

## Feedback is explicit, positive, and corrective

### **Understanding the problem...**

Without question, the more clear and explicit the feedback students receive, the more readily they will master the skills you are teaching. Unfortunately, students often do not receive effective feedback. Four common problems associated with ineffective feedback are: (a) teachers are reluctant to provide negative information that may hurt students' self-esteem or negatively impact their motivation, (b) feedback that is provided tends to be too global or (c) too specific; and (d) they feel they do not have time to provide the feedback necessary.

### **Self-esteem concerns**

Although many teachers are reluctant to provide what they perceive to be negative feedback because they are concerned about its impact on self-esteem and motivation, research clearly shows that *the absence of explicit feedback can be considerably more detrimental* to students in both areas. Basically what happens is that in the absence of feedback, students experience both greater amounts of frustration and failure, and learning a new skill takes a great deal *more* practice (read that as... work!). Clear, corrective feedback has a positive orientation because it shows students how they can be more successful; in the absence of this information, students are left largely to their own resources, so the corrective strategies they invent as they attempt to learn a new skill are

### **A key to the solution...**

When teaching skills, processes, or strategies, ensure that students receive clear, explicit feedback that has the following characteristics:

- Initial feedback should focus on effective behaviors demonstrated by the student.
- Initial feedback should focus on a mastery criteria known to students.
- Corrective feedback should focus on the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the strategy employed by the student.
- Corrective feedback should focus on error patterns, not specific errors.
- Corrective feedback should use examples and nonexamples to help illustrate effective behavior.
- Corrective feedback should be selective.
- Effective feedback includes student elaboration.
- Effective feedback focuses on increasing effort to use the strategy.
- Effective feedback includes establishing goals for improving specific behaviors on subsequent attempts.
- Effective feedback is provided immediately after the practice attempt and just *before* the next practice attempt.

often faulty – the result being *they practice new incorrect* behaviors, then experience more frustration and failure, so their self-esteem and motivation to persist become even greater at risk.

### **Global feedback**

Often, the feedback that teachers provide is too general and does not provide the level of specificity needed to ensure students substantially increase their success in the next practice attempt. The most common, but least effective, form of global feedback is the grade students receive. Grades provide zero information about the specific tactics students were using that were effective, as well as ineffective. Grades tend to be interpreted by students not from the perspective of effectiveness, but rather in terms of social ranking and self-worth. (e.g., *A = “I’m a ‘good person’” – “I have high social status because of this ‘A’” – “I’m worthy and valuable”*).

### **Too specific feedback**

As strange as it sounds, some feedback can be too specific to be effective for students. An example of too specific feedback is when teachers identify each of the spelling errors in students’ writing. While the feedback does help students know which errors to correct, it *fails to help students’ recognize the pattern of errors they are experiencing*.

### **Time for feedback**

Unfortunately, most teachers work under enormous time-constraints. Not only are they under great pressure to ‘cover’ the curriculum due to high-stakes testing practices, they also have large rolls and class sizes. Given these conditions, one of the first things to be sacrificed is providing students with meaningful feedback. The paradox is that the *provision of clear, explicit feedback is one of the most important teaching tactics we can use to speed-up learning!*

### **Teaching Tips...**

#### **Initial feedback should focus on effective behaviors demonstrated by the student**

Rather than focusing on outcomes (e.g., the fact that a student’s writing was free of capitalization errors), begin feedback by identifying the specific behaviors the students demonstrated that led to the positive outcomes. Intentionally use the word “effective” in your feedback.

For example, you might say something like...

*“Mary, this looks like you did a good job using your knowledge of the capitalization and punctuation rules. You were very **effective** in this regard. Also, your use of the paragraph writing strategy was very **effective**. Your paragraph is well organized and communicates your message really well.”*

### **Feedback should focus on a mastery criteria known to students**

Before students begin practicing a new skill or strategy, they should be informed about expectations for performance, or a mastery criteria. Then, early in the feedback session, you should refer to this criteria. Performance checklists, rubrics, and progress charts are all excellent devices for both communicating expectations and feedback about performance.

For example, you might say something like...

