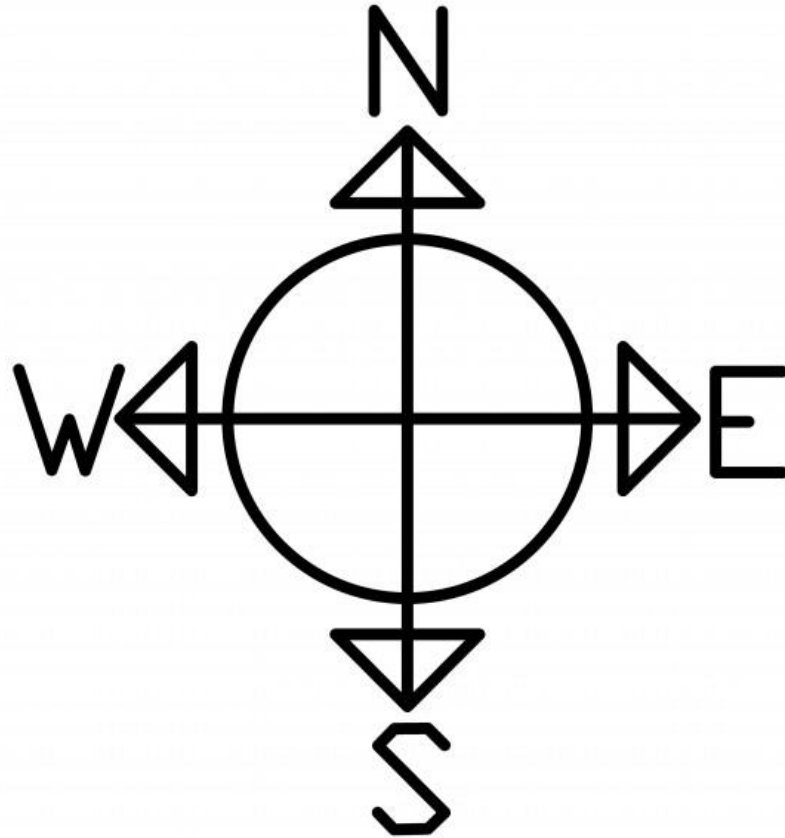


DIVISION OF
SCHOOL & DISTRICT
EFFECTIVENESS
ADVANCING LEADERSHIP | TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

Effective Feedback and Coaching

Northwest Region
ILC
February 24, 2016

Introductions



Goals for the session:

1. Be reflective about current practices.
2. Consider different approaches to providing effective feedback to teachers.
3. Consider the difference between coaching heavy and coaching light and the implications it could have in your work.

Being a principal or supervisor can sometimes feel like...



What are the top two school-based factors that contribute to student learning?

1. Teachers
2. Leaders

<http://www.ed.gov/teachers-leaders>

As you consider the fact that teachers and leaders are the most important school-based factor in increasing student achievement:

What are your greatest challenges with LKES standards 5 and 6 – Human Resource Management and Teacher/Staff Evaluation?

What do the best coaches do to ensure success?



What do the best coaches do to ensure success?

Think about the most effective coaches you know, have watched, or worked with. What are the characteristics that make that person most effective?

Are you Coaching Heavy or Light? By Joellen Killion

Four "A"s Text Protocol – As you read the article, consider the following questions:

1. What ASSUMPTIONS does the author hold?
2. What do you AGREE with?
3. What do you want to ARGUE with?
4. What do you want to ACT upon?

Coaching and Providing Feedback

What would TKES and LKES look like if teachers or leaders were constantly asking themselves, “How well are my students (teachers) doing and how can I improve my teaching (leading) so their learning (teaching) improves?”

How can you shift the thinking to focus teachers and leaders on student learning and how their practice is evaluated not on how they “perform” but how well their students achieve as a result of their performance?

Teachers and Staff Need Effective Feedback!



Seven Keys to Effective Feedback – Text Rendering Protocol

Take a few minutes to read the article. Highlight a word, phrase, and sentence that you think are particularly important to you in your work.

Seven Keys to Effective Feedback

- First Round – share a ***word*** that you feel is particularly significant in your role.
- Second Round – share a ***phrase*** that you feel is particularly significant.
- Third Round – share a ***sentence*** that you feel is particularly significant

Seven Keys to Effective Feedback

1. Goal-referenced
2. Tangible and transparent
3. Actionable
4. User-Friendly
5. Timely
6. Ongoing
7. Consistent

Coaching and Providing Feedback

- Ask for permission and state your intention
- Share one to two key points
- Give honest and direct comments while at the same time preserving relationships
- Pose reflective questions or possibilities
- Collaborate with the teacher, assistant principal, or principal on next steps

10 Coaching Questions That Work In Any Conversation

- What is the outcome you're looking to achieve here?
- Can you share the specifics of what's going on?
- What have you tried so far?
- How have you handled something like this before?
- Why do you think this is happening?

