

**Feedback: Medals and Missions**

Professor John Hattie found that Feedback has more effect on achievement than any other factor. Professors Paul Black and Dylan William of Kings College London spent four years studying and reviewing research into feedback which is closely linked to ‘formative assessment’. They concluded in agreement with Professor Hattie that formative assessment has a huge effect on learning quality. It has been found to add the equivalent of two grades to students’ achievement if done very well.

Research reviews are the best advice available to us, much better than individual pieces of research, or individual opinions. In Teaching Today I try to summarise Black and William’s main findings, by saying feedback should include:

* Medals: This is information about what a student has done well, e.g. ‘Your paragraphs and punctuation are good’ or ‘That’s good evidence’ written in the margin next to a well-made point by the student. Grades and marks are measurements not medals. Medals are information about what exactly was done well.
* Missions: This is information about what the student needs to improve, correct, or work on. It is best when it is forward looking and positive. e.g. ‘try to give more evidence for your views’ or ‘Use more paragraphs to show the structure of your writing’. Again, measurements such as grades do not usually give this information.
* Clear goals: the medals and missions need to be given in relation to clear goals usually best given in advance. Goals might include assessment criteria such as ‘use paragraphing to show the structure of your writing’ or ‘give evidence, illustrations for the points of view you express’.

One way to help you give medal and mission feedback and to clarify goals is to use assessment proformas. Adapt them or devise your own to suit your students and your subject. Make sure the most important skills expressed in the criteria.

You can also use tests and quizes formatively and use other formative teaching methods.

There are research reviews on how to give ‘medals’, sometimes called ‘positive reinforcement’. I have summarised these in the form of an Action Research Proposal. This enables you to read about best practice and then try it out. Ideally you work with a colleague do discuss the issues and give each other support. One great way of giving students feedback is to use formative teaching methods. In some cases, especially where students lack self-confidence, these methods have been found to double attainment.

Feedback is so important, and it is so very rarely done well. You will benefit from reading chapters 6 and 43 of Teaching Today 3rd Ed so you really understand this vital topic. There will probably be a copy in your library. Don’t take my word for all this! Read Black and Wiliam’s own summary of their review yourself, or the full review.

References  
\* Black and William (1998) “Assessment and Classroom Learning” in the journal Assessment in Education.  
‘medals’:<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/2/cu3.html>

See also ‘Teaching Today: a practical guide’ Geoff Petty, 3rd Ed (2004) published by Nelson Thornes chapters 6 and 43.