



Just for the ASKing!



Volume II Issue IV

Growth-Producing Feedback



Bruce Oliver, the author of *Just for the ASKing!*, lives in Burke, Virginia. He uses the knowledge, skills, and experience he acquired as a teacher, professional developer, mentor, and middle school principal as he works with school districts in across the nation. He has written more than 150 issues of *Just for the ASKing!* He is the author of *Points to Ponder* and also a co-author of *Creating a Culture for Learning: Your Guide to PLCs and More..*

This month's newsletter addresses a personal passion and is written with the idea that school leaders can use it with staff as a faculty discussion starter. Please feel free to duplicate it and use it as a professional development tool. At the end of the newsletter you will find a Growth-Producing Feedback Discussion Tool, which lists examples of teacher comments about student work. Use this tool to promote in-depth staff discussion about how to increase the effectiveness of their feedback.

Many books and articles have been published that provide educators with the best ideas to increase student achievement. The ideas contained in these publications are wide and varied. Some of the most popular topics include reaching the underachiever, unit and lesson design, differentiation of instruction, assessing student learning, and ways to meet the requirements of **No Child Left Behind**.

Feedback is another topic that is a repeated focus in the literature. It is an incredibly powerful tool that teachers have at their disposal; it can make a huge difference in student achievement. Grant Wiggins writes that when feedback is given to students properly, most students can achieve at the same level as the top 20% of students. He also asserts that feedback has a positive relationship with the rate that students are engaged. Put quite simply, students who are given specific information about the accuracy and quality of their work will spend more time working on their academic assignments. However, many teachers do not follow the suggestions set forth in research on the topic of feedback. So often, teachers simply follow practices which they inherit or which they have fallen into the habit of using.

It is important for school leaders to provide their teaching staffs with the most up-to-date research. If we want students to improve their achievement, it is important for teachers to follow specific practices.

The first step in improving how and when feedback is provided to students is to understand a clear definition of what good feedback is. Wiggins says that feedback is not about praise or blame, approval or disapproval. Good feedback describes what a student did or did not do for the purpose of changing or maintaining a behavior or performance. Robert Marzano and associates concur that effective feedback should provide students with an explanation of what they are doing correctly and what steps they must take to continue to make progress.

Typical feedback often includes such comments as “Nice work,” “Unclear,” “You need to improve your study habits,” “C+” or “75%.” These types of statements or grades show either an approval or disapproval of what a student has done, and it is evaluative in nature. Research has shown that this type of feedback to students has very little effect on student learning and can have a negative impact on student motivation to learn. Put simply, students tend to ignore comments when they are accompanied by grades or numerical scores. However, students pay much closer attention to written comments when they are not accompanied by a grade. Stephen Chappuis and Richard Stiggins found that “replacing judgmental feedback with specific, descriptive and immediate feedback benefits students.” Productive feedback tells students what they are doing right, pinpointing strengths, and helping learners develop those strengths even further.

The purpose of feedback is to enhance student achievement by emphasizing progress rather than deficiencies. In order for feedback to be meaningful, it is important for teachers to provide it in a timely manner. The sooner students receive feedback on their work, the greater the likelihood that they will learn and grow from the feedback that is provided. Teachers can give feedback through one-on-one conversations, or by circulating around the classroom and commenting on the student work that they see. Marzano has written that “the best feedback involves an explanation as to what is accurate and what is inaccurate in terms of student responses.” In addition, asking students to keep working on a task until they succeed will enhance achievement.

It is also important for feedback to be specific toward a standard or a benchmark. A student must know how closely he or she is coming to mastering the required learning. The teacher should let a student know the specific skill level or knowledge that a student has displayed, and what needs to happen to keep the student moving along the continuum to mastery. In order for feedback to be effective, the teacher should give guidance on how a student can make improvement.



Giving students effective feedback without letting them respond to the feedback by improving their work is an exercise in futility for both the student and the teacher. Students must have the opportunity to listen to what their teacher has said, to make adjustments in their work and to resubmit their assignments for further comments. It can be a matter of personal fulfillment for everyone involved in the learning process when a teacher can see the results of his or her efforts to improve learning.

