10 Guidelines for good feedback

Reading task 3

1. The evaluation does not endanger the pupils. It contributes to building pupils' self-confidence.

Assessment (more broadly, feedback) is designed to help the pupil to learn. Learning will not take place if the pupil feels threatened. Assessment must therefore not be carried out in such a way as to cause the pupil to feel anxious, to feel the need to avoid assessment, to feel the tendency to cheat. The teacher should never try to catch the pupil out and should not focus only on the mistakes made by the pupil. Ideally, the teacher will drop the word mistake from his or her vocabulary. He or she talks to the pupil about what can be done next time in the way the pupil is already good at and what the pupil could do differently to do a better job.

2. Assessment helps the pupil's learning.

Assessment often comes after learning as a form of checking how well the pupil has completed the tasks set. This is called 'assessment for learning' and has little impact on improving pupils' learning outcomes (Stiggins, 2002). While it is inevitable that a teacher will, from time to time, incorporate practices that assess learning after the fact (testing, quizzes), the predominance of assessment should be formative or 'assessment for learning'. Rather than assessment, the teacher reaches for feedback procedures. Assessment and feedback are the times when pupil and teacher work most closely together. Assessment for learning takes on a special significance when the teacher incorporates active learning methods and strategies into schoolwork. If the teacher has taken on the role of guiding and facilitating pupils in their work of constructing their own knowledge, rather than handing over ready-made knowledge, he or she must constantly monitor the learning process and, in a sensitive way, confirm good solutions and correct mistakes or dead ends. It cannot always wait for students to finish their work (learning) but must continuously intervene through feedback. The aim is that the pupils' independent learning should be purposefully directed towards the learning objectives facing them, both in terms of skills and knowledge and attitudes.

3. Feedback informs the learner of the extent to which they have achieved their learning objectives and helps them to identify further objectives.

Assessment in school is primarily to inform, but not to determine who is the best and worst in the class. The information obtained is intended to help pupils to continue learning, to guide them to decide what to do differently, better. Because evaluative statements ('your performance is excellent, good, bad' or 'it's an A, a C, a F') do not inform in a sufficiently concrete way, descriptive feedback is used. Through this, the pupil learns more about his/her performance.

Example

"Your task was to discuss whether we should go on a bike trip or a water trip. You clearly expressed your opinion that it would be better to go on the water, arguing that we had been on bikes twice and had not tried boats yet. (= descriptive part of the feedback)

What other arguments could you make to support your suggestion to go on the water? Has any classmate given a counter argument that you should consider?" (= corrective part of the feedback)

> *The teacher confirms to the pupil that he/she has done a good job of formulating his/her own position and that he/she has supported it with an argument. In the corrective part of the feedback, the teacher pointed out that it is good not to be satisfied with the first and only argument for one's own claim and also that the pupil had not considered counter-arguments.*

4. The method of assessment (giving feedback) is consistent with the learning objectives.

If the teacher has articulated in the objectives that he/she wants to develop a social and cognitive skill, then his/her assessment should be concerned with determining how close the students are to the planned objectives in that skill. The teacher will choose different procedures (for example, observation and comparison with criteria) for checking skill attainment than for checking how well the pupil has learned a set of facts (a test). Sometimes the method of assessment will reveal the teacher's true goals. If a teacher sets as an objective 'independent information seeking' and then chooses a test as a means of verification, asking for repetition of information that the teacher considers important, the stated learning objectives are at odds with the assessment being carried out.

5. The assessment of pupil performance informs the teacher how well his/her curriculum is working for each pupil. It helps the teacher to plan for the pupil's learning, showing the teacher where the pupil's zone of proximal development is.

As the teacher observes (monitors) and evaluates the pupil's work, he or she gains information to help him or her evaluate how well he or she has prepared the curriculum, i.e. the opportunities for learning, given the needs and capabilities of his or her pupils. Based on the information obtained, he/she modifies his/her teaching. Assessment, which informs the teacher of the boundary between what the pupil has mastered and what he has not, enables him to plan teaching and learning in the pupil's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1976). This is found between what the pupil can safely do on his/her own and what he/she cannot do at all, and is defined as the performance of which the pupil is capable with the help of a more experienced (adult or pupil). The latter can help the pupil by solving the task together and providing support for the solution (scaffolding, Bruner, 1978).

