



February 2016

Volume 12, Number 4

## Spotlight On...Formative Assessment: Providing Feedback that Moves Learning Forward

- *A hockey player shoots a puck at the net and waits to see where it goes—in or out.*
- *A teacher comments on a student’s narrative, “The lead to your story really held my attention. Your writing was engaging and pulled me in, but when you added a flashback I got confused about the sequence of events.”*
- *A friend comments, “The shade of that sweater highlights your face. You should wear that color more often.”*

What do all of these statements have in common? Each is an example of feedback. Wiggins (2012) defines feedback as, “information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal.” In the first example, the feedback is simply observable (whether or not the puck went into the goal). In the second example, the feedback was verbal and explicit, but left it to the receiver to determine how to proceed (e.g. continue to write engaging leads but work on sequencing of events). Sometimes feedback is more directive, with specific advice offered, like the third example.

As a formative assessment strategy, feedback is a valuable tool for moving learning forward. Prior to offering feedback, teachers usually engage in other forms of assessment to determine how students’ learning is progressing. Have they developed a solid understanding of the subject? Do they have a misconception? Are they able to perform a skill effectively or do they need to make an adjustment? Once teachers have a handle on students’ learning, feedback can be provided to help them make adjustments. If the student’s learning is headed in the right direction, the feedback may be reinforcing. If the students’ learning is off track or still developing, the feedback may be corrective. Effective feedback helps motivate students to continue moving forward.

The unfortunate reality is that not all feedback is valuable in moving student learning forward and different types of learning require different types of feedback. Ineffective feedback may lead to frustration, lack of motivation and/or confusion for students. To

We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.

~Aristotle



Feedback is the breakfast of champions.

~Ken Blanchard

ensure that feedback is worthwhile and actually bolsters student learning, educators should incorporate these essential features. Feedback should:

- Be goal-oriented and direct attention to the intended learning;
- Point out specific strengths in the work and offer concrete guidance for improvement. For example, rather than offering vague praise like “Great job!” after listening to a student’s oral reading, provide specific details, like “You read that story so that it sounded like a conversation among two friends”;
- Be timely and ongoing—occurring during or soon after learning attempts have been made and happening often enough that learners can make adjustments;
- Offer guidance without doing the heavy lifting (thinking) for the learner. For instance, instead of marking every edit to make in a rough draft, point out lines that need edits and encourage the writer to find and make the edits;
- Be manageable and selective—it is tempting to point out every error, but most learners cannot attend to all of those errors at once.
- Cultivate a growth mindset in students by helping them see learning as a journey and feedback as a healthy part of the process; and
- Focus on the task rather than the individual (e.g. Instead of telling a student, “You are so smart!” say, “You used a number of useful strategies to figure out the answer to that problem”).

For more information about how to use feedback as a formative assessment strategy, check out the resources in the Professional Texts and Online Resources sections below.

## Digital Resources

### [Specific Praise: How It Improves Learning](#)

This video segment from The Teaching Channel discusses the importance of giving specific, rather than vague, praise focused on what students are doing. The video models how teachers can do this and discusses the benefits of using specific praise.



We all need people who give us feedback. That’s how we improve.

~Bill Gates



## [Effective Writing Instruction: Getting What You Really Want](#)

This webinar, produced as part of the Maine Department of Education's Cross Discipline Literacy Network series, shares ways in which teachers can more effectively offer feedback that will improve middle and high school students' writing.

### **Professional Texts**

This month's recommended professional texts are two articles about the use of feedback to inform learning published in Volume 70 (September 2012) of *Educational Leadership*.

#### [Seven Keys to Effective Feedback](#)

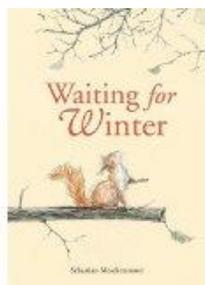
In this article, Grant Wiggins defines feedback and offers seven essential features of useful feedback that moves learning forward.

#### [“How Am I Doing?”](#)

Jan Chappuis outlines prerequisites for providing learners with effective feedback and then provides detailed explanations of five characteristics of effective feedback.

### **Literature for Children and Adolescents**

#### **Children's Literature**



In this engaging tale written by Sebastian Meschenmoser, Squirrel hears about “white and wet and cold and soft” snow from his friend, deer. Not wanting to miss seeing it, Squirrel prolongs his winter nap to search for snow. His investigation leads to disruption of hibernation for other forest friends, but in the end, Squirrel finally discovers snows and along the way learns much about testing hypotheses. While *Waiting for Winter* is a fantasy, children are often curious to know what animals are really doing to survive the cold and snow. Other winter tales focused on animal behaviors include *Waiting Through Winter* by Farley and Evans, *Over and Under the Snow* by Messmer and *Animals in Winter* by Bancroft.

## **Upcoming Professional Development from the Maine DOE**

To explore potential training sessions that may be of interest, be sure to check our extensive list of professional development offerings at

[www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/](http://www.maine.gov/doe/calendar/)



Children are like wet cement.  
Whatever falls on them makes an  
impression.

~Haim Ginott

## Adolescent Literature

A hot topic during this election year is immigration, especially where children are concerned. Some titles you may already know that address this topic include [\*Farewell to Manzanar\*](#) which describes an American internment camp during World War II and [\*The Good Braider\*](#) which is about a Sudanese girl who settles in Portland, Maine. A Nerdy Book Club blog from October 2012 provides a list of [10 books that reflect the US Immigration experience](#) appropriate for middle and high school students and often includes lesson plans for using the text in a class.

**For additional information about this edition, email:**

[leeann.larsen@maine.gov](mailto:leeann.larsen@maine.gov) or [morgan.dunton@maine.gov](mailto:morgan.dunton@maine.gov)

**To subscribe to Literacy Links:**

<https://mailman.informe.org/mailman/listinfo/maineliteracy>

**To view back editions of Literacy Links:**

<http://www.maine.gov/doe/ela/resources/literacy-links.html>

**To view Maine DOE Newsroom and Commissioner's Updates:**

<http://mainedoeneews.net/>

The Maine Department  
of Education  
Phone: 207-624-6600  
Web: [www.maine.gov/doe](http://www.maine.gov/doe)



The Maine Department of Education's mission is to provide leadership and to collaborate with educators and learning communities in order to ensure that every learner has the opportunity to be successful.