



# Let's Talk Assessment...

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## Effective Feedback

*'Descriptive feedback is the **key** to successful assessment for learning. Students learn from the assessment when the teacher provides specific, detailed feedback and direction to each student to guide his or her learning.'*

From "Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind". Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for collaboration in Education. Page 33

From John Hattie:

[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/atol\\_online/ppt/online\\_workshop\\_1.ppt#273.10.The Black Box: findings](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/atol_online/ppt/online_workshop_1.ppt#273.10.The%20Black%20Box%20findings)

Black and Williams's research indicates that improving learning through assessment depends on five deceptively simple factors:

1. **Providing effective feedback to students.**
2. Student's active involvement in their own learning.
3. Adjusting teaching to take account of the results of the assessment.
4. Recognizing the profound influence of assessment on students' motivation and self-esteem—both crucial influences on learning.
5. Ensuring pupils assess themselves and understand how to improve.

### **Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards through Classroom Assessment**

Kings College London

<http://ditc.missouri.edu/docs/blackBox.pdf>

### **What then is effective feedback?**

John Hattie argues that quality feedback should:

- focus on the learning intention of the task
- occur as the students are doing the learning
- provide information on how and why the student understands and misunderstands
- provides strategies to help the student to improve
- assist the student to understand the goals of the learning

[http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/atol\\_online/ppt/041008\\_quality\\_feedback.ppt](http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/atol_online/ppt/041008_quality_feedback.ppt)

***"The most powerful single moderator that enhances achievement is feedback"***

John Hattie. University of Auckland. 1999 Inaugural Professorial Lecture

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***Effective feedback occurs when it is immediate and shows the student how to progress onto the next stage in their learning.***

Turn the page to read about schools in Canada who are using Effective Feedback for Learning Strategies including Lorna Earl's "Closing the Gap" Feedback Prompts to improve achievement.

Let's Talk  
Assessment...

Available on the  
SACSA website:  
[www.sacsa.sa.edu.au](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au)

# Evaluative and Descriptive Feedback

## Evaluative Feedback provides:

- judgements of value or appropriateness of responses
- judgements of correctness or incorrectness

## Descriptive Feedback provides:

- descriptions of why a response is appropriate
- descriptions of what students have achieved
- suggestions of a better way of doing something
- prompts to suggest ways students can improve

Chris Ratcliff, the Maths for Learning Inclusion Torrens Cluster Coordinator, listening and asking focus questions to improve learning.



(Adapted from Gipps et al, *What Makes a Good Primary School Teacher? Expert Classroom Strategies in Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind*. Page 33.) [www.wncp.ca/assessment/rethink.pdf](http://www.wncp.ca/assessment/rethink.pdf)

## From the Superintendent...

Everyday teachers are engaged in ongoing assessments with their students; both formally and informally.

The prime importance of assessment is to provide support for **ALL** students to make continuous progress with their learning. One of the most effective ways of furthering student learning is through the use of effective feedback to students on the quality of their work, suggesting goals for future learning and celebrating their achievements.

Teachers draw on a broad repertoire of strategies and practices to make decisions about the kind of feedback needed to move students along in their learning.

I encourage you to focus on the kinds of feedback you are providing for your students and reflect on points raised in this newsletter.

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**To be successful, feedback needs to be immediate and identify the way forward. It should not simply tell learners whether their answers are right or wrong, or simply provide evaluative feedback in the form of grades and short, non-specific comments of praise or censure. This latter kind of feedback affects students' senses of themselves and tells them how they stand in relation to others, but it offers very little direction for moving forward.** (*Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind*. Page 33.)

## An Example of "Closing the Gap" Feedback

Schools in inner-city Winnipeg, Canada are using the following feedback prompts to scaffold their students to further learning and achievement:

In Introducing a character for a story (written or oral), a student has described someone he knows from a summer camp. After highlighting several phrases that give information about this person, the teacher highlights the student's phrase "This person is a good friend" and considers a closing-the-gap prompt. The prompt could take any of the following forms:

### A reminder prompt:

- E.g., "Say more about how you feel about this person." **(A reminder prompt is most suitable for a student who has good command of figurative language but has not used it here, for whatever reason.)**

(Adapted from Earl, *Assessment as Learning: Using Classroom Assessment to Maximise Student Learning* Thousand Oaks, CA:Corwin, 2003 in *Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind*. Page 33.)

