

Research Paper 1 (AFL in Practice Dylan Wiliam et al – Effective Feedback)

The findings below deal with the ways in which effective feedback can impact greatly on pupil progression.

Feedback

Various research studies have concluded that feedback is more useful when it focuses on the **learning intention** of the task, rather than other features of the work. However, research also shows that most teachers give feedback to children about four other features of their work before, or even instead of, the learning intention of the task:

- Presentation (handwriting/neatness)
- Surface features of writing (full stops, capital letters and especially spelling)
- Quantity
- Effort

It is easy to see why this happens: those aspects are most noticeable in children's work at first sight. They are also relatively straightforward to deal with. Ironically, these are the very things teachers accuse parents of focusing on at parents' evenings.

Therefore it is important that the feedback given to pupils concentrates on the learning identified through LI and more importantly how to be successful in achieving the LI.

Marking – Using Writing as an example

Research shows that marking is often directly responsible for **regression** in many pupils, and that traditional practice tends to demoralise and overwhelm pupils, with children often making no sense of it. Bearing in mind the urgent need to improve children's writing in particular is timely to begin to reconsider current beliefs and practices in marking.

The problems...

Stuck in a rut

One of the problems about marking is that teachers are often embedded in a way of working which is hard to break. Teachers have typically marked children's work by automatically correcting spelling errors and other surface features, acting as a copy editor in a publishing firm, then providing comments at the end. The information is too much for children to process. Teachers often feel that they are marking for an inspector or for parents, when the main purpose of the marking feedback should be to give information to *children* about how well they did against the learning intention.

Marking should aim to move the learning forward in achieving the LI/SC

Giving children too many criteria at the beginning of a task

After sharing learning intentions and making sure children know what to do, it is often the case that the children are then given up to six more learning intentions to pay attention to (*e.g. 'What I'm looking for in this letter to the Prime Minister is that you have used persuasive language. Oh, and don't forget your best handwriting, correct spellings, capital letters and full-stops, grammar, punctuation and paragraphs.'*) Children now have seven criteria to deal with in perhaps 20 or 30 minutes.

Research shows that, in these circumstances, children pay most attention to what the teacher makes clear, by their actions, means the most to them. So a teacher who continually mentions handwriting will have beautiful handwriting in their class, but the children will be producing less work than they could. Always focusing on handwriting slows children down.

The same is true for spelling. Research shows that children can only spell correctly words that they *know* how to spell, so it is of little use to tell them to make sure their spelling are correct. Children learn to spell by the specific teaching of spelling (word-and sentence-level work), by looking at patterns and doing work where a spelling rule is the learning intention, and also by reading. Asking children to check spellings continuously only leads to spelling becoming too dominant in the writing process. Children worry disproportionately about their spelling and get out of their seats to look up words, often talking to other children on their way. They have by then often lost the thread of their sentence. Ironically, copying out the correct spelling in their work from the dictionary does not then help them to spell that word correctly the next time they want to use it. It has wasted their time. Worrying about spelling also stops children trying adventurous words and can lead to misspelt words being 'corrected' by them to an alternative misspelt word, or worse, a correct spelling can be 'corrected' by the child so that it is then misspelt.

Expecting children to apply all the criteria they have ever been taught for every piece of working means that we are treating every piece of writing *as a test*. It is only in test situations that we ask children to apply all their learnt skills. Imagine making every mathematics lesson a maths test! We know that children's maths progress would be very slow, as has been evident in children's writing. In maths we introduce one skill at a time, teach children to develop that skill, later make sure they apply it and, at regular intervals, test it. We need to do the same with writing, giving children feedback from the learning intention only, ignoring spellings and other features, unless that is the learning intention. On a regular basis we need to ask children to apply all they know about writing in a test essay. Many schools have extended writing lessons every week where children operate in these conditions. Literacy advisors have pointed out that this is not a good idea, because it simply gives children time to practise more of their mistakes, so once every four weeks or half a term would seem more appropriate. In the meantime, we need to be focusing on specific aspects of writing in order to help children develop their skills.

Giving too much feedback at the end

Having given many criteria at the beginning of the task, we often then give children too much information through marking, which is overwhelming and difficult for children to take in. They are often demoralised by it, especially if there are many spelling errors pointed out when the child's writing was in fact very good.

