The language of feedback
Empowering learner autonomy

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Session objectives:

Together, we shall think critically about:

• the language of feedback used in the classroom
• strategies to imbibe the language of feedback in the teaching and learning process
• the role of feedback in Assessment for Learning (AfL)
What comes to your mind when you see/hear the word... LANGUAGE?
7–38–55 RULE OF COMMUNICATION

**WORDS**
7% SPOKEN WORDS

**VOICE TONE**
38% VOICE TONE

**BODY LANGUAGE**
55% BODY LANGUAGE
How would you describe the word...

FEEDBACK?
Context is everything!

Cambridge works with schools worldwide to build an education that shapes knowledge, understanding and skills. Together, we give learners the confidence they need to thrive and make a positive impact in a changing world.
Think:

• Who is your learner?
• What opportunities are you devising to promote lifelong learning in your classroom?
• How are you developing open-mindedness through the classroom talk?
• Why is it essential to address individual learning needs and styles of our learners?
Think further...

Marc Prensky (2001) in *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* says:

‘Our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.’

‘Today’s students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors. These differences go far further and deeper than most educators suspect or realize.’
Why are some learners not motivated to learn?

A survey for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the United States, “The Silent Epidemic, Perspectives of High School Dropouts” (Bridgeland et al. 2006) pointed out that:

“most dropouts are students who could have and believe they could have succeeded in school...the general reasons they fail remain constant – a lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academic challenges and the weight of the real-world events.”
Engage me or enrage me...

Marc Prensky (2001) points out the types of learners:

- those who are truly self-motivated
- those who are going through the motions
- those who believe that what they are being taught is of little relevance to their lives but also realise that they need their qualifications for the future
- those who increasingly “tune out” or lose interest, convinced that school is devoid of relevance to their lives.
Evolving classrooms...
Evolving conversations.

Recall a typical school day.

- What interactions do you hold with your learner(s) during the day?
- Are the discussions always around academics?
- What else do you talk about?
- Can you note down three prominent topics you discussed with your learner(s) in the last week?
Feedback – a constructive tool in the classroom

Culture of mindful feedback

Could you suggest at least one strategy to foster the culture of mindful feedback in your classroom/your school?

What kind of language will the adults and learners use while providing feedback to each other?

Be as specific as you can in the response you share.
Padlet QR code:
In a nutshell:

The language of feedback in the everyday classroom situation plays a significant role.

It can be fostered by:

• Promoting interactions and relationships with learners/amongst learners that are based on mutual respect, care, empathy and trust.

• Avoiding negative/prejudiced/biased emotions in interactions with learners.

• Being sensitive to their individual needs, culture and beliefs can foster a culture of feedback.

• Promoting learner motivation through feelings of competence, autonomy and belonging.
The Cambridge Attributes

- **confident** in working with information and ideas – their own and those of others
- **responsible** for themselves, responsive to and respectful of others
- **reflective** and developing their ability to learn
- **innovative** and equipped for new and future challenges
- **engaged** intellectually and socially, ready to make a difference…
Could you draw some correlation between the Cambridge Attributes and feedback as a tool to learn? How can these attributes build a strong and positive language of feedback in school? Some responses:

1. **Confident Learners:**
   1. A strong feedback language instills confidence by emphasizing students' strengths and achievements while providing constructive guidance for improvement.
   2. Encouraging students to take risks and learn from mistakes fosters a growth mindset, where feedback is seen as an opportunity for growth rather than a critique.

2. **Responsible Learners:**
   1. Responsibility in the feedback process involves both giving and receiving feedback thoughtfully and respectfully.
   2. Students learn to provide feedback that is constructive and considerate of others' feelings, promoting a positive and supportive feedback culture.
   3. Taking responsibility for one's learning journey includes actively seeking feedback, reflecting on it, and using it to set goals and make progress.

