

Speaker Notes: Workshop 3: FORMATIVE FEEDBACK

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These are the learning intentions for this workshop

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More recently John Hattie has identified the 3 most important elements for effective teaching and learning as

1. Sharing clear goals with the students (so that they know where they are going and why)
2. Sharing success criteria (so they can recognise when they have achieved the learning goal and what success looks like)
3. Rapid formative feedback (to help them move forward)

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This is a description of formative feedback from Black & William.

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The defining feature of formative feedback is the presence of comments and advice on how to improve.

That being the case, these are the three elements that all formative feedback should contain:

1. What has been done well (related to the agreed features of quality)
2. What has been less successful
3. One or two suggestions on how improvement can be made

Note that it's this advice on how to improve that is critical. To be truly formative, the feedback must inform the next steps in the learning process. It must be 'actionable'. To suggest 'work harder' isn't enough. Formative feedback needs to point them towards ways to realise the improvement and reach the goal.

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Now let's talk about why formative feedback is so important.

Why is a teacher comment often more useful than simply providing the student with a mark or grade?

A mark or grade doesn't tell the student what they did or didn't do well or how to do better next time, whereas effective feedback comments from the teacher are more likely to

support the student in their future learning.

In addition, overemphasis on, and overuse of, grades and marks can create a competitive culture in your classroom. Research indicates that this leads to high achievers becoming complacent and low achievers becoming demotivated.

Carol Dweck's work on students motivation found that feedback in the form of gold stars, grades, or place-in-class ranking focuses students on performance rather than their own learning. As a result, students actively avoid taking risks and challenging themselves during new learning in order to ensure they secure the reward and protect their egos.

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The approaches to formative feedback referred to and explored further in the accompanying booklet can be facilitated through feedback that is delivered through oral and written means.

Oral feedback is usually given during the lesson

It provides feedback that is responsive to the individual student

Oral feedback can be underestimated because it is less formal, but it can be a very powerful and effective tool.

It's also interactive, allowing students to respond and participate.

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The second type of feedback is written feedback which tends to be given after a task or piece of homework has been completed.

Usually, this feedback takes the form of a mark or a grade with no supporting comment **or** a mark or grade supported by a comment **or** a comment only.

The research on the impact on how students respond to feedback is explored in the next slides.

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This table shows that written feedback in the form of comments only is actually the most effective method for improving learning. This is because when comments are accompanied

by marks, students tend to ignore the comments. In fact, what is the first thing students look at when they receive marks with a comment? They look at their mark.

And what is the second thing they look at? They compare it to their friends' mark!

The findings you see on this slide, are from two Israeli studies referred to by Black and Wiliam. This was also a key finding in the King's College research and is backed by findings in a range of countries.

So what does this imply for our practice?

Does it mean getting rid of marks and writing detailed comments on each piece of student work? No.

It's not necessary to apply comment-only marking to every piece of work, but it is a strategy that should be built into assessment on a regular basis. And while students may express disquiet at first about not always getting a mark, you can calm their anxieties by letting them know that you are keeping a record of their marks and comments and you can share those with them and their parents at set times.

Students will still receive summative marks/grades from time to time, but perhaps it's worth asking, have we, and our students, become over-reliant upon marks?

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4 things to avoid when giving feedback are

Giving too much – as this only causes a student to feel overwhelmed. Even though there may be many things you'd like to comment upon, try to stick to 2 things the student did well and one thing you'd like to see him/her improve upon.

Too little – Ticks, gold stars, and comments like 'good', 'very good', or 'excellent' may give a student a brief ego boost, but they won't provide any information on what exactly the student did well or how the student might do better next time.

Too vague – such as 'watch your punctuation' – is not helpful because the student may not genuinely know what is wrong with their punctuation. A student needs to know specifically what to watch out for. So a better piece of feedback would be: 'Make sure you only use capital letters at the start of each new sentence and when using proper nouns.'

Finally, if feedback is **too late** – in other words, if it comes after the learner has moved on to the next thing, then the learner will not have the opportunity to take the feedback on board and use it to improve. Ideally, formative feedback should take place during the learning.

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Students need time and practice in order to be able to give good feedback to each other.

You may need to begin by providing guidance on how to provide useful and sensitive feedback or work on developing listening skills if students are giving feedback in a group.

It is well worth the effort to support students in giving feedback as students can benefit greatly from both giving and receiving peer feedback.

See the workshop booklet (03), discussion card 3 for specific ideas on how to help students develop this skill.

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Whether it is a teacher or a student who is giving feedback, these are some of the characteristics of quality feedback

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That's the end of this presentation. Here are just a few thoughts to take away with you.

The last bullet is particularly important as you all try to introduce this in your classrooms.

You will not be able to give detailed oral or comment-only written feedback on every piece of work. To begin, you could try choosing one occasion a month for comment-only marking or spread the load by focusing on one group of students at a time.

Whichever approach you introduce, using a formative approach to feedback can make learning more beneficial to students.

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Now you are ready to move into the workshop materials, using booklet 03. The workshop will facilitate further discussion and provide practical ideas on how to provide better feedback to your students.

