



# Communicating About Learning Through Feedback

Presented by  
Karen Todd & Jennifer Wilson

# Central Idea

Learning is influenced by  
communication

# Lines of Inquiry

An inquiry into:

- The forms of communication about learning
- The function of communication about learning
- The impact of communication on learning

# The forms of communication about learning

- Oral
- Written
- Non-verbal
- Grading/Applying a Value

# Collaborative Communication (D. Cooper)

- Student involved
- Training/modelling and practice of how to communicate

E.g.

Marco walked up to the house.

His heart pounding with each step, Marco inched toward the cobweb-covered door of the crumbling mansion.

*“Look at these two sentences – which sentence do you find to be more effective and why?”*

...instead of *“Which sentence is better?”*

- Talking Point: Think of an example where you are giving feedback to your child and the words used to give that feedback

# An inquiry into: The function of communication about learning

The function or purpose of communication about learning is to:

- Move learning along a continuum
- Promote growth mindset and life-long learning
- Encourage metacognitive reflection
- Develop self-efficacy
- Increase ownership of, “buy-in”, and empowerment over learning



# Metacognitive Reflection

- Metacognitive Reflection is self-awareness
- How do we develop this in our students?

## Modelled behaviour

People are impacted by the world around them. Kids look to adults as models of how to act. If we behave in a manner that is anxious and pressured then kids can learn to respond in a similar manner.



# Understanding the Amygdala

- The part of the brain involved in mediating emotional arousal
- Processes emotions, stores the memories of emotional reactions, and reacts so aggressively to stress that it will physically prevent information from reaching the centers of the brain necessary for absorbing new knowledge
- Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, frustration can spur the brain to enter the proverbial "fight or flight" mode.
- The amygdala goes into overdrive and gets in the way of the parts of the brain that can store memories
- Strong impact on learning

*Neurobiology of Learning and Memory (2002)*



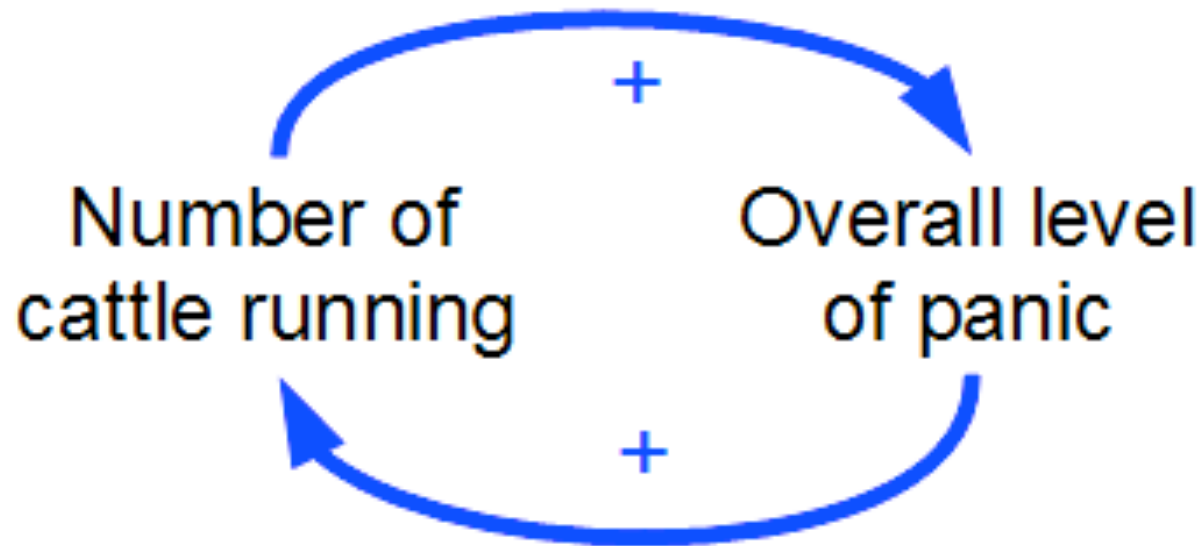


# Receiving feedback - a tool for reflection

- Positive feedback and interactions stimulate the reward centres in the brain leaving the recipient open to taking in feedback.