### A scaffolding prompt:

- E.g., "Can you describe how this person is a good friend?"; "Describe something that has happened that showed you what a good friend this person is"; "He showed me he was a good friend when...". **(Scaffolding prompts work well with students who need more structure or some direction but are more likely to carry on from there).**

### An example prompt:

- E.g., "Choose one of these statements to tell me more about your friend. "He is a good friend because he never says unkind things to me." Or, "My friend helps me do things." **(When a student is struggling or doesn't appear to understand the concept, example prompts can provide them with actual models of the learning intention.)**

# How to give constructive feedback...

These guidelines are based on the Harpaz/Lefstein 'Communities of Thinking' model of learning and its related 'Fertile Questioning.' Many teachers have found this re-think of the way we construct classroom learning useful, as it puts the learner at the centre of their own learning—with scaffolding of course! To read more about it, visit the Learning to Learn Website.

<http://www.learningtolearn.sa.edu.au/Colleagues/pages/default/lefstein/>

Adapted from Adam Lefstein and Yoram Harpaz who advocate the following 10 points for giving constructive feedback:



**Minimize and downplay evaluation.** The purpose of the feedback is not to give the learner a score (e.g. “very good” or “needs improvement”), but to identify ways in which they could further learn, develop and improve. (A good operating assumption is that every activity is in some way “very good”, and also in some way “needs improvement”).



**Ask many questions.** Questions are generally preferable to answers, as the former tend to stimulate and sharpen thinking while the latter tend to shift responsibility from the learner to the person providing feedback.



**Listen to the learner.** Try to understand their reasoning, motivations, concerns and needs. Allow these issues to direct your comments and the conversation.



**Adopt the learner's perspective.** Try to “get inside the learner’s mind” and see the issues from their perspective. It doesn’t matter how you might have performed a task or would solve a particular problem—what is important is to help the learner find their own path. Another useful perspective is that of the intended audience—e.g. the reader of a piece of student writing, or the students in a classroom lesson (when giving feedback to the teacher). Reflect back to the learner how their actions might be interpreted by or affect the intended audience.



**Direct feedback to what can be realistically changed or improved** in the current context. For example, if giving feedback to a short basketball player, it would be unhelpful to dwell on how much better they would be if they were taller—presumably an issue out of their control. Rather, it would be considerably more constructive to discuss ways of coping with their height disadvantage.



**Anchor the feedback in examples, but generalize from particulars to broad principles.** Don’t share with the learner your “gut feelings”; if you can’t provide examples of a problem or issue, the comment should likely be discarded. Seek to move from particular examples to a general principle that is potentially applicable to other contexts.



**Be balanced and moderate** in your feedback. Balance between encouraging and critical comments. Don’t overdo it; too much feedback can be damaging or misleading.



**Conduct the feedback conversation in an appropriate location and at an appropriate time.** This seems obvious, but worth reflecting on because in so many schools there are so few locations and such little time for an intimate, uninterrupted conversation.



**Converse, don’t preach.** The general tone of a feedback conversation should be one of two friends talking about a topic of mutual interest. Let your curiosity guide you—share with the learner your questions, responses and reflections as an interested participant or reader. Try to avoid an authoritative tone.



**Encourage the learner’s own self-criticism.** Support students to develop, practise and become comfortable with reflection, and with a critical analysis of their own learning so they are able to take more responsibility for their own learning and monitor future directions.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

Curriculum Corporation have a professional learning module on their Assessment for Learning website with a specific focus on Effective Feedback. [www.curriculum.edu.au/assessment](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/assessment)

**There are two parts to the Module.**

**A data show presentation which provides information on:**

- Improving student performance
- What is feedback?
- What is effective feedback?
- An example of effective feedback
- Principles of effective feedback
- When does feedback occur?
- Features of effective feedback
- Effective feedback in action
- Possible feedback strategies

**A Workshop/s which provide participants with the opportunity to:**

- Reflect on and evaluate current practice with regard to feedback
- Examine the notion of effective feedback
- Practise using effective feedback

Visit the Assessment for Learning website and order the following DVDs **FREE**.

- **Strategic Questioning** (Available now)
- **Effective Feedback** (Available 2007)
- **Student Self-Assessment** (Available 2007)

**Focus for  
next issue:  
Assessment  
Tools**



## IMPORTANT SACSA CONSIDERATIONS...

- ◆ You don't have to **'teach'** every single outcome to know that it has been achieved.
- ◆ You don't have to **'assess'** every single outcome to know it has been achieved.
- ◆ The **range of evidence** you collect on student's work can be used **more than once** for making judgements of student achievement and for **more than one outcome**.
- ◆ You do **need a range of evidence** to support your judgements.
- ◆◆ Read Mandy Jessop's story in Let's Talk Assessment, November, 2006. Volume 1, Issue 3 where she describes how she learnt that evidence can be found in unexpected places eg the playground and that even a piece of evidence like a simple picture can provide evidence towards outcomes in 3 different Learning Areas.

Extra copies of the newsletter available from:

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