6. In assessment, we always compare and consciously choose a comparative measure.

In order to evaluate, i.e., to comment on the value of the phenomenon under study, we must have an idea of what is good and what is not in the case of the phenomenon. In school assessment, we are making a statement about the value of a pupil's performance. We need to compare it with something in order to make a judgement about its value. It is common to compare pupils' performances with each other. For example, the teacher reads all the reflections that the pupils have written and then considers which pupils to award an A, which a B, etc. A class norm is created that expresses what is normal performance in a given class and on a given task. In another class, perhaps the same performance would have earned its author a different grade. This measure for evaluating a student's performance is called the "social norm."

Another measure is the criteria that the teacher sets before the pupils begin the task. The teacher will describe the expectations of what a job well done will look like. Criterion-based assessment is called criterion-referenced assessment. Criteria can be standardised.

A third benchmark used in school is called the individual relationship standard. This consists of comparing the pupil's current performance with how the pupil has handled the task in the past, looking for improvements in the pupil's performance compared to past performance. Again, however, this looks at those components of performance that are related to the educational goals being pursued.

The teacher should be aware that he/she is always choosing a 'frame of reference', i.e. that he/she must necessarily compare the pupil's performance with something in order to be able to decide on its quality. Assessment according to a social norm (comparison with classmates) has many pitfalls and should be limited and, where possible, replaced by assessment according to predetermined substantive criteria. Criterion-referenced assessment can then monitor individual pupils' progress. That is, at the same time monitoring individual improvement, but against set criteria or standards.

7. Summative assessment draws on as many sources of information about student learning as possible.

Summative assessment summarises a pupil's strengths (what they have mastered) and their needs (what they need to improve on). It should not be based on one piece of work, such as a final exam or test, or on one type of source (only the review papers written during the quarter and the oral examination). The teacher should observe a variety of student performance throughout the period for which the summative assessment is provided, collecting information about the student's work in different situations and also about different components of the student's performance separately. The teacher should draw on his/her observations and notes on the pupil's learning process (record sheets) as well as on the analysis of the pupil's products, the pupil's self-assessment and peer assessment. The portfolio (see Chapter 5) is helpful in documenting both the pupil's own work and the metacognitive processes that took place in the pupil's mind when assessing his/her work.

8. Feedback should be provided in a way that the pupil can use it.

Feedback should be primarily descriptive and specific (see above), but also timely. Information that is received late is usually not used for learning. It is best if the learner can get feedback immediately. It is not within the teacher's power to provide timely feedback to all twenty-five to thirty pupils in a class. Therefore, pupils need to learn to give feedback to themselves as soon as possible. A related issue is the way in which the teacher describes and presents the learning objectives to the pupils: the pupils must understand the learning objectives and be able to recognise the extent to which they have been met. Well-formulated criteria in conjunction with clear examples help to do this.

9. Assessment teaches pupils self-assessment.

One of the important aims of education is to teach pupils to evaluate their own work. This is helped by the teacher's practice of providing feedback and assessment in such a way that pupils see the teacher's method of assessment as a model for their own assessment. It is essential that the teacher teaches pupils to relate evaluative statements to concrete evidence in pupils' work. Pupils should always be encouraged to justify the quality of their work.
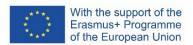
10. In assessment (feedback), the teacher and pupil use the same language - the pupil understands the language of assessment.

In order to get the maximum benefit from feedback, the pupil needs to have a good understanding of what the teacher is saying. This means that at the very beginning of the work, the teacher must take time to ensure that the pupil understands the learning objectives or the criteria against which his/her performance will be assessed. In doing so, the pupil learns the content but also acquires a language in common with the teacher.