do my students know and understand these?	
9. How useful is my feedback? Do my students read it? (can they read my writing?) Is it understandable by them?	
10. Can students act on my feedback? Do I support them in this? How do I provide space, time & resources for this?	
11. How do I keep records of the feedback I give students? Can I use it to judge progress and improvement?	

Giving Effective Feedback

Purposes of feedback

• "to facilitate learning;
• to see whether learning has taken place;
• to provide feedback to teachers … on how students are progressing, clarifying for the
 teacher … what can be done to improve, extend or enhance learning;
• to provide feedback to students concerning their own progress, clarifying for the student
what he or she needs to do to improve, extend or enhance learning;
• to diagnose students' needs or barriers to learning and help inform necessary changes
to the [curriculum unit or the teaching]".   (Tummons 2005, p. 34-5)

and in addition, Knight and Yorke also suggest:
• "To encourage emancipation by alerting the student to possibilities which they may not
have hitherto discerned … [moving] the student into richer intellectual territory" (2003, p. 35-36)

Consider "comment only" formal feedback

Giving grades or marks was found by the Black et al study (2003) to distract students from formal
formative feedback. As one teacher noted "at no time during the first 15 months of comment-only
marking did any students ask me why they no longer received grades … I found this amazing" (p. 45).
The students were focused on improving their work through the formative feedback comments, and no
longer needed the mark, as a measure of their work quality.

Forms of feedback

Feedback has often been given by teachers and not acted upon by students, and there is no impact on
students' learning. Torrance and Pryor (1998) give several examples of this and argue that the types of
feedback that teachers give could be responsible. They found that "feedback was almost wholly
characterized in terms of short-term rewards – praise and/or team points, 'smiley face' stickers etc. –
rather than detailed comment on how to develop an idea further or help with particular problems"
(p. 39).
These external rewards have been shown to encourage a comparative focus (competing with others)
rather than a learning focus (improving one's own understandings).

Feedback for understanding

For encouraging deep understanding the feedback should involve "detailed comments on ideas,
evidence and techniques. The goal is understanding and feedback should reflect it."
(Brown and Knight 1994, p. 110)

"A checklist for good feedback …

1. clear and unambiguous;
2. specific;
3. supportive, formative and developmental;
4. timely;
5. understood;
6. delivered in an appropriate environment" (Tummons 2005, p. 76).