One of the most important research findings is that grading every piece of work is counterproductive. This mainly applies to secondary schools of course, but there are parallels in primary schools. Grades freeze children in to 'ego-related mode' rather than 'task-related mode'. Anyone who gets B or above is likely to feel complacent and anyone with B minus or below tends to feel demoralised. Grades beg instant comparisons with classmates, again leading to complacency and demoralisation. Children ignore marking *comments* when a grade or symbol is present, because that becomes the most important measure of their ability and achievement. Instead, research shows that children should be given information about where they achieved success against the learning intention and where they could improve against the learning intention – both at the same time. For instance, given a learning intention of using effective objectives, we might say '*These are the three best adjectives you used and this one needs improving.*' Pointing out the success of the adjectives, then stating that the spelling could be improved, does not fit this formula. Every now and again children do need to know where their work lies in comparison with a standard – but not for every piece of work.

Distance Marking

Distance marking – marking away from the children because there is simply no alternative – takes up much of teachers' lives. Much of my specific research has focused on ways to make distance marking more manageable for teachers and more meaningful and accessible for children. Research about distance marking shows that children need to be able to *read* the teacher's comments and ***understand*** them. Understanding is often absent, and only the most confident and able children ask teachers to explain marking comments to them. Most children do not ask because they do not want to lose face by making the teacher think they do not understand what she has written.

Children also need to be given set lesson time to read marking comments, and then a short period of time to make a small, focused improvement based on the comments. Without the feedback information being used by the child, the improvement suggestion is unlikely to be carried over to future work in different contexts. For instance, writing '*You could say more about the prince*' will only be worthwhile if the child is then asked to use this prompt to write another sentence about the prince, thus improving the working against the learning intention.

Sadler (1989), in his paper about formative assessment, established three conditions for effective feedback to take place:

- the child must first know the **purpose** of the task
- then how far they **achieved** the task
- finally how to move closer towards the desired goal, or how to '**close the gap**' between **what they have done and what they could do**.

It is often the case that, instead of giving specific concrete strategies to help children move from what they have achieved to what we want them to achieve, teachers instead simply reiterate the desired goal. For example, '*You need to give a better description here*' merely reiterates the learning goal of 'write a descriptive story opening'. Better advice would be that which focuses on how to improve the description (e.g. '*What was the prince wearing?*', '*Could you describe just the prince's face?*').

MARKING AND FEEDBACK POLICY

Mission Statement

We believe feedback and marking should provide constructive feedback to every child, focusing on success and improvement needs against learning intentions; enabling children to become reflective learners and helping them to close the gap between current and desired progress.

Principles

Marking and feedback should:

- Be manageable for teachers
- Relate to learning intentions, which need to be shared with children
- Involve all adults working with children in the classroom
- Give children opportunities to become aware of and reflect on their learning needs
- Give recognition and appropriate praise for achievement
- Give clear strategies for improvement
- Allow specific time for children to read, reflect and respond to marking
- Involve children in the same process (whether oral or written), to ensure equity across subjects and abilities
- Respond to individual learning needs, marking face-to-face with some and at a distance from others
- Inform future planning and individual target settings
- Be accessible to children
- Use consistent codes throughout the school
- Ultimately be seen by children as positive in improving their learning
- Encourage and teach children to self-mark wherever possible

Strategies

Summative feedback/marking

This usually consists of ticks and crosses and is associated with closed tasks or exercises. Wherever possible, children should self-mark or the work should be marked as a class or in groups

Formative feedback/marking

With oral feedback, in the course of a lesson, teachers' comments to children should focus firstly on issues about the learning intention and secondly, and in a whisper, or other features

Quality marking

Not all pieces of work can be 'quality marked'. Teachers need to decide whether work will simply be acknowledged or given detailed attention.

Wherever the task is open or narrative, feedback should focus first and foremost on the learning intention of the task. The emphasis in marking should be on both success against the learning intention and improvement needs against the learning intention. Focused comment should help the child in 'closing the gap' between what they have achieved and what they could have achieved (e.g. *'What else could you say about the print?'*, *'Say something about the prince's personality'*, *'Try one of these words: handsome, elegant, arrogant'*). With English narrative writing, codes can save time and make the feedback more accessible to the child: highlight three things (maybe two or even one per child with younger children) which are best against the learning intention and put an arrows where improvement against the learning intention could take place, including a 'closing the gap' comment. Where codes are inappropriate, success and improvement should be pointed out verbally or in written form. Useful 'closing the gap' comments are:

- A **reminder** prompt (e.g. *'What else could you say here?'*)
- A **scaffolded** prompt (e.g. *'what was the dog's tail doing?'*, *'The dog was angry so he...'*, *'Describe the expression on the dog's face'*).
- An **example** prompt (e.g. *'Choose one of these or your own: He ran round in circles looking for the rabbit/The dog couldn't believe his eyes'*).