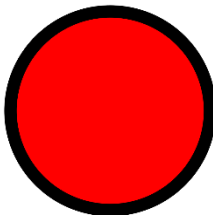
10 Coaching Questions That Work In Any Conversation

- What's your opinion on how to handle this?
- What's the first thing you need to do to resolve/achieve this?
- What resources do you need?
- What are you willing to commit to doing/trying/changing (by when)?
- When would it make sense for us to reconnect to ensure you have achieved the result you want?

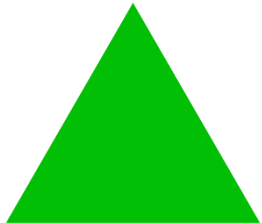
<http://keithrosen.com/2011/11/10-coaching-questions-that-work-in-any-conversation/>



What squares with your thinking



What is still rolling around in your head?



What are 3 things you can take away from this session?



Four “A”s Text Protocol

Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, Washington 2005.

Purpose

To explore a text deeply in light of one’s own values and intentions

Roles

Facilitator/timekeeper (who also participates); participants

Time

Five minutes total for each participant, plus 10 minutes for the final 2 steps.

Process

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin or on sticky notes in answer to the following 4 questions (you can also add your own “A”s).
 - What **Assumptions** does the author of the text hold?
 - What do you **Agree** with in the text?
 - What do you want to **Argue** with in the text?
 - What parts of the text do you want to **Aspire** to (or **Act** upon)?
2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.
3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining “A”s, taking them one at a time. What do people want to agree with, argue with, and aspire to (or act upon) in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one “A” to the next, giving each “A” enough time for full exploration.
4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?
5. Debrief the text experience.



Reprising coaching heavy and coaching light

Since I first wrote about coaching heavy and coaching light in the May 2008 issue of this newsletter, I have engaged in multiple conversations with coaches and their supervisors about the idea behind my original article regarding the two kinds of coaching and why I think this concept is crucial to coaches and the success of coaching.

Coaching heavy does not mean being directive, demanding, or authoritative. Heavy means substantive, weighty, valued. It means robustly engaging in the work of coaching with a laser-like focus on improving student learning. Coaching light is more focused on the teaching rather than learning. It emphasizes the sense of being supported rather than the sense of producing results. Some have even suggested that coaches cannot coach heavy without coaching light first to build relationships. Perhaps that is true for some; however, I do not subscribe to that notion.

Coaches often have the notion that they cannot have substantive conversations with their colleagues without first coaching light to build a constructive relationship. I contend that substantive conversations, held in a dialogic manner without judgment or expectations and focused on beliefs and assumptions rather than actions, does far more to build trust than any amount of coaching light. In other words, more substantive conversations about student learning increase trust.

Coaches can also establish



trust and respectful, productive relationships with teachers by giving authentic feedback supported with evidence about student learning and identifying and unpacking misconceptions.

So what do coaching light and coaching heavy look like in practice?

In practice, coaches use similar strategies for coaching light and heavy. For example, they may hold pre- and post-observation meetings with teachers before and after visiting the teacher's classroom. However, the topics and the intensity of the professional learning differ. In coaching light, the coach invites the teacher to name a focus for the observation without reference to anything other than his or her preference. In coaching heavy, the coach encourages the teacher to

select a focus for their work together, based on the content of professional learning, the school's specific improvement goals, the teacher's own performance improvement goals aligned with the district's performance standards, or student learning goals within the teacher's team or classroom.

In coaching heavy, the coach probes before agreeing, for example, with a teacher who states, "I'd like to work on formative assessment." The coach and teacher engage first in understanding specific student-learning goals and related teacher-learning goals before exploring which particular instructional practice is most likely to achieve those goals. The coach strives to build the precision of the teacher's request so that it

Continued on p. 9

Coaching light	Coaching heavy
Focus on teaching practices identified by teachers	Focus on student learning and the use of specific practices within the school's or district's instructional framework, teachers' performance standards, or aligned with the adopted curriculum
Feedback on teaching practices	Feedback on the interaction between student engagement in learning, performance, and achievement and teaching
Teacher self-assessment based on perceptions or opinions	Data-driven assessment based on student data
Voluntary coaching — only those teachers who request coaching receive it	Expectation for all teachers to engage in coaching — all teachers engage in continuous improvement with specific feedback and support from the coach
Focus on adapting or refining instructional strategies	Focus on transforming practice, examining beliefs, and testing assumptions
Focus on implementing strategies	Focus on deep understanding of the theory and research underlying strategies to ensure executive control
Emphasis on feeling supported	Emphasis on developing expertise

Continued from p. 8

becomes, “I am puzzled that students are not performing as I expect on benchmark assessments. In reality, I am not certain I have adequately assessed students. If I engage students more authentically in the learning process and use more purposeful and frequent formative assessment, I will have more evidence about students’ learning. One specific strategy that is identified in our teaching standards is assessment for learning so that I can adjust my teaching so there are no surprises on the benchmark assessments.” Coaches contribute to this type of clarity in teachers’ thinking by exploring their rationale, motivation, and expected results before providing support.