## In contrast

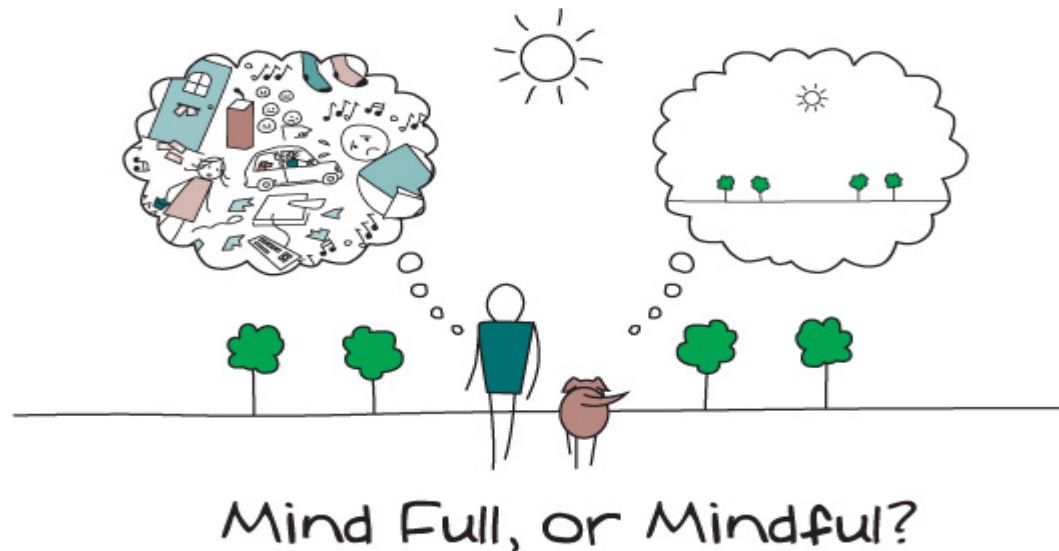
- Worry is infectious. Kids pick up on what another person is feeling. When we manage our worry then we are able to communicate in a calmer manner. When we are in a calm place we are able to be reflective and plan reasonable steps for what to do next.



# How can we support?

- Connect with the child first (student centred)
- Have relaxed interactions about school work
- Demonstrate mindful behaviour.

Mindful behaviour results in more focus and benefits academics!



**M** - Moment-to-moment attention

**I** - In the here-and-now

**N** - Non-judgmental attitude

**D** - Detach from unhelpful thoughts

**F** - Forgive & be grateful

**U** - Unconditional acceptance

**L** - Learn with beginner's mind

Zhen-Phang

## **An inquiry into:**

### **The impact of communication on learning**

What would our  
conversations be like if our  
intention is to positively  
influence and promote  
learning?

Amy: I taught my dog to whistle

Joe: Really? That's incredible- I want to hear him!

Amy: He can't whistle

Joe: I thought you said you taught him to whistle?

Amy: I did teach him- he just didn't learn

# Consider...

We are influenced by our experiences and the models in our lives.

- How can what we say about learning motivate and inspire to further learning ?
- How do we use feedback to encourage and build learning rather than defeat learning potential?



- Motivating and encouraging our children begins on a fundamentally philosophical level: attitude. Our attitude is communicated through what and how we say & do. This can happen unconsciously – shift our intention.

*Think and Talk:*

- How do we motivate and energize ourselves to continue our own learning? The learning of our partners, friends or peers?
- Think of a time when you received feedback that inspired you to learn more/ do better? Made you feel like a failure/ defeated, or not wanting to learn more?





# Motivation:

Children who doubt their competence set low goals, choose easy tasks and plan poorly – when they face difficulties they become confused, lose concentration, and start telling themselves stories about their own incompetence. In the long run they disengage, decrease effort, generate fewer ideas and become passive and discouraged.

Johnson, P. *Choice Words: How Language affects Children's Learning*



# Motivation:

Children with strong belief in their own agency work harder, focus their attention better, are more interested in their studies, and are less likely to give up when they encounter difficulties. When children feel competent they plan well, choose challenging tasks, set higher goals, experience improved concentration when facing difficulties and in the process of engaging in difficulties, and learn more skills.

Johnson, P. *Choice Words: How Language affects Children's Learning*



# Self-efficacy

Drawing children's attention to their successes and having them reflect on and identify why they were successful shows them how their decisions and strategic actions were responsible for the success increases children's perceptions of their ability and effectiveness of focused effort.

Johnson, P. *Choice Words:How Language affects Children's Learning*

Helping kids manage themselves in the world.

Changing Education Paradigms by Sir Ken Robinson

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>



# Growth vs. Fixed Mindset

Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort.

Dweck, C.S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership*, 65 (2), 34-39.

# Growth vs. Fixed Mindset

Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck

In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.

Dweck, C.S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership*, 65 (2), 34-39.



Students who believe that academic achievement is determined by fixed ability are more likely to work toward performance goals (i.e., grades) to please the teacher and appear competent. For these students, grades are the currency in school, and the exchange value for grades is more important than the learning....Students who attribute academic success to their own **efforts** are more likely to adopt learning goals, which means they are motivated by an increasing sense of mastery and by the desire to become more competent.

(Earl, 2003, p.36)

- A focus on effort installs a growth mindset in the learner
- Praising intelligence sets students up for failure - the only way they can interpret any future difficulties in learning is by telling themselves they are not smart
- Students who attribute their success to intelligence limit the amount of educational challenge they are willing to assume because it might expose a lack of intelligence

Dweck, C.S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership*, 65 (2), 34-39.



