

Effective feedback

By Mick Walker

In defining feedback, and this does sound obvious, but something has to happen first. Like the way bats or whales tend to use sound to listen to the echoes: sonic use. So, feedback is a reaction, it's a consequence of the performance.

I think there are two types basically, that's useful and, probably, useless. In terms of educational feedback, the purpose is generally to provide information that consolidates or improves performance

There are numerous forms of feedback - oral feedback, such as about a piece of work, observation of a task or response to a question acknowledgment, the ticking of a page to say that the work is actually being looked at and then we use things like grades or marks, and then written feedback.

There's also a physical feedback, the learners pick up on the nods and the winks and the applause and their facial expressions. The method will of course depend on the purpose and the context:

What are you trying to achieve?

Why?

So how is this best achieved?

However, feedback can have three effects on receivers, they can be:

- positive
- negative, or indeed it can be
- neutral

To have a positive effect, learners need to know where they are in their learning - what are the next steps, or possible steps, and some indication of how to get there? In other words, it works best if it is focused on confirming what is being done. Is it right or clearly indicates what needs to be done, with some indication of what can be achieved, where the learner needs to go next? This raises questions about the method and style of feedback. It's often seen as desirable to give praising feedback, but be cautious, it's likely to be well received and often engender motivation when it's genuine, but it's sometimes difficult to maintain.