A Teacher's Guide to Giving Effective Feedback

Abigail Aasen

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to discuss the importance of teachers giving students feedback in the classrooms. Specifically, this paper examines studies done on student feedback including if it should be given, when it should be given, and how it should be given. This paper proposes a specific plan for a classroom including the type of feedback to use in test situations and content practice situations (for example learning spelling words or math facts). Feedback helps students make corrections in their work and allows them to see where they stand versus what the teacher would like students to learn in any specific lesson or unit. Although student feedback is already widely used, there is a question of how it can be done more effectively to assist in the retention aspect of a students' learning. Types of feedback are reviewed and compared to show which methods yield better results. The examples in this paper include results from studies involving the improvement of math and writing skills through feedback made to improve student accuracy and set goals.

Keywords: *student feedback, effective feedback, IFAT forms, elementary students, retention*

In elementary schools, teachers have goals and expectations that students are expected to meet. Receiving a report card is an obvious indicator of how teachers give an account of a student's progress in the classroom. Sometimes this can be a shock for both students and their parents. That is why it is essential to give frequent and constructive feedback to students. This feedback provides students with a clear view of where they are on any topic or concept and it can be an indicator of the level they are expected to be at (Shute, 2008). Without this feedback it is harder to comprehend objectives, make corrections, and retain the necessary information. This paper will explore why teachers should give student feedback, how feedback should be administered, and when student feedback is most effectively given.

Why should student feedback be given?

In a study done by Chandler reported in the *Journal of Second Language Writing* students receive feedback on writing assignments over the course of a semester. All of the subjects were music majors from East Asia. The course the study focused on was geared towards improving English (as a second language) in writing. Half of the students writing autobiographies were given feedback and half were not. Those non-feedback students were only given a grade. The research concluded that students given feedback made less errors in future papers than the group of students who received no feedback (Chandler, 2003).

How should feedback be given?

A second study was done for the same course with a different group of similar students to determine which type of feedback was most effective in creating a higher English accuracy in the papers. The first option was direct correction where the teacher edited the mistakes and showed the correct way to write a specific sentiment. Other options were a description of why the error was wrong, underlining only the error, or a combination of underlining and describing what the errors were. Data showed that the student group who received feedback in the form of direct correction improved the most. Direct correction was "fastest and easiest for [the students] to revise" (Chandler, 2003, 291). However, in a survey given to students they responded that they preferred underlining with the description because it helped them learn their mistakes and how to fix them more effectively (Chandler, 2003). So, although direct correction was the fastest way for students to improve their writing there is no evidence that they understood the fixes they were making enough to claim that they learned better from that form of feedback. Students preferred underlining with a description even though statistics showed that correction was most effective in curbing future mistakes. A teacher has to decide if it is more important to give feedback in a way that the students feel helps them learn best, or trust the statistics and give a more direct form of correction.

These studies were done in college classrooms but it is still very relevant and applicable to any level of classroom. In elementary schools it is important to decide if the speed of improvement is most important or if the most important thing is to make the students feel that they truly understand the errors they have made. This decision is complicated by the fact that direct correction seems to be the most

effective although it is not preferred by the students studied.

When is student feedback most effectively given?

We have all had experiences at some point in our lives where we waited endlessly for test results or had text anxiety from not knowing how an exam will result. Teachers need time to properly correct work sheets, tests, and essays along with working on making lessons for the next day. Sometimes by the time students receive their test scores back they have forgotten the test almost entirely including which questions they struggled with most and which ones they were confident in. After such a long period of time, students become less curious abould their mistakes and may be only concerned with their percentage overall or if they earned a good job sticker on their work. Additionally, it is stressful when an answer is marked wrong without being told the right answer. To remedy these concerns it is important to give corrective and immediate feedback whenever possible.

To examine the real importance of feedback in 2006, Roberta Dihoff studied elementary school students and noted how different types of feedback affected math progress. Two groups of forty students were observed. One group tested normally achieving in math and the other tested Math Learning Disability (MLD). These two groups were each split into four categories that would determine what type of feedback each student received. The options were the Scantron group (where students filled in bubbles with no feedback), the delayed feedback group (where students who were finished with the test were able to look over correct answers compared to their own), and a verbal feedback group (where the teacher told the testing student whether or not their answer was correct and then asked them to make another choice if it was incorrect). The final and most interesting group was the Immediate Feedback Assessment Technique (IFAT) form group. Using this method, students scratch off their answer A, B, C, or D on an answer sheet and a star indicates a correct answer once scratched off. If an incorrect first answer is chosen the student had two more chances to answer the question correctly.

Dihoff's results showed that groups who received immediate feedback by either IFAT or immediate verbal feedback showed more improvement. This was observed in the normally achieving group and especially in the MLD group. These results support the method of making feedback immediate when possible (Dihoff, 2006).

Naturally, it is almost never practical for one teacher to individually give verbal feedback on correct and incorrect answers to every student in his or her classroom. The IFAT form is a very interesting and effective way to especially help students who are struggling with a concept. I can testify for this method because I have participated in this form of testing as a student. It is very helpful for students to recognize being on the right track when taking a test and the IFAT forms help to boost confidence and bring down levels of post-test anxiety. The stress of not knowing results is removed because of the immediate feedback.

Recommended Method for Feedback

First and foremost student feedback should definitely be given whenever possible because it reduces future errors. Secondly, feedback should be given in a way that is both time effective and boosts student's confidence in their learning. Just because direct correction is the fastest to revise does not always indicate higher levels of student comprehension. "Feedback can promote learning if it is received mindfully, but it can inhibit learning if it encourages mindlessness" (Salomon and Globerson, 1987; Bangert-Drowns et al, 1991). Lastly, feedback should be given immediately whenever possible to keep students interested in the result of their work and learning, boost confidence, and create a more helpful testing environment. Teachers should give students feedback as often as possible to let students know where they stand. Of course the method of feedback will have to be flexible to the needs of different classes through the years of teaching. Based on these studies, the use of IFAT whenever practical, and correcting by underlining and describing the error, will likely be the most effective ways of giving feedback to students.

References

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