In discussing teaching, coaching light begins with, “So, how do you think it went from your perspective?” In coaching heavy, the coach begins with, “Let’s review the focus for our

work together and the reasons for selecting that. Let’s also review the data from your classroom. Let’s talk about what these data mean and what generalizations emerge from this lesson that will influence future instruction so that student learning increases.”

In meeting with teams to plan instruction, coaching light sounds like, “What instructional and learning strategies do you recommend for addressing these ideas?” Coaching heavy, on the other hand, sounds like, “What does research tell us are the most appropriate approaches to address these particular content outcomes and the needs of our learners? Let’s unpack that research and study its appropriateness for this portion of the curriculum and our students.”


Coaching heavy focuses on developing and using professional expertise of educators and deepening the body of knowledge about the field of teaching. Coaching light focuses on

pursuing areas of interest grounded in little more than preference.

Coaching heavy is based on several assumptions. First, teaching is a profession with standards of practice that are grounded in research. Coaches support teachers in linking the body of professional knowledge to their practice by examining the effects of their teaching. Second, teachers develop expertise by engaging in continuous improvement with specific feedback and ongoing opportunities to deepen professional knowledge and practice.

The differences between coaching heavy and coaching light are far from subtle and have significant implications for how coaching affects student learning and teaching.

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TT3 TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS™

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF TEACHER LEADERS



ARE YOU COACHING **HEAVY** OR **LIGHT**?

By Joellen Killion

If the primary goal of a coaching program is to improve student learning, then coaches focus their work on strengthening the quality of teaching and learning. If any of the providers of coaching — the school, the district, or the coach — is unclear about the goal of the coaching, then coaches will struggle to keep a laser-like focus on doing what matters.

I have been experimenting with how

I talk with coaches about the importance of their decisions related to how they allocate their time and services. I've come to believe that there are two kinds of coaching — coaching *light* and coaching *heavy*. The difference between them is essentially in the results produced. Aspects of a coach's belief system, the roles, and the context matter, too.

Coaching *light* results in coaches being accepted, appreciated, and even liked by their peers. When coaches' work is driven by the goal of being appreciated, coaches tend to say "yes" to services they believe will ingratiate them with staff members, particularly those who may exhibit some reluctance to working with a coach. Coaching *light* occurs when coaches want to build and maintain relationships more than they want to improve teaching and learning. From this perspective, coaches may act to increase their perceived value to teachers by providing resources *and* avoiding challenging conversations. They may provide demonstration lessons, share curriculum materials, or facilitate learning without holding an expectation that teachers apply the learning in their classrooms. While each service has value and contributes to improving teaching and learning, they can also be acts of avoidance.

From the perspective of the teacher,

WHAT'S INSIDE

NSDC tool

It's time to celebrate successes in our learning.

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Voice of a teacher leader

Bill Ferriter wonders if he is a mentor or a leader.

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Lessons from a coach

Coach Linda Sutphin forges connections in high school.

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Focus on NSDC's standards

Joellen Killion describes the Leadership standard.

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Research brief

Standards for effective pedagogy.

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coaching light feels supportive. Teachers appreciate the resources and ideas, yet they simultaneously wonder if it wouldn't be better if the coach were working directly with students. Teachers feel as if they have an advocate in the coach, someone who understands the complexity of their work and who will empathize with them. They may request the same kind of resources or support from the coach that they might ask from a classroom aide, if they had one. Teachers acknowledge that they have received strategies and ideas from the coach that are useful and that they may even try some in their classrooms. Coaches who lack confidence and courage may tread lightly in their interactions with teachers and limit the focus of their interactions to praise or to questions that merely ask teachers to recall or describe their actions.

Light coaching examples

Examples of coaching *light* include testing students, gathering leveled books for teachers to use, doing repeated demonstration lessons, finding web sites for students to use, or sharing professional publications or information about workshops or conferences. Coaching *light* can even include feedback to teachers that describes teacher behaviors rather than student learning. Sometimes, in order to build relationships and establish their credibility, coaches may compromise their influence by engaging in tasks that have limited potential for impact on teaching and learning. This is coaching light.

Coaches may be saying, “Yes, but the services you describe as coaching *light* have the potential to build trusting relationships and establish my credibility and convey to teachers that we are serious when we say, ‘We are here to help you.’” I agree that coaching *light* achieves these goals, however, there are other ways to build trusting, professionally respectful relationships and establish credibility that are grounded in tackling the difficult issues and being willing to address what has previously been “undiscussable” in schools. “How well are my students doing and how can I improve my teaching so their learning improves?” These questions are crucial in ALL schools, not just the low-achieving schools in which many coaches work.

Heavy coaching examples

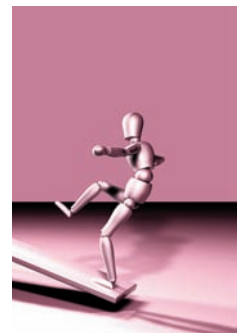
Coaching *heavy*, on the other hand, includes curriculum analysis, data analysis, instructional changes, and conversations about beliefs and how they influence practice.