3. **Reflective Learners:**
   1. Reflection is essential in developing a strong feedback language. Students learn to reflect on their own work and progress, as well as the feedback received from others.
   2. By encouraging students to reflect on the feedback they provide and receive, educators help them understand its significance and how it can inform their learning.
   3. Reflective learners develop the ability to articulate their thoughts and ideas effectively, enhancing their communication skills in giving and receiving feedback.

4. **Innovative Learners:**
   1. Innovation thrives in an environment where feedback is valued and encouraged.
   2. Students are empowered to think creatively and explore new approaches based on the feedback they receive, leading to innovative solutions and insights.
   3. Feedback that promotes innovation focuses on fostering a growth mindset, encouraging experimentation, and celebrating diverse perspectives and ideas.

5. **Engaged Learners:**
   1. Engagement is key to fostering a positive feedback culture in school.
   2. When students are engaged in their learning and invested in their progress, they are more receptive to feedback and actively seek opportunities for improvement.
   3. Feedback that is meaningful, relevant, and timely keeps students engaged and motivated, driving continuous growth and learning.

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Further reading…
Further reading…

Encouraging student voice

Student voice is the active engagement of young people in their education via opportunities for them to share perspectives about their learning. Encouraging student voice helps to promote autonomy and engagement by making sure students are fully engaged in the learning process.

There are many ways we can develop student voice in an online setting.

Encourage communication in the online space you are using
You are the role model here, so you should demonstrate the type of interactions that you want to encourage. Where possible address students by name and provide them with appropriate opportunities to contact you. Contact with your students may take a whole range of formats but should always be welcoming and encouraging of their thoughts and questions. Establishing effective ways for students to share is key to encouraging student voice online.

Recognise the challenges that your students may be facing
Not all your students will have the same experience or expertise related to online learning. Create opportunities for students to share what they do and do not understand about their current situation by asking open-ended questions such as ‘How are you feeling about learning biology away from school?’ Asking open-ended questions like this avoids any assumptions on your part and allows you to gain valuable feedback. Their responses should help you to gauge the work you are asking and how they are engaging with it.

Be responsive to your students
Do not be afraid to encourage your students to give you feedback on your online teaching. Show that their contributions are valued by making relevant adjustments to how you are teaching and explaining how their feedback informed the changes. Doing this helps students to feel that they have the opportunity to shape their learning environment. Seeing the impact of suggestions from students will motivate others to engage as well as encourage those who already have to continue doing so.

Support your students
In an online setting, students may feel they have fewer opportunities to interact with you and gain direct support. Make sure you provide time and space for them to ask clarifying questions related to the tasks you have set. You could arrange one-to-one follow-up chats or set up discussion groups. The creation of groups gives students the opportunity to offer peer support, and you may want to encourage them to share questions with each other before coming to you. If you monitor these groups, you can use your time effectively by responding to common questions in one place. Their questions should allow you to judge the tasks you have set and alter them if necessary.
Making connections - Strategies to implement language of feedback in teaching, learning and assessment
The Cambridge Teacher Standards

- Domain 1: Teacher values and attributes
- Domain 2: Classroom culture and environment
- Domain 3: Teaching skills and practices
- Domain 4: Innovation and improvement in teaching and learning
- Domain 5: Community engagement

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Why these two standards?

Classroom culture and environment

Teachers:

Standard 1 create a classroom culture and environment where all students are supported in their learning
Standard 2 establish positive and productive relationships with all students to support their learning and achievement
Standard 3 have high expectations of themselves in their professional practice
Standard 4 have high expectations of all students
Standard 5 work effectively with colleagues to develop the curriculum and enhance student learning.

