

**Improving understanding and learning.
Possible strategies to consider using with your students.
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Overview: Explicit Areas for Consideration and Discussion

Student Perceptions

- Areas of weakness
- Present level versus potential level
- Effort
- Understanding of teacher's advice
- Evolution of student's understanding

Teacher Perceptions

- Positive feedback for improvement, not denigration
- What can be tweaked? Marginal gains.
- Specific strategies

Joint areas

- Student learning goals – mastery and learning focus
- Clarification of your advice

Although the list of students created for your subject area has been determined by using the student mark in relation to their level of performance, it is important to focus on the processes associated with improvement, rather than specifically referencing the mark itself. Current research highlights the importance of encouraging students to develop a ‘growth’ mindset, where they have a strong sense of agency in their capability to learn and develop a more sophisticated level of understanding, seeing their own intelligence as something that can be grown or developed.

In contrast, many students often foster a ‘fixed’ mindset which is developed through the ongoing reference to the mark itself, further reinforcing the perception that the student has of their own intelligence. Often students who lack confidence will try to hold onto, or retain their level of attainment (mark), rather than looking for new ways to approach their work or develop their understanding. This type of feedback relates more to the product of learning rather than the process. Subsequently, learners who continually reference these marks do not always engage or seek strategies to develop their understanding in a particular area of functioning (Dweck, 2006).

More recent research by John Hattie, identifies that to make feedback effective “teachers must have a good understanding of where their students are, and where they are meant to be – and the more transparent they make this status for the students, the more students can help to get themselves from the points at which they are to the success points, and thus enjoy the fruits of feedback (2012, p.115)”. This highlights the need to encourage students to move their learning and understanding to the next level. Here are series of strategies that may be worth considering.

TEN APPROACHES WORTH TRYING

1. **Ask** the students **what** areas of their learning they do not understand and encourage them to assess their own capability, looking specifically at their own work in order to find areas that need improvement. (The very best students can always find little areas to improve as they are often more experienced in diagnosing their ability. Encourage your students to aspire to make improvement, instilling a strong sense of self-belief in them as you engage with them).

2. **Talk** to the students about **why** they think they are currently achieving at that level. Are they **attributing** their current mark to their own ability or rather to the subject itself, the delivery or teacher and not really taking responsibility for their own level of achievement? Discuss this with them.
3. **Ask** them to **reflect** upon their ongoing level of **effort**, and if they do not feel that they are working to capacity. Encourage them to attain a PB (Personal Best) each time they complete or present a piece of work.
4. Always **try** to provide **positive feedback** in the first instance (telling them about some good aspects their work) and then look to **explain** “**what**” things need to be done differently to improve, providing **explicit guidance** and examples of **how** this can be achieved.
5. **Make** sure that any feedback is **specific** and contains detailed reference to the **skill, knowledge** or **understanding** that is being developed rather than just offering general advice that lacks purpose.
6. **Offer** strategies to **assist** their learning (and **model** these explicitly where appropriate), either through demonstration or by referring to another person’s work that is relevant. Collaboratively, help students **plan** out a timetable or guide to assist them to complete the work that they need to do, establishing **clear expectations** about the completion of future tasks. Get the students to **complete** questions and tasks that **replicate** exam conditions, forcing them to become familiar with the type of learning environment they are going to experience. Help them to refine the examination process.
7. **Encourage** the student to **develop short and long term goals** that they wish to attain, making sure that these are **written down** and regularly reviewed.
8. Continually **ask** the students to **tell** you if the nature of the feedback you are providing them is assisting them to learn? Allow them to **target** very specific areas of their understanding that need improvement and encourage them to **communicate** these to you regularly.
9. **Provide** the **necessary time** to communicate the feedback effectively to your students, making sure that they **really understand** the **information** and **suggestions** that you are providing for them
10. **Encourage** the students to see their **own understanding** as a piece of ‘artwork’ that can continually being refined and shaped. Encourage the students to focus on the processes associated with the learning, becoming better at understanding how they learn most effectively.

References

- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*. New York, Routledge.
- Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York. Random House.