Students who have been praised for their intelligence are less willing to try tasks at which they think they might not succeed because their belief is built around being viewed as intelligent.

Dweck, C.S. (2007). The perils and promises of praise. *Educational Leadership*, 65 (2), 34-39.



# Managing Change

Change is very important but to be able to cope with and manage change also need a sense of stability and control - can be achieved through routine, schedules (p. 29)

*Opening Minds: using language to change lives* by Peter Johnston



Communication is **What** we say and **How** we say it and because it involves a psychological component it influences how we feel about our work, think about ourselves and act as a result.

Be calm

Be connected

Ask Questions

Listen

Acknowledge

Share

Examples:

What do you like about what you did? Why?

(The message: focus on the positive)

What do you think you need to do next?

What would you change if you could do it again?

(The message: learning is a lifelong process, we will have more opportunities)

# Communicating about learning: Giving feedback

Feedback has the most powerful single effect on student achievement.

Measured by "effect Size" (ES)

- Punishment ES = 0.2 (8 percentile gain)
- Praise ES = 0.14 (6 percentile gain)
- Reinforcement ES = 0.94 (33 percentile gain)
- Task and/or process-specific cues ES = 1.1 (36 percentile gain)

*(William, p.121)*



# Effective Feedback

***Feedback MUST provide a recipe for future action.***

- Positive - start all feedback with comments on student successes
- Genuine
- Balanced - comment on equal number of strengths and weaknesses
- Actionable - state accomplishments then state next "doable" steps
- Constructive, not critical
- Quantity: less is more
- Content - keep the comments focused on the learning targets/criteria

# Talking about Report Cards

- The purpose of reporting is to communicate student achievement to students and their parents/ caregivers. Student performance is evaluated based on information collected through assessment activities over an instructional period (Ministry of Education, 2009)

# Talking About Letter Grades

- A

The student demonstrates excellent or outstanding performance in relation to the learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade.

- B

The student demonstrates very good performance in relation to the learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade.

- C+

The student demonstrates good performance in relation to the learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade.

- C

The student demonstrates satisfactory performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade.

- C-

The student demonstrates minimally acceptable performance in relation to the learning outcomes for the course or subject and grade.



When we give students grades - when we evaluate them- we want to grade them on what they have learned - grades are based on evidence gleaned from ongoing authentic assessment...work samples, student talk, performances, artifacts...we evaluate and give grades ONLY after students have had time to internalize the strategies and skills we have taught and we base grades on a substantial body of evidence that stands as proof of learning and current understandings (p.272).

Harvey, Stephanie, & Harvey Daniels (2009). *Comprehension & Collaboration: Inquiry circles in action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

The bottom line is that we place a bit too much emphasis on one mark or grade in our society. Grades are inferences, personal interpretations on the part of the teacher, not infallible truths about students' mastery. We err when we attach too much self-worth and celebration to so fleeting a moment, so inaccurate a tool, so subjective an overworked teacher's judgment. Grades are fragile things on which to base so much. It's worth keeping them in perspective.

(Wormeli, 2006, p. 95)



The effects of rewards (stars, stickers, candy!!)

- Can bring students to believe that learning activities are not worth doing in their own right ... instead help them develop a sense of pride at having tried hard – show that effort pays off!

**Feedback has the most powerful single effect on student achievement.**

# Closing Thoughts

Reflecting on the impact of feedback and communication on learning, what conversations about report cards and letter grades/performance standard will you be having with your children?



# References:

Books:

William, D. (2011). *Embedded Formative Assessment*.  
Solution Tree Press

Wormeli, Rick (2006). *Fair isn't always equal: assessing and grading in the differentiated classroom*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse

*Power of Slow* by Christine Hohlbaum

Powerofslow.com (Christine Hohlbaum)

*Opening Minds: using language to change lives*

*Choice Words : How language affects children's learning*  
– both by Peter Johnston

*Power of Patience* by M.J. Ryan

*How to Talk so Kids Can Learn* by Faber & Mazlish



# Suggested links & resources:

Changing Education Paradigms by Sir Ken Robinson  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U>

[http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/  
steve\\_keil\\_a\\_manifesto\\_for\\_play\\_for\\_bulgaria\\_and\\_beyond.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/steve_keil_a_manifesto_for_play_for_bulgaria_and_beyond.html)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/  
matthieu\\_ricard\\_on\\_the\\_habits\\_of\\_happiness.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/matthieu_ricard_on_the_habits_of_happiness.html)

[http://www.ted.com/talks/  
rita\\_pierson\\_every\\_kid\\_needs\\_a\\_champion.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion.html)