Coaching *heavy*:

- Is driven by a coach’s deep commitment to improve teaching and learning, even if it means not being liked;
- Is focused on planning powerful instruction; implementing and analyzing frequent formative assessments; holding high expectations for teacher performance; and delivering a rigorous curriculum;
- Requires coaches to say “no” to trivial requests for support and to turn their attention to high-leverage services with the greatest potential for improving teaching and learning;
- Requires coaches to work with all teachers in a school, not just those who invite them to provide services; and
- Requires coaches to seek and use data about their work and regularly analyze decisions about time allocation, services, and impact.

When coaching *heavy*, coaches work outside their comfort zone and stretch their coaching skills, content knowledge, leadership skills, relationship skills, and instructional skills. They are increasingly aware of the beliefs that drive their actions and reexamine them frequently.

From a teacher’s perspective, coaching *heavy* feels heavy — in the sense of the weight of collective responsibility and commitment each teacher devotes to the success of every student. Teachers may spend more time working with teams of colleagues rather than alone to plan instruction, analyze assessment data, examine student work, conduct action research, and deprivatize their professional practices. To teachers, coaching *heavy* causes them to feel on edge, questioning their actions and decisions. This does not mean that teachers feel fear, anxiety, or dread. Rather, teachers feel a heightened sense of professionalism, excitement, increased efficacy, and satisfaction with teaching. Coaching *heavy* holds all adults responsible for student success and engages them as members of collaborative learning teams to learn, plan, reflect, analyze, and



Coaching heavy holds all adults responsible for student success and engages them as members of collaborative learning teams to learn, plan, reflect, analyze, and revise their daily teaching practices based on student learning results.

BELIEFS THAT MAY INTERFERE WITH ONE’S ABILITY TO COACH HEAVY AND POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS

Belief	Side effects
1. Being accepted gives me more leverage to work with teachers.	Working on being accepted may delay conversations on what matters most — teaching and learning.
2. Being viewed as credible is essential to being a coach.	Credibility emerges from the alignment between one’s actions and one’s words. Acting on what matters immediately builds credibility.
3. The work of coaches is to support teachers.	Saying that a coach’s role is to support teachers misleads teachers. A coach’s primary responsibility is to improve student learning.
4. Teachers resist change.	As professionals, teachers seek continuous improvement. Teachers are motivated to change when they see proven results in terms of student success. When that success becomes evident in their own classrooms, they become change enthusiasts.
5. Coaches can’t impose on teachers since they have no supervisory responsibilities.	Coaches can’t afford not to impose on what teachers believe and how that impacts their actions. Their work is too important and without conversations about beliefs, deep change is unlikely.
6. Helping teachers know about or learn how to implement new instructional strategies is a coach’s primary responsibility.	Coaches’ primary responsibility is student learning often mediated by teachers’ application of effective practices rather than knowing about or knowing how to use those practices.
7. Coaches are not responsible for what teachers do.	Coaches are responsible for helping teachers explore the beliefs that drive their actions. In dialogue, through reflective questioning, and by presenting data, coaches can influence what teachers think and do.

revise their daily teaching practices based on student learning results.

Coaching *heavy* occurs when coaches ask thought-provoking questions, uncover assumptions, and engage teachers in dialogue about their beliefs and goals rather than focusing only on teacher knowledge and skills. For example, rather than talking about what a teacher decided to do in a lesson, the coach asks the teacher to describe his or her belief about teaching, student learning, and student capacity to learn. These differences are not just subtle shifts in the way questions are worded, but rather tied directly to the coach’s desire to engage teachers in examining their mental models and how those beliefs drive their decisions and resulting behaviors. For example, rather than asking, “What did you think about when the students were unable to respond to your questions?” the coach asks, “What do you believe is the role of teacher questions in the learning process? What intentions do you hold

when asking questions in your lessons?” The purpose of interaction at the belief and goal level rather than at knowledge and skills level is to facilitate teachers’ exploration of who they are as teachers as much or more than what they do as teachers. At this level, deep reform can occur.

Refining the concept

I presented the concept of coaching *heavy* and coaching *light* to coaches in Walla Walla (Wash.) Public Schools. Where I have visualized coaching *heavy* and *light* as two ends of a seesaw with the light end in the air and the heavy end on the ground, they see an image that is more of a spiral with each revolution focusing more finitely on the target. Coaches, they said, use a blend of coaching *heavy* and *light* and with each turn they narrow their focus.

My perspective shifted as a result of listening to their thinking. Coaches may use both coaching *heavy* and coaching *light* in their repertoire of

strategies. But, beyond a few introductory weeks of coaching *light*, coaches must shift to coaching *heavy* and stay there. In this way, coaches increase the potential to significantly impact teaching practices and student learning. I will grant coaches a short period of time at the beginning of a new coaching program — when they are new to a school or when coaching is new to the school — to coach *light*. During this time, coaches assess the culture, context, and conditions in which they work. However, the shift to coaching *heavy* cannot wait long because students cannot wait for the best teaching possible.

