

Survey Question

22. The comments that I get on my work in this class help me understand how to improve

Australian Professional Standard

Professional Practice Domain

Standard 5: Assess, provide feedback and reporting on student learning

Focus areas:

- 5.1 Assess student learning
- 5.2 Provide feedback to students on their learning
- 5.3 Make consistent and comparable judgements
- 3.1 Establish challenging learning goals

What does this sound like in the classroom?

"This teacher always gets our work marked quickly, and so it's still fresh in my mind and then the comments they've made make sense. We also get time to review the comments and see which [criteria] we've met or not met."

Why is this important?

It is commonly reported that students do not read teacher feedback comments (Duncan, 2007), however, feedback is a major influence on learning and achievement (Hattie, 2009). Testing data shows that students who are provided with feedback usually perform better than students who are not (NSW DEC, 2014).

Feedback aims to close the gap between a student's current performance and desired performance after instruction has occurred by identifying whether an answer is correct or incorrect, describing how understanding is correct or flawed and explaining what needs to be done to improve performance in future. Students can use feedback to increase effort and employ more effective strategies. Teachers can use feedback to set or clarify appropriate challenging and specific goals, and determine which strategies to use to assist students to reach the goals (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

The type of feedback and the way it is given is critical to how effective it is. While the frequency of feedback in most classrooms could be higher, simply providing more feedback is not a solution (Dinham, 2008). It is necessary to consider the nature of the feedback, the timing of the feedback and how a student will receive this feedback, as students can bias and select feedback information (Hattie, 2012).

Effective feedback must answer three major questions (Hattie & Timperley, 2007):

1. Where am I going? (What are the goals)

2. How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goals)
3. Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make progress better)

Feedback with the most impact is about a task and how to do it more effectively, as opposed to feedback related to praise, rewards and punishment (NSW DEC, 2014). The most effective forms of feedback provide cues or reinforcement to learners as related to the learning goals. Rewards like stickers and awards usually are less effective as they usually contain little information about the task. Encouraging students to self-reflect and actively seek feedback is also an effective strategy (Hattie, 2012). Delayed feedback is more effective during fluency building and learning more difficult concepts which take more thought processing (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

What strategies have been shown to work in the classroom?

Good feedback is focused so that students have an opportunity to act on the feedback. It is well developed, specific and provides clear direction (Chamberlain, Dison & Button, 1998).

Guidelines for using feedback to enhance learning include (Shute, 2008):

- Focus feedback on the task not the learner
- Provide descriptive feedback (describe what, how, why)
- Present feedback in manageable chunks of information (do not overwhelm students)
- Be specific and clear
- Keep feedback as simple as possible but no simpler than it needs to be based on the learning goals
- Reduce uncertainty between performance and goals
- Give unbiased, objective feedback in written form
- Use a learning goal approach to feedback (focus on the learning rather than the performance)
- Provide feedback only after students have attempted a solution

Students need to understand the language of feedback, and this needs to be developmentally and subject appropriate. When matching comments to students' current understanding can be improved in several ways:

1. Make the criteria and standards expected of assessable work clear to students before they start;
2. Discuss, explain and demonstrate expected practical and thinking skills before students are assessed; provide exemplars to students
3. Write the comments as simply and clearly as possible
4. Provide a glossary of common terms and their meanings that you regularly use in comments on work
5. Follow the guidelines above on content of comments, i.e., describe the characteristics of the work that are being commented on, explain the judgements being made in relation to the criteria and standards, provide suggestions and explanations that show how to do things better.

One crucial point to come from some recent research (Burke, 2009) is that many students do not know how to use feedback as many have never been taught how to do so. A key element of classroom discussion with students should be the development of strategies to use feedback to improve their future performance and learning.

What three things can I try in my classroom tomorrow?

1. Check the feedback you have given to students previously. Does it answer the 'three major questions'? (See Hattie above)
2. Ask students for positive examples of feedback they have received. How did it help them to reflect upon the task and their work? Did it encourage them to make improvements?
3. It can also be effective to advertise the success of each student in the group when possible. Public, positive reinforcement speeds up acquisition of skills and informs others of the array of strategies available to them.

What opportunities are there for collaboration with my colleagues?

Ask expert teachers their opinion of what constitutes effective feedback and what works best for the students at your school. Share examples of feedback given to students. Liaise with fellow subject teachers to ascertain common failings among students in your subject area. Compare feedback approaches and discuss whether they have satisfied Hattie's 'three major questions'.

Where can I find out more?

Video

- Teaching Channel: Carol Dweck on Performance Assessment
- Dylan Wiliam: Giving Effective Feedback
- Robert Reetz: Putting Students on a Winning Streak by teaching them to use constructive feedback
- Ron Berger: Austin's butterfly

Referenced articles, books and other great reads:

- Archer, A. and Hughes, C. (2011) Explicit Instruction. Guildford Publications, USA. Chapter 7 (describes detailed steps for providing immediate affirmative and corrective feedback) and Chapter 8 (describes detailed steps for providing feedback on independent assignments)
- Curtin University (2015), Western Australia. Providing Feedback for Student Learning. Accessed 3 May 2015
- Chamberlain, C., Dison, L., Button, A. (1998) Lecturer feedback - implications for developing writing skills: A South African perspective. Proceedings of the HERDSA Annual International Conference. New Zealand.
- Dinham, S. (2007). How schools get moving and keep improving: Leadership for teacher learning, student success and school renewal. Australian Journal of Education. 51(3): 263- 275.
- Duncan, N. (2007). Feed-forward: improving students' use of tutor comments, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education. 32 (3), 271 -283.
- Hattie, J. (2013) Visible Learning for Teachers. Routledge Taylor & Francis. Chapter 7: The place of feedback (detailed steps and strategies for giving feedback)
- Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007) The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research; Mar 2007; 77, 1; Academic Research Library pg. 81
- Flinders University (2015). Research summaries: Feedback to improve student learning. Accessed 5 May 2015.

- Stenger, Marianne. (2014) 5 Research-Based Tips for providing Effective Feedback. Accessed 5 May 2015
- Spiller, D. (2009) Assessment: Feedback to Promote Student Learning University of Waikato. Accessed 8 May 2015