

## Teaching Your Way Around the World

Teachers and administrators share their experiences in international schools around the world

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### Demos and feedback: Students learning from each other

Posted on [February 18, 2020](#) by [Paul Magnuson](#)

*This the fourth and final blog post in a series of reflections with Bill Tihen. I am pleased that, just as we finish processing Bill's notes from his November visit with LAS visiting scholar Bret Thayer, Bill has scheduled a new visit to attend the ECIS STEAM conference we are hosting March 6-7.*

Students must learn to give, hear, and accept feedback. Bill suggests that there are four general steps to make feedback effective.

1. Students **plan and present** a demonstration of their work, keeping the requirement for feedback in mind. Ideally students share their work for other students (and faculty members). Before presenting their work, students predict what sort of feedback they are likely to receive – both positive comments as well as suggestions for improvement.

1. After students have presented their work, they **receive feedback**. When students receive feedback they keep it safe for those giving them feedback by restricting themselves to listening and taking notes. Students learn to resist the urge to challenge the feedback, clarify misunderstandings, or justify themselves. In this manner, students and faculty giving feedback do so in a safe environment – and the students receiving the feedback actually hear it.

1. **Giving feedback** entails:

- (1) commenting on those aspects of the work that are well-liked and how the demonstration shows movement toward the end goal; and

- (2) commenting on what would make the work *even better*. For those things that might need to be addressed, an acceptable formulation of constructive criticism might be: "I like the [whatever it is] and think it might be *even better* if you [did this, changed this, considered this alternative, etc.]

1. And finally, **working with the feedback** requires clearly using one or more suggestions received from the group. Students give credit for the origin of the idea and explain how they made the suggestion their own and integrated it into their work. Work completed without adopting and adapting ideas from others is incomplete.

These four steps from Bill can lead to great use of feedback – or not. We've seen both results, so it's probably fair to say that these may be necessary but not sufficient conditions in Bill's framework. Other factors, like having the time and space to work without constant adult interruption, having an atmosphere of trust, and so on, are also important.

As I reflect on Bill's four steps, two interesting parallels jump out. First, how similar his suggestions for receiving feedback are to student feedback sessions of LEINN International at the University of Mondragon. Second, how refreshing it is to hear someone require students to incorporate each other's ideas.

LEINN International is an undergraduate program for future entrepreneurs. (LEINN stands for Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation. It is managed by a highly creative company, Tazebaez, which is itself a product of the parent LEINN program.) The day I visited, a cohort of freshmen were giving each other feedback. They sat

in a circle. The student receiving feedback took notes and limited his responses to a “thank you” for both positive and constructive comments from each colleague. I was amazed at how frank the feedback was, how carefully presented by the students, and how gracious those receiving feedback seemed. In hindsight, they were doing nothing other than what Bill suggests in (2) above, something we’ve adopted for our alternative 9th and 10th grade program at my school.

Requiring students to use the ideas of other students contradicts a lot of common practice in schools. How often have we heard teachers admonish students to “do your own work” and “keep your eyes on your own paper?” Bill is doing the opposite, requiring students to get *and use* feedback from other students, and above all else, not to try to go it alone. Please, please look at other students’ papers (plans, projects, models), he is saying. Learn from each other, exchange ideas. And then give credit where credit is due. What a refreshing take on learning.

*Thanks, Bill, for the years of collaboration, the experimental classes, and the debriefings that continue when we get together, most recently in this series of blog posts. You are amazing to work with.*



#### **About Paul Magnuson**

Several years ago, Paul Magnuson founded a research center at the high school level in collaboration with colleagues at Leysin American School. The center supports professional learning through a variety of programs, including year-long action research projects by faculty who receive competitive resident scholarships. In addition, the center works with schools and universities around the world, hosting 10 to 15 visiting scholars annually, and consulting and presenting at schools and other organizations. Paul has created a number of tools and programs, including classroom observation schemes, language immersion summer camps, the middle school at LAS, and most recently, edge, a high school program which offers an alternative to traditional school through greatly increased student agency. His current interests are the documentation of edge, pulling agile into education, and self-regulation for both students and teachers.

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