When I talked with a team of coaches in Fairfax County (Va.) Public Schools about coaching *heavy* and coaching *light*, I expressed my uncertainty about using the words *heavy* and *light*. I told them that I worry that coaching *heavy* connotes that coaching is focused on corrective action or conveys a supervisory or evaluative orientation to coaching. This is not my intention with coaching *heavy*. Rather, the orientation is one of laser-like focus on the work of improving teaching and student learning. Like a laser, a coach focuses intense energy into a small space. That small space is the interaction that occurs between teachers and students.

These insightful coaches suggested another way to describe coaching *heavy* and coaching *light* — coaching shallow and coaching deep. I share their metaphor with my own embellishments. In shallow water, both the coach and teacher feel safe. They can touch bottom. They have a limited perspective of what it means to swim because they can still stand. In deep water, however, both the coach and the teacher, unless they are competent swimmers, are out of a comfort zone since they must depend on their swimming skills to be safe. Depending on their skills, they may experience anxiety or even fear. Coaches can provide flotation devices to reduce anxiety if necessary, yet coaches must be competent swimmers and stand ready to rescue a teacher who does not swim well. Coaches and teachers together can work on improving the strength and accuracy of their strokes so they grow as competent and confident in deep water as they are in shallow water. Eventually, non-swimmers develop a view of themselves as mas-

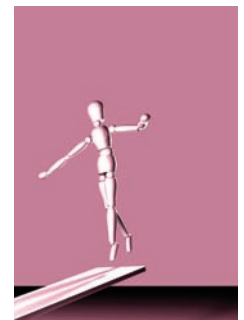
ter of both elementary and advanced swim strokes and, when they demonstrate that they have become swimmers, they navigate easily and eagerly and even for distances.

What I am asking of coaches demands that they shift from being liked and appreciated to making a difference. Coaches may need to examine their beliefs about who they are as a coach, the role of coaching in the school, and about change. These beliefs drive who they are as coaches. Coaching heavy requires that coaches move to the edge of or beyond their comfort zone and even their competence to encourage teachers to move beyond theirs as well. For some coaches, the thought of this produces tremendous anxiety. When coaches opt to stay in their own or in teachers' comfort zone too long, they limit the impact of their work and even waste their precious time and the resource of coaching. Coaches' decision to stay in their comfort zone, I believe, is based on their beliefs about the role of a coach or about how to improve teaching and student learning. (See chart on p. 3.)

Conclusion

The work of coaching is complex and challenging. What coaches do each day influences what teachers do and that, in turn, influences what students know and do. When coaches allocate time to services with the greatest potential for deep change in teaching and learning within their schools, students, teachers, and principals benefit. Every student succeeds as a result of high-quality teaching. Every teacher succeeds as a result of coaching *heavy*. No teacher faces an instructional challenge alone again. Every school community engages in ongoing, ruthless analysis of data, and continuous cycles of improvement that allow educators to measure results in a matter of weeks, not months or years. Coaches support teachers as they work together to resolve problems of practice and to make smarter, collaborative decisions enriched by the shared practice of the community. When coaches choose roles that have the greatest potential for impacting teaching and student learning, the perceived value of coaching and coaches will be unquestioned, even when budgets are tight and other competing priorities emerge. ◆

I am asking coaches to shift from being liked and appreciated to making a difference.



Adapted from Joellen Killion's chapter on Coaches' Roles, Responsibilities, and Reach in Knight, J. (Ed.), *Coaching: Approaches and perspectives* (2009). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Copyright © 2009 by Corwin Press, www.corwinpress.com. All rights reserved.



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Feedback for Learning Pages 10-16

Seven Keys to Effective Feedback

Grant Wiggins

Advice, evaluation, grades—none of these provide the descriptive information that students need to reach their goals. What is true feedback—and how can it improve learning?

Who would dispute the idea that feedback is a good thing? Both common sense and research make it clear: Formative assessment, consisting of lots of feedback and opportunities to use that feedback, enhances performance and achievement.

Yet even John Hattie (2008), whose decades of research revealed that feedback was among the most powerful influences on achievement, acknowledges that he has "struggled to understand the concept" (p. 173). And many writings on the subject don't even attempt to define the term. To improve formative assessment practices among both teachers and assessment designers, we need to look more closely at just what feedback is—and isn't.

What Is Feedback, Anyway?

The term *feedback* is often used to describe all kinds of comments made after the fact, including advice, praise, and evaluation. But none of these are feedback, strictly speaking.

Basically, feedback is information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal. I hit a tennis ball with the goal of keeping it in the court, and I see where it lands—in or out. I tell a joke with the goal of making people laugh, and I observe the audience's reaction—they laugh loudly or barely snicker. I teach a lesson with the goal of engaging students, and I see that some students have their eyes riveted on me while others are nodding off.