*The criteria we are shooting for is to make no more than 1 error per 20 words you write. That translates into have a paper that's 95% error free. You wrote 139 words, and you made a total of 19 errors, so that means it was 86% error free. Not bad. You are only 9 points from reaching mastery.*

### **Corrective feedback should focus on the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the strategy employed by the student.**

As you begin to focus on providing feedback, place the emphasis on assessment of the strategy the student was using to perform the task, the outcomes produced by that strategy, and the need to use a more effective and/or efficient strategy. In short, blame the lack of success on the strategy the student was using, not the student.

For example, you might say something like...

*"Mary, it looks like the 'check for spelling strategy' you were using wasn't working well for you. Let's see if we can come up with a better way to check your spelling."*

### **Corrective feedback should focus on error patterns, not specific errors.**

For example, if students consistently misspell words with the vowel digraph 'ie' by placing the 'e' first, an ineffective form of feedback is to identify each of the misspelled words in the student's passage. A more effective technique would be to identify a few of these errors, point out the pattern to the student, and identify the more effective strategy to use to prevent future errors.

For example, you might say something like...

*Mary, I noticed many of the misspelled words that have 'ie' combinations in them. For example, here the word 'belief' is spelled 'beleif' and over here the word 'receive' is spelled 'recieve.' There seems to be a pattern of words with 'ei' combinations in them. It's hard to remember which comes first, the 'e' or the 'i'. so here's a strategy you can use to help keep it straight.*

*Say to your self "i" before 'e' except after 'c' - - I come before Ed, except when I see the 'c' first' because Ed loves 'cs'. Look at this word 'belief' I don't see a 'c' before the 'i' or 'e', so I know that the 'i' comes first.*

*Now look at this word, receive. I do see a 'c', so I know that Ed loves Cs, so the 'e' as in 'Ed', comes first.*

*I didn't mark every one of the words that were that were misspelled in this way. Now that you have a good strategy for spelling these words correctly, check over your work and correct any other words that might have this problem."*

### **Corrective feedback should provide students with examples and nonexamples of effective behavior.**

The brain learns best when it can clearly distinguish between correct and incorrect, so when providing feedback, be sure to both provide an example of the correct version of the behavior, and a contrasting nonexample.

For example, you might say something like...

*Here's a word. Look at it, and use the strategy to tell me which is spelled correctly.*

*RELIEF      RELEIF*

For another example, you might say something like...

*Remember to use this strategy for words with 'ie' combinations. Which of the words these words would you apply this strategy if you weren't surer about the spelling?*

*ACHIEVE      ACCOMPLISH*

### **Corrective feedback should be selective.**

Do not try to correct every type of error the student is making if there are more than two or three types. Guidelines for selecting errors to correct include:

- Target those kinds of errors that are easiest for the student to learn to correct .  
and/or
- Target those errors that occur most frequently.  
and/or
- Target those errors most likely to produce the greatest gain once corrected.  
and/or
- Target those errors that most greatly impair successful outcomes.

### **Corrective feedback should include scaffolded assistance .**

Initially, model for students the more effective strategy.

Then, perform the strategy with students by having them direct you in the correct behavior as you perform it.

Then assist students with prompts and cues as they perform the more effective strategy.

Then have students perform the more effective strategy without your assistance.

**Effective feedback includes student elaboration.**

Have students use their own language to describe the more effective strategy you are advocating.

**Effective feedback focuses on increasing effort to use the more effective strategy.**

For example, you might say something like...

*This new spelling strategy will work well for you, so you need to try hard to use it.*

**Effective feedback includes establishing goals for improving specific behaviors on subsequent attempts.**

For example, you might say something like...

*Your last paper was 86% error free. Mastery of 95% error free. How close to mastery do you think you can get on the next paper?*

**Effective feedback is provided *immediately following* the practice attempt and just *before* the next practice attempt.**

Grading papers always takes time, especially when you have a large number of students. Nonetheless, keep in mind that most effective times to provide feedback is immediately after the student has practiced the skill so that the experience will be fresh in their minds. Likewise, by the time students practice the skill again, they may have forgotten the feedback, so it should be reviewed just prior to the next practice attempt.

HOME – Tactics for use during the strategy lesson

MAKES SENSE HOME