Provisioning feedback in the right circumstances can have a significant impact on student achievement. It can provide the student with specific information on the strengths of a product or performance and give pinpointed information on how to improve. By giving complete information about a product, it also clearly informs parents as to the progress of their children. It is a very effective instructional strategy that can be accomplished easily within the classroom.

According to the meta-analysis conducted by Marzano et. al. (2001), there are several important elements found in effective feedback.

1. Feedback should be corrective in nature.
   Students should not be left wondering about their performance. Good feedback validates the positive elements of the product and identifies what areas could be improved. Additionally, good feedback can suggest methods to improve the quality of future performance. Asking students to keep working on a task by incorporating specific corrective feedback into future revisions can enhance student achievement.

2. Feedback should occur close to the performance
   Appropriate feedback should occur as close to the performance as possible in order to strengthen the connection between the feedback and the learning. Too much separation in time makes the feedback appear spurious and it is difficult for the student to see how to integrate it in further revisions. By decreasing the interval between performance and feedback, students will perceive that the feedback cycle is a logical extension of the learning cycle.

3. Feedback should be tied to exact criteria.
   Often, when students are asked to report on their performance on a learning task, they first relate how other students did on the task and report their performance in relation to that of others. Although this performance comparison yields a fragment of information about the task, it does not help students look for specific ways to improve. However, if students are presented with the learning explicitly specified through the use of rubrics and other scoring guidelines, students can see how their performance measures up according to a set list of criteria.

4. Students should engage in providing and responding to feedback.
   There are times when students regard the grading of assignments in a passive manner—not seeing the correlation between the scoring criteria and their performance. Involving students in the feedback process helps them to understand the criteria by which they will be judged and increases student engagement in the process.

Examples of effective feedback
   Good coaches can teach us a lot about effective feedback. Here are two examples:

   Pitching coach to player during practice: “See how your arm is coming across your body, the way that we discussed. Check your front leg.

   Can you bring it toward home plate more?”

Reading teacher to new reader: “We have been working a lot on fluency. I can tell that you have really worked hard to make the words come together. The next thing to work on is to add excitement to the words by changing the tone of your voice. These words (points to text) seem mysterious. Can you make this phrase sound mysterious by changing your voice?”

These examples reflect the elements of good feedback: specific, related to the desired performance, suggesting ways to improve tied to criteria rather than comparison with other performers. There are no judgments of worth, only specific descriptions of what the student is currently doing and what he/she specifically can do to get better in relation to the goal.

Steps for providing (and receiving) feedback
   Providing (and receiving) feedback can be overwhelming. For some, it can feel like an attack or a devaluing of a product that has a great deal of personal investment. For others, it provokes feelings of fear or anxiety as the individual may not want to “hurt the feelings” of others. Therefore, the process of providing and receiving feedback should be taught explicitly. This helps to lessen some of the emotion that can be associated with this process.

   The first step is to identify the positive elements of the product. Giving clear examples of the positive aspects helps identify the elements that went well and what should be maintained.
in subsequent revisions. It also helps to maintain the rapport between the learner and the assessor by reinforcing the idea that the assessor isn’t “just out to find what is wrong” but to affirm the strong elements of the piece.

The second step is to identify potential growth. The distinction here is not to identify the weaknesses or areas to be improved. By looking at this from a position of potential strength, the teacher gives a subtle but strong message to the learner that this is a process and that one always can work to improve one’s craft.

The next step is to work with the learner to identify concrete ways to improve the product.

Finally, the invitation is to incorporate the feedback into a revision of the product. Awareness of vocal tone and body language is critical to this process.

Additionally, students should be taught how to receive feedback. It is easy to get defensive and lose sight of the authentic elements of the product that can be strengthened. Active listening skills can be reinforced to help with this process. Teaching students to monitor their emotional response to the feedback also can be helpful.

Creating a culture of critique

There are a number of challenges to using feedback effectively in the classroom. Other than the obvious ones—including making time to use a process approach like this—cultural and social/emotional obstacles present themselves. In order to use feedback effectively, teachers and learners must possess a strong sense of task persistence and the sense of craftwork. This is not easy in this fast-paced world where most learners approach assignments with a “Let’s get this one checked off the list” mentality in order to move on to the next task. When faced with refining a product, the first response can be this incredulous retort: “Why? I’ve already done that?”

It is important to instill a notion of “cognitive connoisseurship” within the classroom. This refers to the idea that learning is a process, not a destination. Effective learners constantly look for ways to improve their craft.

Finally, a strong foundation of psychological safety must be established within the classroom to provide the right environment for giving and receiving effective feedback for learning. In order to accept feedback, a learner must know that the teacher will deliver the feedback in a loving and respectful manner. For this to occur, a strong relationship must exist between the teacher and learner. Additionally, for peer feedback to work most effectively, students must have a strong sense of community and feel that they can share feedback without the thought of retribution from their peers.

Implications for practice

Here are some guiding questions to help with further investigation:

- How do I provide a psychologically safe environment to foster student use of feedback?
- Do I explicitly teach my students how to give and receive feedback?
- Do I routinely give both positive accounts of performance as well as provide areas of growth in assessing students’ work?
- Do I provide feedback close to the time that students complete their product?
- Do I create written criteria to assess student work?
- How do I allow for students to give feedback to others?

Implementing together

Suggestions for schools:

- Read and discuss the SOS article at a faculty or team meeting. (Watch the Web cast to spark discussion.) Discuss ways teachers gave feedback to students today. Examine in terms of the qualities of effective feedback. Generate two or three concrete suggestions for making feedback more effective.
- Role-play concrete examples of teachers using feedback in ways that help build a classroom culture of “cognitive connoisseurship.”
- In learning teams, go deeper. Select one of the faculty-generated suggestions for improving feedback. Agree to incorporate the suggestion into feedback over the next two weeks. Agree to log your actions and set a schedule for observing each other at least once. Arrange with the principal and/or department chair to observe as well.
- At the next team meeting, share observations about using the strategy and its impact on learning. Refine and agree on actions for the next two weeks.
- Share actions taken and observations of impact on student learning at the next faculty meeting.

Lorraine A. Ozar, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness,
School of Education, Loyola University Chicago
lozar@luc.edu

Michael J. Boyle, Ph.D.
Assistant Director, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness,
School of Education, Loyola University Chicago
mboyle@luc.edu

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