Here are some other examples of feedback:

- A friend tells me, "You know, when you put it that way and speak in that softer tone of voice, it makes me feel better."
- A reader comments on my short story, "The first few paragraphs kept my full attention. The scene painted was vivid and interesting. But then the dialogue became hard to follow; as a reader, I was confused about who was talking, and the sequence of actions was puzzling, so I became less engaged."
- A baseball coach tells me, "Each time you swung and missed, you raised your head as you swung so you didn't really have your eye on the ball. On the one you hit hard, you kept your head down and saw the ball."

Note the difference between these three examples and the first three I cited—the tennis stroke, the joke, and the student responses to teaching. In the first group, I only had to take note of the tangible effect of my actions, keeping my goals in mind. No one volunteered feedback, but there was still plenty of feedback to get and use. The second group of examples all involved the deliberate, explicit giving of feedback by other people.

Whether the feedback was in the observable effects or from other people, in every case the information received was not advice, nor was the performance evaluated. No one told me as a performer what to do differently or how "good"

or "bad" my results were. (You might think that the reader of my writing was judging my work, but look at the words used again: She simply played back the effect my writing had on her as a reader.) Nor did any of the three people tell me what to do (which is what many people erroneously think feedback is—advice). Guidance would be premature; I first need to receive feedback on what I did or didn't do that would warrant such advice.

In all six cases, information was conveyed about the effects of my actions as related to a goal. The information did not include value judgments or recommendations on how to improve. (For examples of information that is often falsely viewed as feedback, see "Feedback vs. Advice" above and "Feedback vs. Evaluation and Grades" on p. 15.)

Decades of education research support the idea that by teaching *less* and providing *more* feedback, we can produce greater learning (see Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Hattie, 2008; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Compare the typical lecture-driven course, which often produces less-than-optimal learning, with the peer instruction model developed by Eric Mazur (2009) at Harvard. He hardly lectures at all to his 200 introductory physics students; instead, he gives them problems to think about individually and then discuss in small groups. This system, he writes, "provides frequent and continuous feedback (to both the students and the instructor) about the level of understanding of the subject being discussed" (p. 51), producing gains in both conceptual understanding of the subject and problem-solving skills. Less "teaching," more feedback equals better results.

Feedback Essentials

Whether feedback is just there to be grasped or is provided by another person, helpful feedback is goal-referenced; tangible and transparent; actionable; user-friendly (specific and personalized); timely; ongoing; and consistent.

Goal-Referenced

Effective feedback requires that a person has a goal, takes action to achieve the goal, and receives goal-related information about his or her actions. I told a joke—why? To make people laugh. I wrote a story to engage the reader with vivid language and believable dialogue that captures the characters' feelings. I went up to bat to get a hit. If I am not clear on my goals or if I fail to pay attention to them, I cannot get helpful feedback (nor am I likely to achieve my goals).

Information becomes feedback if, and only if, I am trying to cause something and the information tells me whether I am on track or need to change course. If some joke or aspect of my writing *isn't working*—a revealing, nonjudgmental phrase—I need to know.

Note that in everyday situations, goals are often implicit, although fairly obvious to everyone. I don't need to announce when telling the joke that my aim is to make you laugh. But in school, learners are often unclear about the specific goal of a task or lesson, so it is crucial to remind them about the goal and the criteria by which they should self-assess. For example, a teacher might say,

- The point of this writing task is for you to make readers laugh. So, when rereading your draft or getting feedback from peers, ask, How funny is this? Where might it be funnier?
- As you prepare a table poster to display the findings of your science project, remember that the aim is to interest people in your work as well as to describe the facts you discovered through your experiment. Self-assess your work against those two criteria using these rubrics. The science fair judges will do likewise.

Tangible and Transparent

Any useful feedback system involves not only a clear goal, but also tangible results related to the goal. People laugh, chuckle, or don't laugh at each joke; students are highly attentive, somewhat attentive, or inattentive to my teaching.

Even as little children, we learn from such tangible feedback. That's how we learn to walk; to hold a spoon; and to understand that certain words magically yield food, drink, or a change of clothes from big people. The best feedback is so tangible that anyone who has a goal can learn from it.

Alas, far too much instructional feedback is opaque, as revealed in a true story a teacher told me years ago. A student came up to her at year's end and said, "Miss Jones, you kept writing this same word on my English papers all year, and I still don't know what it means." "What's the word?" she asked. "Vag-oo," he said. (The word was *vague*!)

Sometimes, even when the information is tangible and transparent, the performers don't obtain it—either because they don't look for it or because they are too busy performing to focus on the effects. In sports, novice tennis players or batters often don't realize that they're taking their eyes off the ball; they often protest, in fact, when that feedback is given. (Constantly yelling "Keep your eye on the ball!" rarely works.) And we have all seen how new teachers are sometimes so busy concentrating on "teaching" that they fail to notice that few students are listening or learning.

