

School Based Assessment (SBA) TRAINER NOTES

No. 15: *Feedback: What, how and why*

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Feedback is one of the important teaching tools that teachers apply in designing and carrying through assessment for learning. Feedback is important within an SBA activity to ensure that every student is offered the best opportunity to understand what is required, learn the skills and content, and demonstrate the level of competence s/he has reached. Students learn from feedback from their peers; they learn from watching videos of their performances or listening to themselves. But first, students need to learn how to use feedback from peers or themselves and the best way they learn this is by the examples that teachers offer them.

Cowie (2005) reports research into learners' own views about how different kinds of assessment influence their learning. She found that even children as young as 7 or 8 can tell the difference between 'evaluative' feedback ("good" "not good" etc) and 'informational' feedback ("you need to talk about why you think X" etc); and that learners find informational feedback more motivating than evaluative feedback. Her work supports the view that is gaining force that teacher assessment can have effects not only on students' learning but on their motivation, self-esteem and confidence. This makes the ways that teachers give feedback as important as the kinds of feedback they give.

Cowie (2005) also argues that for learners to be able to implement feedback they have received into their own learning (that is, if feedback is to feed-*forward*), they need to be ready to 'bridge the gap' between where they are now and what they can perceive as a 'better' or 'higher level' performance. This notion of bridging the gap relates to the concept of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, discussed in TN 12. Feed-forward can only happen if the learner is able to self-assess and self-monitor. This means that when teachers give a learner feedback they must also make that feedback have a feed-**forward** role. Feedback needs to not only tell students where their weaknesses lie and which areas they need to work on; they need to give them a sense of *how far* they are from where they should aim to be, and of how they might get there, i.e., development strategies.

Cowie, B. (2005). Pupil commentary on assessment for learning. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16, 2: 137-151.