

Feedback Sandwich: Food for Student Growth!



By Carol Beaton (LEFT), SEEC Beginning Teacher Network Coordinator, and Jennifer Glasheen (RIGHT), SEEC Director of Teaching & Learning

Waiting to pick up my granddaughter from gymnastics, I had the opportunity to watch her for a few minutes. She was working on a layout-front tuck in the tumbling pass for her floor routine. She made a diagonal pass across the large mats, and her coach stood at the corner, waiting for her. “You got the height you needed that time. Next time concentrate on rotating faster after the layout. Tuck your body tightly to help you rotate quicker. That will allow you to land it.” (Learning goal: a layout front tuck)

The performance-based curricula utilize some tricks the rest of us could profit from. Formative assessment is embedded in everything they do. As important as the assessment itself is the feedback that follows the assessment. Improvement and ultimately success in meeting the learning goal is dependent on the feedback.

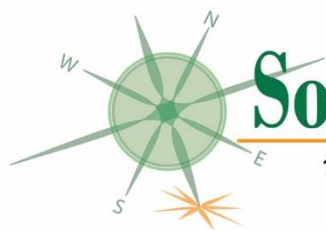
“You kept your head down. Now bring your arms all the way around to finish the swing.” (Learning goal: a good golf swing)

“The angles create good perspective. Next try using shading to create the focal point.” (Learning goal: a painting with perspective)

Evaluative or Descriptive?

Feedback can be evaluative or descriptive. We are compelled to provide evaluative feedback. We have to have grades on the tests, in the gradebook, entered into the online grading program, on the papers we return to students. Research tells us that when the grade goes on the paper, the learning stops! Any comment or feedback that accompanies the grade is viewed as the justification for the grade. Evaluative feedback points out what the student failed to do.

Descriptive feedback gives hope. It is constructive. It is more coaching than critiquing. It answers the questions for the student: “Where am I now? What did I do well? What needs to be improved? How can I improve?”



Descriptive feedback affects both performance and motivation. The student looks at the work beyond just the grade.

Some useful criteria to consider

1. Descriptive feedback is effective when it directs attention to the intended learning (learning targets), pointing out strengths and offering specific information to guide improvement.

2. The feedback occurs during learning, while there is still time to act on it

- Use mistakes to inform next steps
- Provide opportunity to improve during the learning
- Plan time to act before grading
- Time spent giving feedback may be wasted if we do not build in time for them to act on it

3. Addresses partial understanding

- Should re-teaching be needed?

4. Does not do the thinking for the student

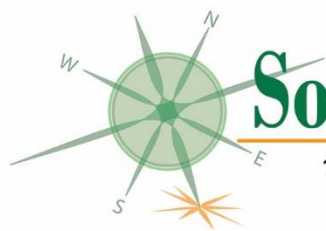
- Try not to "over-feedback"
- Check to see if students know what, know how, then hold them accountable
- Feedback by questioning
- Feedback in discovery learning tasks
 - Allow students to analyze mistakes and determine a course of action (Inquiry)
 - Guide with more questions to build on prior knowledge

5. Limits corrective information to amount students can act on

- Use professional judgment and differentiation
- Enough but not too much corrective feedback so they can act on in time provided
- Focus on one criterion or aspect of quality at a time
- Consider giving further guided practice opportunities

A Feedback Sandwich

Descriptive feedback can be thought of as a feedback sandwich. Think back to the gymnastic coach's comments. It should contain information about what went well ("You got the height you needed that time."). It should point to an improvement that can be made ("Next time concentrate on rotating faster"). Finally, effective feedback suggests a plan for how to get better ("Tuck your body tightly to help you rotate quicker. That will allow you to land it."). The piece to be improved upon is sandwiched between the positive and the plan to improve. The



South East Education Cooperative

1305 9th Ave. S., Fargo, N.D. 58103 | (701) 446-3170 | www.ndseec.com

gymnast knows what she has achieved, and is empowered to move forward in improving a specific element of her skills.

Descriptive feedback has the power to motivate students, empower them to be in control of their own learning by giving the tools to progress toward meeting the learning target. Evaluative feedback will not go away. Every assignment need not have a grade. As teachers, it is a difficult task to balance the need to provide formative assessment and effective feedback with the need to grade our students. It requires creativity in planning and incorporating the formative piece into the learning activities as well as finding opportunities for graded pieces. It is the way in which we utilize this marvelous trade secret of descriptive feedback that will give it the power to enhance learning in our classrooms.