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# INTRODUCTION

The term 'feedback' is a relative newcomer to the English lexicon. It was coined in the early 20th century during the development of broadcasting technology to describe the sort of disruptive noise you will almost certainly have heard at some time or another when your favourite guitar player has wandered too close to the amplifier. Later, it was adopted by communication theorists who gave it a much more positive spin, using it as the term for an incoming response to an outgoing message – a signal that tells us the communication has been received. Most familiar to us now in an educational context, its meaning has further evolved and diversified.

Feedback is often cited as one of the most powerful tools for enhancing learning. And in the classroom it can be understood and implemented in a whole range of ways, as our contributors – the best of the best – demonstrate in the following pages. But although they each provide their own unique take on the importance of feedback to teaching and learning, they are unanimous in emphasising the paramount importance of feedback as clear *communication* – the context in which our current understanding of the word originated.

Dylan Wiliam, for example, points out the importance of formative assessment as a means of enabling the teacher to make evidence-based decisions about each student's needs, and stresses the importance of this source of feedback as a way of gaining insight into what students are getting out of the teaching process. Similarly, Mike Gershon, who makes the link to communication theory quite explicit with his diagram of the 'feedback loop', illustrates the point that feedback is not a one-off response but a continuing process or dialogue. However, for a student to respond effectively and constructively to the feedback they are given by the teacher, they must be allowed time in which to reflect on it and implement it. Their response is a continuation of the feedback loop – the two-way communication conducted over time. This same point about feedback being a two-way process is made by Andy Griffith, who also employs the language of communication theory when he argues that, for the teacher, feedback is something we should be able to both give and receive. He explores this idea in the light of the question: how can we encourage our students to be more open to feedback? The answer, he suggests, lies in the willingness of the teacher to model this openness themselves by inviting and acting on student feedback in order to improve the effectiveness of their own practice.

This idea of feedback from students to teachers – a reversal of our usual assumptions about the direction of flow – is also taken up by Mick Waters, who suggests formalising this process by inviting students to award points to teachers based

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on the teacher's effectiveness in helping the student to learn. Shirley Clarke, too, argues that it is feedback from learners to teachers which constitutes the most significant and productive means of improving students' learning experience and supporting their learning. This application of feedback, as an important opportunity for learning and improvement for teachers as well as their students, is a point also made by Jackie Beere, whose contribution focuses on how best to encourage a positive response to feedback. She advocates introducing the idea of 'thinking on purpose' - the practice of reflecting on feedback in order to be able to act on it appropriately and productively. To this end, she points out the advantages - whether you are a teacher or a student - of reframing critical feedback as something positive rather than negative; as a valuable opportunity to learn and improve. Indeed, this emphasis on feedback as a trigger for action is one also shared by Andy Griffith, Mike Gershon and several others.

Other contributors give us a different perspective, focusing instead on what constitutes the most useful and effective feedback. For example, Art Costa and Robert Garmston challenge the notion that feedback should be about giving praise. Writing in the context of feedback on teacher performance, they argue that praise can actually be counterproductive, since it encourages dependency on the assessor rather than developing a capacity for reflection in the person being assessed. A more useful and productive form of feedback, they argue, is to use what they term 'data description' - describing what you see. Barry Hymer, in his contribution, makes the same point. Praise and reward can, he tells us, be detrimental to intrinsic motivation. If a student relies for motivation on praise from the teacher, they won't learn to motivate themselves and develop a love of learning for its own sake. Their engagement with learning will always be dependent on the promise of a prize or external reward. Like Costa and Garmston, Hymer argues that simple praise and reward only serve to keep the teacher in control, and thereby rob the student of self-efficacy. Instead, teachers should aim to give acknowledgement, encouragement and feedback that is both detailed and specific, a point also made by Seth Godin, who suggests that feedback should offer an analysis rather than simply an opinion: 'This worked because ...' rather than, 'I liked this.' Godin makes the further point that timing is crucial to ensuring that the feedback you give will be effective in improving performance, because if it is given too early or too late the student (or indeed teacher) will not be in a position to act on it.

