Giving Feedback to Students

Research (for example; Duffy 2013, Fry et al 2015) has confirmed what most teachers already know: providing students with meaningful feedback can greatly enhance learning and improve student engagement and achievement. Consider feedback as written or oral developmental advice on a student's performance, and that it is fundamental to the learning process. The objective of feedback is to help learners maximise their potential, raise awareness of their strengths and areas for improvement, and should include action points or targets to improve performance.

Effective ways to use feedback

Here are five research-based tips for providing students with the kind of feedback that will increase motivation, build on existing knowledge, and help them reflect on what they've learned.

1. Specific

Be as Specific as Possible. Hattie and Timperley (2007) highlight the importance of supplying learners with specific information about what they are doing right or wrong. It is vital to provide learners with information on what exactly they did well, and what may still need improvement. It is also useful to link to improvements that may already have been made. Has a student's performance changed or improved since the last assessment? Let them know about it, even if they still have a long way to go.

2. Timely

Numerous studies indicate that feedback is most effective when it is given immediately, rather than a few days, weeks, or months down the line, this is not often feasible for a busy academic with large cohorts. So, the sooner the better.

3. Set Goals

Hattie and Timperley (2007) note that effective feedback is most often oriented around a specific achievement that students are (or should be) working toward. When giving feedback, it should be clear to students how the information they are receiving will help them progress toward their final goal. Rubrics are helpful here as they will have been set up prior to the summative assessment with the learning objectives in mind. Effective rubrics provide students with very specific information about their performance, comparative to an established range of standards.

4. Be Sensitive

The way feedback is presented can have an impact on how it is received, which means that sometimes even the most well-meaning feedback can come across the wrong way and reduce a learner's motivation. To avoid this, fully explaining the purpose of any monitoring,

and ensuring that learners understand how the feedback is meant to help them compete against their own personal best, rather than each other.

5. Involve Learners in the Process

Learners need to be given access to information about their performance. Involving learners in the process of collecting and analysing performance-based data cannot be understated. At the broadest level, students need to know if they actually have mastered the material or not. Giving them information about the ways they are studying, reading, searching for information, or answering questions can be invaluable. This is also the opportunity to invite dialogue, evidence suggests (Millar 2006, Beaumont et al 2011) that dialogue can support students' engagement with, and the understanding of, the feedback. Dialogue of this nature can also foster students' sense of academic connectedness with the learning material and well as the assessment process.

Marking online with GradeMark®

You should consider trying GradeMark® if your school or college hasn't already done so. GradeMark® is accessed through Turnitin and is an online marking tool. It provides you with a bank of what are called Quick Mark Templates, which you can use, or edit, to suit your needs. You simply click on a comment from the selection on the right of the student's submission and drag it into place on the script. Alternatively you can click on the script and type your own comments. There is also the facility to type a summary of general comments and provide targets, which could follow the guidelines above. Typing your feedback provides a more inclusive access to feedback, allowing students to use eReaders or web-applications to read your comments back. There is also the facility to record these general comments, which again provides a more inclusive approach. To find more information about GradeMark® you can try the demo, GrademarkDemo, or watch the video on the SALT website, Turnitin-video-guides. You can also create and use rubrics within GradeMark® these can be set against the assessment criteria and can be edited and reused as needed.

References

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