When teachers provide feedback in a specific and proper manner, there is an added benefit to student learning. When students are given information about their progress, they begin to develop the skill of self-assessment. They can actually articulate what they have learned and what they still need to work on. Ultimately we do not want students to be completely dependent upon their teachers to let them know if they are learning. Self-assessment is a great life skill we can teach our students. The result can be that our students will have greater aspirations to succeed in the future, enjoy greater satisfaction from their learning, and set future performance goals.

Please see the next page for a Growth-Producing Feedback Discussion Tool to use with your faculty.

© 2005 Just ASK Publications & Professional Development

Permission is granted for reprinting and distribution of this newsletter for non-commercial use only. Please include the following citation on all copies: Oliver, Bruce. "Growth-Producing Feedback." *Just for the ASKing!* October 2005. Reproduced with permission of Just ASK Publications & Professional Development.



Growth-Producing Feedback?

Analyze the following statements and determine which statements would help students be more successful. Consider how you could revise any that do not appear to be growth producing so that they are more effective.

- Take a look at the example on the board. Look at my second step and compare it to what you have done.
- I gave you the handout with all the directions. Go back and read the handout again.
- I'm not sure you studied very long or hard on this test. I expected better results from you.
- There are just too many careless errors here. Take your paper back and correct your mistakes.
- Your subject/verb agreement is incorrect on numbers 3, 7 and 10. Please go back and fix them and bring your paper back to me.
- Your writing lacks clarity and focus.
- Remember that our objective was to make all your letters touch the line. Go back to your seat and fix the letters that don't follow that pattern.
- You must follow the steps in the recipe precisely. Go back over the steps in the recipe and see if you can find out which step you missed.
- It's clear from your explanation that you have grasped the main ideas. I would recommend one change. Think about your third statement and see if you can make a better argument for your thesis statement.
- In number four, you are dividing fractions. Remember to invert the fraction and then multiply.
- Look at the footnote format I gave you at the beginning of the assignment and see if you can fix the footnotes you have included in your paper.
- I feel that I have presented this information in a clear cut manner. I've done my part. Now you figure out why you aren't getting it.
- Your work is showing great improvement. You're doing much better.
- C+
- You have too many awkward sentences in your paragraph.
- Don't make the same mistakes you made the last time. Look at section two of the handout and compare it to your work. I think you'll see where you can make the proper adjustment.
- You will find all of the correct answers in the review sheet I gave you on Friday. Compare your answers with the review sheet, make the necessary corrections, and resubmit your paper.
- You really should have done a better job on this assignment. I'm disappointed.
- Great work! You are becoming an excellent student.

Growth-Producing Feedback?

- I want you to listen to the tape again. Listen to how the narrator pronounces his words. Then come back and try your recitation with me again.
- Look at your materials list and make sure you have included everything that is required for this project.
- You have set up your formula to solve the problem correctly. But you made a slight error in step # 2.
- There is no excuse for the kind of work you turned in.
- Let's review. Your paragraph was to have a thesis statement, three supporting statements, and a concluding sentence for a total of five sentences. Here's the paragraph you submitted. I want you to rewrite it correctly.
- You've set up your experiment properly following all the steps in the procedure section of your book.
- Your book report was just superb this time. I enjoyed reading it so much. Great work!
- I'm going to listen to each of you play individually. I want you to do a self-assessment and then I will critique your playing.
- Remember what the librarian taught us last Friday. Go back and research your topic more thoroughly.
- Too vague.
- Your writing has all five components of a good newspaper lead.
- Keep up the good work.
- Your figure is inaccurate. Go back and redo it.
- This is well done. It's obvious that you took a lot of time to complete your project.
- Go back and review the rubric descriptors for this assignment. Your overall rating was a 3. I want you to revise it so that it is a 4.
- You did not sound very good today. I hope you improve before next week's concert.
- I explained that to the whole class yesterday. There's no reason why I should have to explain it to you again.
- Remember... *i* before *e* except after *c*. Using this rule go back and correct your spelling words.
- I want you to do two things. First, go up to the physical model I shared with the class. Then, using this tool, I want you to put the finishing touches on your project so that it looks like the model.
- Let's talk about sentence structure. The objective of the assignment was for you to write longer sentences. I want you to look at the first paragraph and see if you can combine several of your short sentences into one longer sentence.
- When I pass back your tests, I want you to correct all the questions that you missed.