The argument for analytical and specific feedback is taken up by Ron Berger and Diana Laufenberg, who both argue for the importance of giving feedback referenced to clear criteria. Their practical approaches to this differ, however. Laufenberg places an emphasis on the importance of making time to give detailed, face-to-face feedback against the assessment criteria to each individual

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student. This face-to-face delivery, she argues, is both more effective and more encouraging than written feedback. Berger, on the other hand, lays no particular emphasis on giving feedback face to face, but argues for the importance of giving individual, descriptive feedback on specific aspects of student work or performance and of avoiding general, holistic statements such as 'good work'.

On the other hand, Phil Beadle argues that praise should be considered a very important element when giving feedback. Using the analogy of a coach encouraging a football team, he illustrates the way in which praise has the power to motivate in the immediate moment in a way that analytical criticism does not. However, praise should, he tells us, always be followed by advice on how to do even better. Geoff Petty, too, cites praise as one of the key factors for effective learning which has emerged from meta studies of evidence-based research, together with clearly understood goals and the will to improve. And Taylor Mali, writing in the context of giving feedback to parents on a child's performance and attainment, also makes a case for giving positive feedback, suggesting that negative feedback will be less likely to lead to improvement than if the teacher accentuates what is praiseworthy while highlighting the room for development within that positive context. Nevertheless, more important even than feedback, Mali argues, is what he refers to as 'feedfront' – giving clear instructions and setting clear goals before a task even begins. In this respect he is in agreement with Ron Berger, Diana Laufenberg and others who stress the need for feedback to be linked to clear, previously stated criteria.

Although several contributors warn against giving generalised and non-specific praise, this does not discount, of course, the need for a positive approach with an emphasis on demonstrating kindness, encouragement and helpfulness in the giving of feedback – whatever that feedback may be. Seth Godin, for example, reminds us to 'say something nice' if we can. Similarly, Ron Berger tells us that we must be 'kind' when feeding back on work, whatever it is that must be said. And Art Costa and Robert Garmston, who take a strong position against feedback that is simply evaluative, stress at the same time the need to establish a sense of trust if the feedback we give is to be accepted as meaningful and constructive.

Some of the contributors provide advice about very specific approaches. Paul Dix, for example, gives a detailed account of the use of student wristbands on which they can record the useful feedback they have been given. This is a way of encouraging them to take ownership – literally – of their own progress and ongoing targets for learning. Bill Lucas, too, in arguing that we must give students the opportunity and choice to accept or reject the feedback advice that we offer them, is also raising the issue of students taking ownership, albeit in a

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less material sense. A further example of a contributor who gives us some insight into the practical implications of her approach is Diana Laufenberg, who explains how she makes time for one-to-one feedback by planning work that the rest of the class can absorb themselves in while she speaks to each individual.

From these contributions, each unique and enlightening in its own right, a number of key themes emerge. One of these is the need to get the balance right between praise and constructive critique by keeping feedback specific, detailed and firmly referenced to clearly explained criteria. Another is that these same principles should be applied whether the feedback is from teacher to student, teacher to colleague, student to teacher or student to student. Response to feedback, too, emerges as a theme: the need to give students the time to reflect on it, to question it, to act on it. And, of course, we have a theme which relates to the manner in which feedback should be given: kindly, constructively, in a timely way and in an atmosphere of trust. Above all, perhaps, these contributors are united in the view that what effective feedback is primarily about is clear, constructive and specific communication.