That's why, in addition to feedback from coaches or other able observers, video or audio recordings can help us perceive things that we may not perceive as we perform; and by extension, such recordings help us learn to look for difficult-to-perceive but vital information. I recommend that all teachers videotape their own classes at least once a month. It was a transformative experience for me when I did it as a beginning teacher. Concepts that had been

crystal clear to me when I was teaching seemed opaque and downright confusing on tape—captured also in the many quizzical looks of my students, which I had missed in the moment.

Actionable

Effective feedback is concrete, specific, and useful; it provides *actionable* information. Thus, "Good job!" and "You did that wrong" and *B+* are not feedback at all. We can easily imagine the learners asking themselves in response to these comments, What *specifically* should I do more or less of next time, based on this information? No idea. They don't know what was "good" or "wrong" about what they did.

Actionable feedback must also be accepted by the performer. Many so-called feedback situations lead to arguments because the givers are not sufficiently descriptive; they jump to an inference from the data instead of simply presenting the data. For example, a supervisor may make the unfortunate but common mistake of stating that "many students were bored in class." That's a judgment, not an observation. It would have been far more useful and less debatable had the supervisor said something like, "I counted ongoing inattentive behaviors in 12 of the 25 students once the lecture was underway. The behaviors included texting under desks, passing notes, and making eye contact with other students. However, after the small-group exercise began, I saw such behavior in only one student."

Such care in offering neutral, goal-related facts is the whole point of the clinical supervision of teaching and of good coaching more generally. Effective supervisors and coaches work hard to carefully observe and comment on what they observed, based on a clear statement of goals. That's why I always ask when visiting a class, "What would you like me to look for and perhaps count?" In my experience as a teacher of teachers, I have always found such pure feedback to be accepted and welcomed. Effective coaches also know that in complex performance situations, actionable feedback about what went right is as important as feedback about what didn't work.

User-Friendly

Even if feedback is specific and accurate in the eyes of experts or bystanders, it is not of much value if the user cannot understand it or is overwhelmed by it. Highly technical feedback will seem odd and confusing to a novice. Describing a baseball swing to a 6-year-old in terms of torque and other physics concepts will not likely yield a better hitter. Too much feedback is also counterproductive; better to help the performer concentrate on only one or two key elements of performance than to create a buzz of information coming in from all sides.

Expert coaches uniformly avoid overloading performers with too much or too technical information. They tell the performers one important thing they noticed that, if changed, will likely yield immediate and noticeable improvement ("I was confused about who was talking in the dialogue you wrote in this paragraph"). They don't offer advice until they make sure the performer understands the importance of what they saw.

Timely

In most cases, the sooner I get feedback, the better. I don't want to wait for hours or days to find out whether my students were attentive and whether they learned, or which part of my written story works and which part doesn't. I say "in most cases" to allow for situations like playing a piano piece in a recital. I don't want my teacher or the audience barking out feedback as I perform. That's why it is more precise to say that good feedback is "timely" rather than "immediate."

A great problem in education, however, is untimely feedback. Vital feedback on key performances often comes days, weeks, or even months after the performance—think of writing and handing in papers or getting back results on standardized tests. As educators, we should work overtime to figure out ways to ensure that students get more timely feedback and opportunities to use it while the attempt and effects are still fresh in their minds.

Before you say that this is impossible, remember that feedback does not need to come only from the teacher, or even from people at all. Technology is one powerful tool—part of the power of computer-assisted learning is unlimited, timely feedback and opportunities to use it. Peer review is another strategy for managing the load to ensure lots of timely feedback; it's essential, however, to train students to do small-group peer review to high standards, without immature criticisms or unhelpful praise.

Ongoing

Adjusting our performance depends on not only receiving feedback but also having opportunities to use it. What makes any assessment in education *formative* is not merely that it precedes summative assessments, but that the performer has opportunities, if results are less than optimal, to reshape the performance to better achieve the goal. In summative assessment, the feedback comes too late; the performance is over.

Thus, the more feedback I can receive in real time, the better my ultimate performance will be. This is how all highly successful computer games work. If you play Angry Birds, Halo, Guitar Hero, or Tetris, you know that the key to substantial improvement is that the feedback is both timely and ongoing. When you fail, you can immediately start over—sometimes even right where you left off—to get another opportunity to receive and learn from the feedback. (This powerful *feedback loop* is also user-friendly. Games are built to reflect and adapt to our changing need, pace, and ability to process information.)

It is telling, too, that performers are often judged on their ability to adjust in light of feedback. The ability to quickly adapt one's performance is a mark of all great achievers and problem solvers in a wide array of fields. Or, as many little league coaches say, "The problem is not making errors; you will all miss many balls in the field, and that's part of learning. The problem is when you don't learn from the errors."

Consistent

To be useful, feedback must be consistent. Clearly, performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy. In education, that means teachers have to be on the same page about what high-quality work is. Teachers need to look at student work together, becoming more consistent over time and formalizing their judgments in highly descriptive rubrics supported by anchor products and performances. By extension, if we want student-to-student feedback to be more helpful, students have to be trained to be consistent the same way we train teachers, using the same exemplars and rubrics.

