

BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARMONK, NEW YORK

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Title: *What is Quality feedback?*
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School/Grade: Coman Hill/Grade I and Math Specialist

SUMMARY OF *INVESTIGATORS OF PRACTICE* ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context:

As teachers working with first grade students, we were curious to learn what defines “quality feedback.” We were first exposed to quality feedback last summer at a staff development workshop led by teacher consultant, Diane Cunningham (Learner-Centered Initiatives, LTD.) After this initial exposure, we wanted to know more about the criteria of quality feedback and how it can be used to deepen student understanding.

Action Plan:

Our research question was “What is quality feedback?” based upon our interest in the impact of feedback on student learning. Because our district is committed to improving our use of feedback during formative assessments, we have been given the gift of spending time with teacher consultant, Diane Cunningham. In addition to learning from Diane, we examined articles written by numerous highly-regarded educators, including Grant Wiggins, Peter Johnston, and Chris Tovani.

Results:

We were struck by how many “ah-ha” moments we experienced as the result of our research. After we conducted our research, we coded the information presented in the articles and found a string of themes pertaining to what quality feedback entails. We found that quality feedback is:

- Goal-referenced
- Tangible/transparent
- Actionable
- User-friendly (specific & personalized)
- Timely
- Ongoing
- Consistent

We also began to notice that there are certain elements of quality feedback that take place during different periods of time. We decided to dissect quality feedback into “Pre-Feedback,” “During Feedback,” and “Post-Feedback.” Here’s how we segregated these parts (although you will notice that many of the elements are repeated throughout each phase):

Pre-Feedback:

- Classroom environment: Establish a classroom setting in which the students...
 - see the teacher acknowledging her own difficulties, errors and mistakes
 - persevere when faced with challenges
 - are metacognitive
 - understand that knowledge is not fixed
 - have choice, as it leads to intrinsic motivation to learn
 - have meaningful conferences and conversations with peers and teachers
 - create rubrics with the teacher
- Goal-referenced: students need to know what they're trying to learn
- Tangible/transparent: specific language regarding goals
- User-friendly: language is understood by students

During Feedback:

- Timely: must happen at a time when students can act upon the feedback in order to change the results of their learning
- User-friendly/specific:
 - what will improve one student's learning will not necessarily improve another student's learning
 - name 1 or 2 key elements that if changed will yield immediate and noticeable improvement
- Goal-referenced: make sure feedback is aligned to the learning target
- Errors vs. mistakes: Focus on errors (which are due to a lack of knowledge), instead of mistakes (which are due to a lack of attention). One can identify patterns in student errors, and target instruction or intervention based upon specific areas of student need
- "Positive" doesn't mean praising:

Positive feedback motivates students and gives them the tools to improve. Teachers often confuse being positive with providing praise. They are not the same...If we praise a student who's fully engaged, we simply distract her and suggest that her real goal should be to please us... Ordinarily, teachers don't need praise to make a student feel good about the book he has just made or the math problem she has solved. We can just point out what was accomplished and ask, "How did you do that?"¹

Post-Feedback:

- Timely/Actionable: immediate opportunity for student to use/apply feedback
- Formative vs. summative guidance: Formative guidance helps students focus upon improving their own learning, instead of focusing upon the outcome, such as their final grade
- Managing feedback
 - Balance of feedback groupings (large group, small group, individual)
 - Record-keeping options: rubrics, checklists, etc.
 - Choose carefully: product or process
 - Focus on a section of work vs. the whole piece/assignment

¹ "Guiding the Budding Writer," Educational Leadership, September, 2012, 67.

Implications:

We are more aware than ever that we need to be mindful of the criteria of quality feedback, which we can begin implementing at the start of the school year. Looking to the future, we hope to provide feedback that is goal-referenced, user-friendly, encouraging, timely and consistent. In addition, we would like to teach our students to be comfortable and capable at providing each other with quality feedback. Finally, we plan to continue our research and keep an on-going dialogue with each other as we continue to grow as both teachers and learners.

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