Teaching skills and practices

Teachers:

Standard 1 demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how students learn and how this impacts on teaching
Standard 2 demonstrate secure content knowledge and pedagogy to plan coherent, authentic and engaging learning programmes and lessons
Standard 3 have a deep understanding of the diverse needs of students and adapt their practice accordingly
Standard 4 orientate their students and ensure they are ready to learn
Standard 5 use effective teaching strategies to motivate, challenge and extend student learning
Standard 6 use a range of assessment strategies to inform next steps in the teaching and learning process and to provide timely, accurate and constructive feedback
Standard 7 use summative assessment to understand student progress and attainment
Standard 8 manage time effectively and ensure the classroom is free from disruption.
Assessment for Learning (AfL)

- **Where the learner is going**: Sharing learning intentions and success criteria
- **Where the learner is now**: Gaining evidence of learning
- **How can the learner get there?**: Providing feedback, helping learners to take their next steps
Assessment for learning

Assessment for learning (AFL) is an approach, integrated into teaching and learning, which creates feedback for students and teachers in order to improve learning and guide their next steps.

What does assessment for learning mean?
AFL focuses on both the teacher and student understanding three key things:
1. Where the learner is going: sharing the aims of a lesson and success criteria helps learners to see what they are aiming for and what they need to do to achieve those aims.
2. Where the learner is: Assessment, such as effective questioning, will help teachers to gauge what individuals and groups have learnt during a lesson, generating evidence of learning that both teachers and students can make use of.
3. How can the learner get there? Teachers use the evidence of learning to inform choices about what they will do next with a class or individual students. Learners can use this evidence to make decisions about their learning, such as how to spend their independent study time.

AFL is concerned with maximising the feedback process (teacher to student and student to teacher) to optimise student learning. Feedback ranges from the informal (e.g. oral comments given immediately to learners as they think through problems), to more formal (e.g. written feedback given after an end of topic test). AFL also involves high-quality peer and self-assessment where learners or peers may be involved in making decisions about future learning needs (Belland, 2010).

The term ‘assessment for learning’ became popular in the 1990s. At this time there was concern that learners were being over-assessed and that there was a disproportionate focus on end results (assessment of learning) rather than on assessment processes that could actively enable learners to make progress. Both assessment for learning and assessment of learning are valuable to education, but they have different purposes.
Language of Feedback

Teaching, Learning, Assessment

Case study 1 – Grade 6:

In a writing class, the teacher gives students a performance task of writing a newspaper report. The work is done when it is ‘up to professional writing standards’ for the sample newspaper report. The students receive a description of the standard in writing with a model response. But the main information is the last part.

“When you think your writing is up to standard, put it on this table, and sign it with your favourite colour pen – signifying it is up to standard.”

On the table, students will also find some newspaper reports up to standard from previous students and some that are not, marked as such.

A student thought he was ready. But upon getting to the table and closely inspecting all the sample newspaper reports on the table, he went back to his table (having realised his was not up to standard) to work further.
Case study 2 – Grade 9:

At half-time of every football game, the coach asks the players:

- What’s working for us?
- What’s not working for us?
- What’s working for the other team?

Players answer the questions, and they propose the advice that follows from the feedback on what to work on in the second half.

The same questions are asked again and discussed the next day in practice in the post-mortem of the game, with the coach asking players to re-create successes and failures in walk-thru simulations.
Case study 3 – Grade 1:

In a class of 1st graders, students in pairs create a simple map of the whole school, with concentration on a map of a room in the building. The map’s success is assessed, in part, by other students’ ability to use the map to find something, using the map key and compass rose. After each team has had others use their map, students self-assess using a few prompts with smiley faces or sad faces for each criterion to be circled, reflecting their self-assessment as to how helpful and clear their map was.
Reflect:

To what extent are these good examples of feedback strategies to assess teaching and learning?

What makes you say so?

Post your responses in the chat box.
Consolidate:

- Gaining mastery over the content (Knowledge, understanding and skills)
- Thinking deeper
- Precision and accuracy in the work produced
- Ability to communicate and collaborate
- Language awareness
- Developing creativity and critical thinking…
Evaluating – Direct Negative Feedback vs Indirect Negative Feedback

Direct negative feedback

Negative feedback to a colleague is provided frankly, bluntly, honestly. Negative messages stand alone, not softened by positive ones. Absolute descriptors are often used (totally inappropriate, completely unprofessional) when criticizing. Criticism may be given to an individual in front of a group.