Progress Toward a Goal

In light of these key characteristics of helpful feedback, how can schools most effectively use feedback as part of a system of formative assessment? The key is to gear feedback to long-term goals.

Let's look at how this works in sports. My daughter runs the mile in track. At the end of each lap in races and practice races, the coaches yell out *split times* (the times for each lap) and bits of feedback ("You're not swinging your arms!" "You're on pace for 5:15"), followed by advice ("Pick it up—you need to take two seconds off this next lap to get in under 5:10!").

My daughter and her teammates are getting feedback (and advice) about how they are performing now compared with their final desired time. My daughter's goal is to run a 5:00 mile. She has already run 5:09. Her coach is telling her that at the pace she just ran in the first lap, she is unlikely even to meet her best time so far this season, never mind her long-term goal. Then, he tells her something descriptive about her current performance (she's not swinging her arms) and gives her a brief piece of concrete advice (take two seconds off the next lap) to make achievement of the goal more likely.

The ability to improve one's result depends on the ability to adjust one's pace in light of ongoing feedback that measures performance against a concrete, long-term goal. But this isn't what most school district "pacing guides" and grades on "formative" tests tell you. They yield a grade against recent objectives taught, not useful feedback against the *final* performance standards. Instead of informing teachers and students at an interim date whether they are on track to achieve a desired level of student performance by the end of the school year, the guide and the test grade just provide a schedule for the teacher to follow in delivering content and a grade on that content. It's as if at the end of the first lap of the mile race, My daughter's coach simply yelled out, "B+ on that lap!"

The advice for how to change this sad situation should be clear: Score student work in the fall and winter against spring standards, use more pre- and post-assessments to measure progress toward these standards, and do the item analysis to note what each student needs to work on for better future performance.

"But There's No Time!"

Although the universal teacher lament that there's no time for such feedback is understandable, remember that "no time to give and use feedback" actually means "no time to cause learning." As we have seen, research shows that *less* teaching plus *more* feedback is the key to achieving greater learning. And there are numerous ways—through technology, peers, and other teachers—that students can get the feedback they need.

So try it out. Less teaching, more feedback. Less feedback that comes only from you, and more tangible feedback designed into the performance itself. And, of course, send me some feedback on this article at gwiggin@authenticeducation.org.

Feedback vs. Advice

- › ***You need more examples in your report.***
- › ***You might want to use a lighter baseball bat.***
- › ***You should have included some Essential Questions in your unit plan.***

These three statements are not feedback; they're advice. Such advice out of the blue seems at best tangential and at worst unhelpful and annoying. Unless it is preceded by descriptive feedback, the natural response of the performer is to wonder, "Why are you suggesting this?"

As coaches, teachers, and parents, we too often jump right to advice without first ensuring that the learner has sought, grasped, and tentatively accepted the feedback on which the advice is based. By doing so, we often unwittingly end up unnerving learners. Students become increasingly insecure about their own judgment and dependent on the advice of experts—and therefore in a panic about what to do when varied advice comes from different people or no advice is available at all.

If your ratio of advice to feedback is too high, try asking the learner, "Given the feedback, do you have some ideas about how to improve?" This approach will build greater autonomy and confidence over the long haul. Once they are no longer rank novices, performers can often self-advise if asked to.

Feedback vs. Evaluation and Grades

› **Good work!**

› **This is a weak paper.**

› **You got a C on your presentation.**

› **I'm so pleased by your poster!**

These comments make a value judgment. They rate, evaluate, praise, or criticize what was done. There is little or no feedback here—no actionable information about what occurred. As performers, we only know that someone else placed a high or low value on what we did.

How might we recast these comments to be useful feedback? Tip: Always add a mental colon after each statement of value. For example,

- *"Good work: Your use of words was more precise in this paper than in the last one, and I saw the scenes clearly in my mind's eye."*
- *"This is a weak paper: Almost from the first sentence, I was confused as to your initial thesis and the evidence you provide for it. In the second paragraph you propose a different thesis, and in the third paragraph you don't offer evidence, just beliefs."*

You'll soon find that you can drop the evaluative language; it serves no useful function.

The most ubiquitous form of evaluation, grading, is so much a part of the school landscape that we easily overlook its utter uselessness as actionable feedback. Grades are here to stay, no doubt—but that doesn't mean we should rely on them as a major source of feedback.

[Grant Wiggins](http://inservice.ascd.org/category/educational-leadership) provides additional insights about feedback at ASCD's Inservice blog: <http://inservice.ascd.org/category/educational-leadership>

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To collaboratively construct meaning, clarify, and expand our thinking about a text or document.

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Take a few moments to review the document and mark the sentence, the phrase, and the word that you think is particularly important for our work.

Steps

1. First Round: Each person shares a *sentence* from the document that he/she thinks/feels is particularly significant.
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3. Third Round: Each person shares the *word* that he/she thinks/feels is particularly significant. The scribe records each word.
4. The group discusses what they heard and what it says about the document.
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6. The group debriefs the text rendering process.