In what follows, you will find the detail of what each expert has to say in their own distinctive voice. For each of these important insights, you will find a number of ways to practically implement the experts' ideas in your own classroom or even across your whole school. Some experts have provided their own strategies, and everything that is from the experts' own voices appears on a grey background. Looking for some ways to facilitate peer feedback without witnessing comments like, 'Your story is awesome' or 'Include more words'? Desperate to stop that sensitive student from taking personal offence every time you offer constructive feedback? Interested in rediscovering your social life by acquiring new ways to make written feedback less time consuming? Read on to see what some of the greatest names in education have to say about feedback and explore a host of practical strategies that will enable you to ensure that feedback – in *your* classroom – is truly the powerfully transformative tool it has the potential to be.

## CHAPTER 1

# FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN TEACHING AND LEARNING PROFESSOR DYLAN WILIAM



PROFESSOR DYLAN WILIAM is Emeritus Professor of Educational Assessment at University College London. After seven years of teaching in London schools, he joined Chelsea College, which later became part of King's College London. In a varied career, he has trained teachers, managed a large-scale testing programme and served a number of roles in university administration. He has written over 300 books, articles and chapters, many with his long-time colleague Paul Black. His most recent books are *Embedding Formative Assessment: Practical Techniques for K-12 Classrooms* (with Siobhán Leahy, 2015) and *Leadership for Teacher Learning* (2016).

## CHAPTER 2

# A FEEDBACK PERSPECTIVE

**ARTHUR L. COSTA AND  
ROBERT J. GARMSTON**



**ARTHUR L. COSTA** is Professor Emeritus of Education at California State University, Sacramento, and co-founder of the Institute for Intelligent Behavior in El Dorado Hills, California. He has served as a classroom teacher, curriculum consultant, assistant superintendent for instruction and director of educational programmes for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. He has devoted his career to improving education through more 'thought-full' instruction and assessment.

**ROBERT J. GARMSTON** is an Emeritus Professor of Educational Administration at California State University, Sacramento. Formerly a classroom teacher, principal, director of instruction and acting superintendent, he worked (until June 2016) as an educational consultant specialising in leadership, learning, and personal and organisational development. He is co-developer of two professional development programmes used in the United States and abroad: Cognitive Coaching and Adaptive Schools ([www.thinking-collaborative.com](http://www.thinking-collaborative.com)). He has made presentations and conducted workshops for teachers, administrators and staff developers throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and the Middle East. He is the author of a number of books, some of which have been translated into Arabic, Dutch, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish.

## CHAPTER 4

# FINDING TIME FOR FEEDBACK

**DIANA LAUFENBERG**



For the past two decades, **DIANA LAUFENBERG** has been a secondary social studies teacher in Wisconsin, Kansas, Arizona and Pennsylvania. She most recently taught at the Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia, an enquiry-driven, project-based high school focused on modern learning. Her practice has deep roots in experiential education, taking students from the classroom to the real world and back again. Prior to her work in Philadelphia, she was an active member of the teaching community in Flagstaff, Arizona, where she was named Technology Teacher of the Year for Arizona and a member of the Governor's Master Teacher Corps. Her expertise has been recognised by earning National Board Certification.

Diana's 'How to Learn? From Mistakes' presentation has featured on TED.com, and her publications include a featured piece on the *New York Times* Learning blog, a co-authored chapter in an educational leadership book and an article in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. In 2013, Diana partnered with Chris Lehmann to start Inquiry Schools, a non-profit organisation working to create and support learning environments that are enquiry driven, project based and utilise modern technology. She currently serves as the executive director and lead teacher for Inquiry Schools.

## CHAPTER 10

# HOW CAN FAILURE HELP YOU GROW?

**JACKIE BEERE OBE**



**JACKIE BEERE OBE** worked as a newspaper journalist before starting a career in teaching and school leadership. She was awarded an OBE in 2002 for developing innovative learning programmes. Since 2006, she has been offering training in the latest strategies for learning, developing emotionally intelligent leadership and growth mindsets. She is the author of several bestselling books on teaching, learning and coaching, as well as being a qualified Master Practitioner in NLP.