

# The Importance of Feedback

Stephanie Norlin

The use of feedback has become an important practice by teachers in the classroom. Though research has proven it to be beneficial, it is not always practiced by teachers. The type of feedback, timing of its use, and way it is used can have positive effects on students in the classroom.

In their research article *The Power of Feedback*, John Hattie and Helen Timperley define feedback as “information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback often occurs after a student’s response, or when information is provided about the specific task at hand. Simplified, it is a teacher’s response to a student’s work.

Feedback can work in several different ways. If there is a challenging task at hand, receiving feedback can produce more efforts from students on future work. Feedback has a higher success rate when there is a clear goal set. The more specific the goal, the more effective it is because it produces more focus and feedback from the students.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) state four task levels of feedback. They say that feedback can be about a task or product and can include direction on how to improve. For example, when a teacher hands back a paper with notes about how to improve written on it. Secondly, feedback can be directed to assist the learning process to help students better understand a task, such as answering a question. The third level of feedback can be looked at as personal feedback. It can have a focus on the self-evaluation part of an assignment to see if a student can work through a task by themselves by using techniques that were

already taught. This level can increase student’s self-efficacy and boost self-esteem levels. The last level of feedback is personal feedback that is unrelated to a task. It is usually a general form of praise such as saying “you are a great student!”

The most common form of feedback, which is also the first level explained earlier is often called “corrective feedback”. This form of feedback focuses on the correctness of behavior or other factors pertaining to a task accomplishment. Written comment feedback on work in conjunction with a grade has shown to be more effective than just one or the other. A comment such as “good work” is vague and doesn’t contain task-related information. Therefore it doesn’t lead to higher levels of commitment or higher self-efficacy or understanding about the task.

Teacher praise is a popular reinforcement method that is placed in the personal feedback category. Burnett reported that praise is recommended for teachers because “it can build self-esteem [and] provide encouragement” (Burnett, 2002, p. 7). Though praise can strengthen self-efficacy, it is being argued as to how providential it is. Paul Burnett’s study on teacher praise and feedback says “teacher praise...is a more intense, detailed response to student’s behavior than feedback” (Burnett, 2002, p. 6). In opposition, Hattie and Timperley say that praise isn’t that effective to students because it doesn’t carry a lot of information or provide answers. But they say if it is specifically directed to the task and performance of it, it can help with self-efficacy.

Burnett found that 91% of elementary students he measured liked to be praised.

69% of those same students preferred not to receive public praise (Burnett, 2002, p. 7). This suggests that students may find public praise to be embarrassing. Hattie and Timperley's (2007) measurements of students found that while elementary students enjoyed being praised for their achievements, older students tended to think the teacher thought they had lower abilities because they were being praised. Feedback and praise produce positive effects on students. Feedback gains the upper hand because it gives students more specifics as to what can be improved, helping them learn the lesson better. Praise on the other hand may encourage the student, but may not influence them in other ways.

Using feedback in a classroom can be as simple as writing a few notes on a student's essay, math homework, quiz, etc. Correcting a paper and writing or telling a student how to find the right answer allows the student to understand the concept better and know why they got it wrong and how they can correct it. Feedback is an important factor in today's classroom, and should be implemented in every classroom.

## References

- Burnett, P.C. (2002). Teacher praise and feedback and students' perceptions of the classroom environment. *Educational Psychology, 22* (1).
- Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 77* (1), pp. 81-112.
- Sutherland, K.S., Wehby, J.H., & Copeland, S.R. (2003). Effect of varying rates of behavior-specific praise on the on-task behavior of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 11* (4), pp. 239-248.