{Disarmed} [New post] Getting feedback right Part 2: How do we provide clarity?

1 message

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New post on **David Didau: The Learning Spy**

Getting feedback right Part 2: How do we provide clarity?

by David Didau

As discussed in yesterday's post, I am currently working on the assumption that there are only 3 meaningful purposes of feedback:

- To provide clarity
- To increase pupils' effort
- To increase pupils' aspiration

I had planned to discuss how we might go about giving each of these kinds of feedback in one post, but on reflection it seems sensible to divide the how of giving feedback into 3 separate posts which will discuss each process in detail.

So, first off is providing clarity. It ought to go without saying that if pupils aren't clear about how to improve, they're unlikely to get any better. The chances are that they will embed mistakes through repeated practice and end up getting good at doing it wrong. This is not to be encouraged. As teachers it should be reasonably obvious to us when a pupil has misunderstood something and when they have made a mistake due to carelessness or lack or effort. Our problem is that we face Hobson's Choice: we know that if we just point out some of the mistakes pupils have made we allow them to embed bad practice, but if we point out every mistake we overload pupils' ability to learn.

So here's my tentative solution. If we insist that pupils annotate every piece of work with the mistake they are able to spot, our clarification can then be applied with pin-point accuracy at the exact they have identified as where they are ready to learn. They will received feedback only on those areas they've identified as containing errors or misunderstandings.

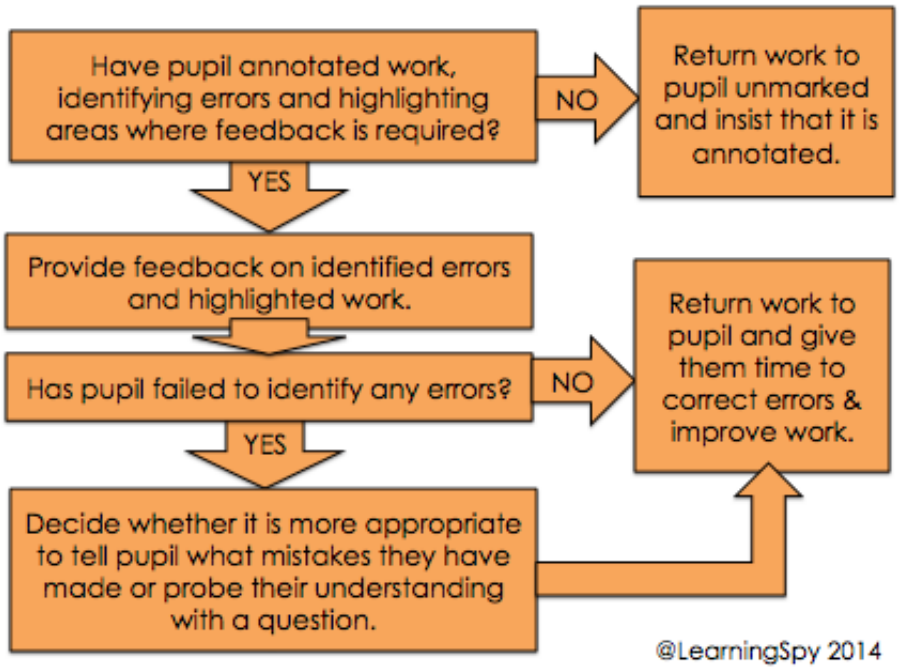
We all know that pupils' self assessment is often rubbish, we let's prevent them from writing meaningless descriptive comments about how they feel about their work and instead let's make them proofread, error check and highlight the areas where they feel uncertain or where they might have taken a risk. This approach forces them to engage meta-cognitively with their work and think about they have produced in a more or less meaningful way.

I realise there is a weakness here: what about those errors which pupils make

unknowingly, or in the belief they are right? These are errors which they may be unable to spot and therefore errors they will continue to make. What do we do about that? Again, we're faced with a choice: we can either tell them what to do, or we can probe their misunderstanding by asking questions. I don't believe there's a right answer on this one; I think it's up to you as a teacher to use your professional judgment to decide whether it will have more impact to tell or question. But it's worth knowing that there are consequences to every choice.

If we choose to tell pupils the answer, then they may not value it. It may be that they fail to remember the answer as they haven't had to think about it. But equally, if could that they will bother remember and value the answer; the outcome is uncertain. If we choose to ask a question to probe a pupil's understanding we run the risk that they won't arrive at a correct answer and their misconceptions will be embedded. There's also the problem that it takes time to think about something new and pupils may decide to ignore the question. However, if the do decide to answer the question and they have the necessary knowledge to think meaningfully about it then they are perhaps more likely to both remember and understand the correct information.

For your convenience, I've distilled this thinking into a handy flowchart:



Feedback to provide clarification

Next up, I'll be thinking about how to provide feedback designed to increase pupils' effort. In the meantime, if you think I've neglected anything interesting or important, please do leave a comment.

David Didau | March 5, 2014 at 3:08 pm | URL: http://wp.me/p3KEoH-1n2

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