Secretarial features

Spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc., should not be asked for in every piece of narrative writing, because children cannot effectively focus on too many things in one space of time. When work is finished, ask children to check for things *they know are wrong in their work* when they read it through. They should not be told to correct all spellings, or they are likely to write further misspellings or waste time looking words up.

Only given children feedback about those things you have asked them to pay attention to. This will mean that some aspects of writing are unmarked, but over time will be marked.

Self-marking

Children should self-evaluate wherever possible. Children can identify their own three successes and look for improvement points. The plenary can then focus on this process as a way of analysing the learning.

Shared marking

Using one piece of work from a child in another class to mark as a class, using OHP, at regular intervals, models the marking process and teaches particular points at the same time.

Another strategy is to show two pieces of levelled work, with the same title, and discuss their differences.

Paired Marking

Before ends of lessons, children should sometimes be asked to mark narrative works in pairs. The following points are important:

- Paired marking should not be introduced until Key Stage 2, unless teachers feel younger children are ready for this
- Children need to be trained to do this, through modelling with the whole class, watching the paired marking in action
- Ground rules (e.g. listening, interruptions, confidentiality, etc.) should be decided, then put up as a poster
- Children should, alternately point out what they like first, holding the highlighter pen, and then suggest ways to improve the piece, but only against the learning intention and not spellings, etc. The 3:1 success to improvement ratio should be followed, to avoid over-criticism.
- Pairings need to be based on someone you trust – best decided by teacher
- Pairings should be ability based, of two middle, two brighter or one middle and one lower together
- Encourage dialogue between children rather than taking turns to be the 'teacher': they should discuss each other's work together (e.g. *'I think this bit really shows how that character feels, what do you think?'*)

Organisation

- The first 5-10 minutes of a lesson should, wherever possible, be used to get around the class to establish understanding and act on it where the work is too easy or too difficult.
- Where possible, children should be encouraged to self-mark
- Set less work, especially in literacy and mathematics, so that time can be allowed to go through work and mark as a class
- Wherever class discussion takes place, feedback is given orally. Notes might also be necessary to inform future planning as a result of the discussion findings

- Children need to have some feedback about their work, but flexibility is important, depending on the nature of the task and the time available
- Distance marking should be assessable to children and manageable for teachers. Use codes against learning intentions wherever possible
- When work has been distance marked, time should be given to children to read and then make one focused improvement based on the improvement suggestion (linked with the arrow when codes are used). In order for the marking to be formative, the information must be used and acted on by the children.

Research Paper 2 – Tom Sherrington

Five Ways of Giving Effective Feedback as Actions

If teachers are going to have a significant impact with the feedback they give, it needs to lead to improved outcomes for students. Feedback needs to be constituted less in terms of a review of what has gone before and more in terms of very specific actions that students should take in order to move forward.

Too much effort is wasted in describing the work students produce or in giving generic wishful evaluative feedback – along the lines of ‘you need to improve the structure of your paragraphs’ or ‘try to include more original ideas’. Some of the **even better if** feedback observed amounts to little more than telling students to ‘get the answers right’ or ‘try to produce better work’. Instead of running the risk of giving vague unactionable feedback, teachers should focus much more on **allocating tasks to students that address their learning needs. A student should be able to read or hear their teacher’s feedback and then do something very specific and concrete that will improve their learning.**

To keep this very simple – using only words beginning with R, because that’s how it started to fall out – I think there are broadly five main types of actions that students should be asked to take after their work has been evaluated:

1. Redraft or Re-do

- Redraft this piece of work / this paragraph/ this graph.... by doing X, by adding Y, by correcting Z...
- Re-do this piece of work but this time make sure you include X, you measure Y, you state Z correctly....
- Redrafting is very powerful provided that the actions are very specific and the scale of the task is manageable for both teacher and student.

2. Rehearse or Repeat

As any musician will know, the feedback from most instrumental lessons is to practise something specific: some scales, sections of the piece, some finger exercises, a performance, each time paying attention to some very particular skill element for additional fluency. This could work for many subjects including Maths:

Practise your number bonds to 100 with these questions... Practise factorising basic common expressions by doing these questions... In French or English, you could practise writing certain type of sentence: Rehearse your use of future tense/dialogue markers/fronted adverbials/connectives – by re-writing these 20 statements adding the appropriate phrase, punctuation – or anything that can be done repeatedly. - Note, it is no good asking most students to simply ‘practise doing X’. They need to be given specific questions so that they are doing X at right level of difficulty and at the right pace and scale. It is also no good giving them lots of one-off questions.

