# Teacher Feedback: the Notre Dame Mindset Checklist

Sometimes we don't realise that words that we think encourage and praise can actually undermine the main mission, to grow great teaching. Is the feedback sending messages that support teachers to enjoy current strengths and refine or build new ones?

| It's helpful to... | Helpful wording | It's unhelpful to... | Unhelpful wording |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Begin with finding out what they already know...** | *"How do you think it went?"* | unhelpful: opening with any negative... | *unhelpful: "well, there's quite a few things I'd change here"* |
| **First focus on the good that is already in place. (3:1 +ves:advice)**<br><br>**Praise the good intention / higher purpose** | *"Firstly, well done on …" "You are skilled at …" "I like the way you wanted the class to … and they did / nearly did / etc"* | unhelpful: a focus on decontextualised detail or small aspects of tasks out of context. | *eg: unhelpful: "one student had poor handwriting" / "well done for starting on time"* |
| **For areas that may need improvement, offer advice IF still needed after asking questions first:** | *"In the group work / in the written answers / did the students achieve what you wanted? / Would you do this differently on another day?"* | unhelpful: starting straight away with commands/modals (see below), or starting with no input from them about the causes or key issues of the area in question | *eg: unhelpful: "Do this / fix that / you ought to be more / we must"* |
| **Get the context (like a doctor's case history) to understand the backstory of the class / lesson** | *"what set / what stage in the topic / how close to the exam / what stage in the year is this?"* | unhelpful: context-free criteria | *eg: unhelpful: "John's work is only level 3" - this can of course also be a helpful observation, if the context is understood.* |
| **Arrive at good areas for improvement by discussion. Offer a real example if that also helps.** | *"Have you considered…?" "Would it help to pop in and see me doing … "* | unhelpful: un-agreed / unchecked one-way proclamations | *eg: unhelpful: "I always…" "you must…"* |
| **Offer the benefits of the thing you're promoting. (Especially if the benefits are for all concerned.)** | *"If … then it's easier for you to … and they will be more able to … "* | unhelpful: leaving benefits for the teacher or students out of the discussion | *eg: unhelpful: "80% of the students need to be 50% more …"* |
| **Focus on what good can come of the teaching now or in future. What IS the GOOD aim, and what IS the GOOD action that will bring it about.** | *"It would be [good] if… because…" "In order to … a good way would be …"* | unhelpful: dominant negative phrasing / instructions to not-do-bad-things without a balancing positive alternative to act ON | *eg: unhelpful: "what we don't need is …" "this isn't very … " "… it will never happen if there is a lack of …"* |
| **Encourage an adult-adult conversation between professionals: respectful, curious, learning on both sides** | *"It was interesting how… what could be…"* | unhelpful: "parent" or "military" modals or commands - these disempower to varying degrees | *eg: unhelpful: "you should / you must / you have to" "why can't you / what's wrong with" "I'm disappointed "* |

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| **Perspective and proportion** | *[I quote Ofsted here!] " good, and very good for this stage in the year"* | unhelpful: many absolutes | *eg: often unhelpful, perhaps also untrue: "never / everyone / nobody / always / all teachers / every lesson must…"* |
| **Keep positive any dangerous/powerful tools such as judgemental language, personal comments, identity-level statements** | *[but rarely / more often only with skillful handling] "That was inspiring" "you have a talent for …" "You are the kind of person who can"* | very unhelpful: any unguarded judgemental language, personal comments, identity-level statements | *eg: very unhelpful,"that was uncomfortable" "you do not have a talent for …" "You are not the kind of person who"* |
| **Support constructive comments with an example of how / who / when / why, so as to offer a path to reaching the good thing.** | *"by specifying the "time, team, and task" before group work students will know how fast to work through it, and know who they are working with, and what to do before starting."* | unhelpful: unspecified proclamations / modals / nominalisations | *eg: unhelpful: "group work needs to be better / the timing had issues / the students could have been more on task"* |
| **Consider the journey we are all on: every teacher learns (from mistakes, and from others) throughout their career** | *"this is a skill that increases over time / with practice / can develop more if…"* | unhelpful: fixed timeframes / a focus on good/not good right now without any view to the future or sense of growth | *eg: unhelpful: "in that last lesson lacked the skill of…" "you do not have the skill of …"* |
| **Find "what works" for the professional you are supporting - we don't all use the same PC/laptop/ipad/tablet, but we can all find ways that work for us** | *"have you tried …" "would it work for you…" "have you seen anybody trying" [with the chance to answer yes or no!]* | unhelpful: imposing techniques, such as your personal favourite, Ofsted's personal favourite last year / Gove's personal favourite last decade. | *eg: unhelpful: "you need to talk for 5 minutes or less" "I always start with a brainstorm" "you must have a fast range of different tasks"* |
| **Consider an "it is good in ways and can be more good" approach** | *"you can" "you might" "it was good when" "one option is" "would the students benefit from" "A fantastic achievement would be…"* | unhelpful: the "should" list, the worst of these being "you should have" - this combines guilt about past failure with no movement to a future solution. | *eg: unhelpful when used without a follow up of "how" "with what resources" "and this will be good because" etc: "should / must / have to / need to / always / never / ought to / just / got to* |
| **Verify - Did your feedback help?**<br><br>**End with an agreement / check / understanding of if what you said will actually help … in what way.** | *"was that useful?" "what was the most thing?"*<br>*"do you feel you can do that?"*<br>*"do you have what you need to do it?"*<br>*"is that sustainable?"*<br>*"when might be a good time to try it?"*<br>*[just a couple of these]* | | |