

5 The effects of feedback on pupils' learning

Read the following two extracts from Black and Wiliam (1998) and respond to the questions that follow:

The dangers of giving marks, levels, rewards and rankings

“Where the classroom culture focuses on rewards, ‘gold stars’, grades or place-in-the-class ranking, then pupils look for the ways to obtain the best marks rather than at the needs of their learning which these marks ought to reflect. One reported consequence is that where they have any choice, pupils avoid difficult tasks. They also spend time and energy looking for clues to the ‘right answer’. Many are reluctant to ask questions out of fear of failure. Pupils who encounter difficulties and poor results are led to believe that they lack ability, and this belief leads them to attribute their difficulties to a defect in themselves about which they cannot do a great deal. So they ‘retire hurt’, avoid investing effort in learning which could only lead to disappointment, and try to build up their self-esteem in other ways. Whilst the high-achievers can do well in such a culture, the overall result is to enhance the frequency and the extent of under-achievement.”

- What are the implications of this for your practice?
- What would happen if you stopped giving marks or levels on pupils' work?
- Why are so many teachers resistant to making this change?

The advantages of giving clear, specific, content-focused feedback

“What is needed is a culture of success, backed by a belief that all can achieve. Formative assessment can be a powerful weapon here if it is communicated in the right way. Whilst it can help all pupils, it gives particularly good results with low achievers where it concentrates on specific problems with their work, and gives them both a clear understanding of what is wrong and achievable targets for putting it right. Pupils can accept and work with such messages, provided that they are not clouded by overtones about ability, competition and comparison with others. In summary, the message can be stated as follows:

Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils.”

- What are the implications of this for your practice?
- Does this kind of feedback necessarily take much longer to give?

Black, P., & Wiliam, D. (1998). *Inside the black box : raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: King's College London School of Education 1998.