3. Revisit and Respond

Very simply, this means ‘do these questions’. It means, on the basis of what I’m seeing, you need more practice answering questions like this. It could mean going back over fundamentals or being given extension questions. Instead of a commentary on what students have done before, teachers simply issue new questions informed by their reading of student work or their test performances. This replaces a focus on retrospective marking with the proactive forward-looking approach of issuing questions or giving students work to do. Quite a big shift in emphasis but one that is likely to have much greater impact.

4. Re-learn and Re-test

This is very simply a case of specifying a set of knowledge and asking students to return to the routines of retrieval practice. They may need to re-visit previous learning too but mainly it is a case of self-quizzing repeatedly using a variety of memory techniques to ensure certain ideas, words, equations, facts, details, quotations – are learned.

It is a very specific form of feedback: you still don’t know all of the facts: go and learn them; prepare for a mini-test. That might be more productive as feedback for a history or geography essay than any number of comments on their paragraph structure.

5. Research and Record

Here students may have some issues with the scope of their exposure to ideas and are showing the need to show deeper insight, wider references, more imagination. The solution to this could be more reading or more research of a different kind. However the instruction to do “more research” could be horribly unproductive or lead down too many blind alleys. Teachers could specify what reading should be done or where exactly students should research – but also require them to record their findings.

If you reconstitute all feedback so that any students can receive it and know precisely what they now need to do in detail, then you have cracked it. This can replace any number of evaluative comments on previous work.

Research Paper 3 – Harry Fletcher Wood

Responsive teaching = formative assessment

Incorporating cognitive science

Cognitive science helped me focus on what students were to learn, and offered valuable guidance in the importance of setting clear objectives and planning learning carefully. This may not sound 'responsive', but we can only respond meaningfully to students' progress if we have a clear goal towards which they are progressing.

Cognitive science provided a robust evidence base which – in places – formative assessment seemed to lack. I found fewer rigorous studies of formative assessment strategies than I had expected; but I found numerous studies in cognitive science, many of which showed the value of formative assessment techniques. For example, I found very few studies testing sharing learning intentions, but I found numerous experiments which tested sharing models to show students what success looks like. Cognitive science offered some rigorous tests for some of the key ideas in formative assessment.

Idea 2: Responsive teaching = cognitive science + formative assessment

This was perfect, but for one crucial, missing element.

Understanding responsiveness

What about the title? What is 'responsiveness', and why does it matter? I submitted the manuscript for [Responsive Teaching](#) to my publisher in November. I stumbled upon research addressing this question only in March, too late to include in the book. Harry Reis reviewed the development of 'relationship science', and defined responsiveness as the feeling that we are interacting with someone who is: "cognizant of, sensitive to, and behaviorally supportive of the self (2007, p.9)". This maps fairly clearly to responsive teaching:

- "Cognizant of" – aware of how students are: what have they understood? Where are they stuck? What do they need?
- "Sensitive to" – caring about how students are doing; accepting that missteps and misconceptions are inevitable in learning and that it is our duty as teachers to help students beyond them
- "Behaviorally supportive" – taking steps to support students: adapting teaching to meet their needs.

Why does responsive teaching matter?

I had believed there were two reasons for pursuing responsive teaching:

- Cognitive science shows the value of clear objectives and carefully planned learning
- Formative assessment suggests the value of identifying what students have learned and adapting accordingly

Reis convinced me of something more. He suggests that perceived responsiveness is the "central organizing principle" in understanding relationships. People who believe they are interacting with someone responsive tend to feel better and do better. Most of Reis's examples relate to

interactions in private life, but he finds the same principle at work among medical patients, who do better if they perceive their doctors to be responsive. Reis distinguishes between:

- Responsiveness – which improves relationships
- Unresponsiveness – which worsens them, and
- Blindly offering care – which is egoistical for the giver, and does not improve relationships.

For teachers, awareness of exactly what students need, and responsiveness to this – rather than indiscriminately providing support – is therefore critical. So, responsiveness can help us both to support students and to improve our relationships with them.

Conclusion

Responsive teaching therefore combines:

- An evidence base from cognitive science
- Two decades experience from formative assessment
- The 'central organising principle' of relationships

So my working definition – **responsive teaching is:**

1. Setting clear goals and planning learning carefully
2. Identifying what students have understood and where they are struggling
3. Responding, adapting our teaching to support students to do better.