Indirect negative feedback

Negative feedback to a colleague is provided softly, subtly, diplomatically. Positive messages are used to wrap negative ones. Qualifying descriptors are often used (sort of inappropriate, slightly unprofessional) when criticizing. Criticism is given only in private.
The Feedback Method

How to criticize

D. L. Cooperrider, D. Whitney

Constructive

NO, BECAUSE...

YES! AND...

Destructive

NO!

YES, BUT...

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Transactional Analysis

Which ‘I’ do you use to communicate?

Eric Berne

Where’s the toothpaste?

Probably in the bathroom cabinet.

In the freezer, where else?!

Where you usually leave it ;)

child ego state

parent ego state

adult ego state

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RAPPS Project
Further reading...

The Power of Feedback

John Hattie and Helen Timperley
University of Auckland

Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative. Its power is frequently mentioned in articles about learning and teaching, but surprisingly few recent studies have systematically investigated its meaning. This article provides a conceptual analysis of feedback and reviews the evidence related to its impact on learning and achievement. This evidence shows that although feedback is among the major influences, the type of feedback and the way it is given can be differentially effective. A model of feedback is then proposed that identifies the particular properties and circumstances that make it effective, and some typically thorny issues are discussed, including the timing of feedback and the effects of positive and negative feedback. Finally, this analysis is used to suggest ways in which feedback can be used to enhance its effectiveness in classrooms.
The term ‘feedback’ emerged around the start of the 20th century. It was coined to describe mechanisms that would allow a well-engineered system to regulate itself (e.g., when a heating system exceeded a certain temperature it turned itself off, and could restart when the temperature fell below a certain level). There is an inherent sense of control and autonomy within its original conceptualisation.

In reviewing the history of the social sciences, it is apparent that early behaviourists used feedback ideas extensively when attempting to analyse alternations in behaviour rates and probabilities. They conceived feedback as stemming from internal positive feedback or from avoidance of punishment (negative feedback). The consequence of present actions would regulate changes in the rate of future action, in accord with the goal of serving an organism’s motivational requirements; be they biological or socially defined. Inspection of such uses, the term ‘feedback’ began to be used widely, becoming an aspect of everyday vernacular well aside from its original derivation in engineering theory and practice.

Today, feedback has come to have many more expansive meanings. For instance, there are distinctions between feedback and feedforward, and it can refer not only to actual consequences but can also be self-rewarding (i.e., feedback may inspire further actions and be intrinsically rewarding within itself). Certainly, our responsiveness to feedback is seen as a key driver of behavioural adaptation. The notion of sensitive and adaptive responsiveness was one of the initial ideas investigated through psychological science methods, often resuscitated and documented under the term ‘knowledge of results’.

In broad perspective, it is not hard to locate convincing evidence pointing to feedback as a key process involved in behavioural change. For instance, military training became more accurate and less wasteful in using ammunition when provided with detailed instruction coupled with feedback, both factors being essential (Dygar, 1942). Young drivers became more careful after accidents or near accidents (Kahayu, Senker, & Thynell, 1991), and entrepreneurs often report certain positive learning effects associated with existing business failures (Polks & Geltorres, 2009). Consider, as an example, the famous Hawthorne studies where workers were paid to be part of an experiment: no matter how different independent variables were manipulated, worker productivity increased. For example, when the light in the factory was reduced, rest pauses were introduced, and group payment was changed to individual payment, still the production increased. The claim, now known as the Hawthorne effect, was that because the workers knew they were part of an experiment and being observed, their performance increased. An alternative explanation for the increased output is the feedback workers received.

Further reading...
Get in touch!

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Thank you!