Research Based Strategies for the Classroom

Part #9 - Providing Feedback

Introduction

Providing the right kind of feedback to students can make a significant difference in their achievement. There are two key considerations. First, feedback that improves learning is responsive to specific aspects of student work, such as test or homework answers, and provides specific and related suggestions. There needs to be a strong link between the teacher comment and the student's answer, and it must be instructive. This kind of feedback extends the opportunity to teach by alleviating misunderstanding and reinforcing learning. Second, the feedback must be timely. If students receive feedback no more than a day after a test or homework assignment has been turned in, it will increase the window of opportunity for learning. Feedback is a research-based strategy that teachers, and students, can practice to improve their success.

Key Research Findings

- When feedback is corrective in nature—that is, it explains where and why students have made errors--significant increases in student learning occur (Lysakowski & Walberg, 1981, 1982; Walberg, 1999; Tennenbaum & Goldring, 1989).
- Feedback has been shown to be one of the most significant activities a teacher can engage in to improve student achievement (Hattie, 1992).
- Asking students to continue working on a task until it is completed and accurate (until the standard is met) enhances student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).
- Effective feedback is timely. Delay in providing students feedback diminishes its value for learning (Banger-Drowns, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991).
- Administer tests to optimize learning. Giving tests a day after a learning experience is better than testing immediately after a learning experience (Bangert-Downs, Kulik, Kulik, & Morgan, 1991).
- Rubrics provide students with helpful criteria for success, making desired learning outcomes clearer to them. Criterion-referenced feedback provides the right kind of guidance for improving student understanding (Crooks, 1988; Wilburn & Felps, 1983).
- Effective learning results from students providing their own feedback, monitoring their work against established criteria (Trammel, Schloss, & Alper, 1994; Wiggins, 1993).

Implementation

Fine-tune how you provide feedback by focusing on the details of what you say, as well as when you say it. Research suggests best practices for providing feedback:

1. Increase the value of tests and homework. Providing only a grade or number on a test or homework assignment leaves out critical information for students. Take time to write comments, point out omissions, and explain your thinking when reviewing student work.

2. Make feedback count. Feedback is best when it is corrective in nature. Help students see their errors and learn how to correct them by providing explicit and informative feedback when returning student work. Make feedback another part of the learning process.

3. Don't delay feedback. The longer students have to wait for feedback, the weaker the connection to their effort becomes, and the less likely they are to benefit.

4. Help students get it right. If students know you want to see them succeed, and you're willing to help explain how, their learning improves. Give students opportunities to improve, try again, and get it right.

5. Ask students to provide feedback. Students can monitor and provide feedback to other students, as well as compare their work to criteria. Engage students in review of their own work and others.

6. Give students time to absorb new ideas. Tests are more effective as opportunities for learning if a day has gone by between learning experiences and the test.

7. Use rubrics. Rubrics provide criteria against which students can compare their learning. Involve students in developing rubrics. Rubrics help students focus their effort.

Additional Resources

RubiStar is a free online tool that teachers can use to make and save rubrics. Developed by the High Plains Regional Technology in Education Consortium, ***RubiStar*** includes a tutorial for new users and a feature that enables teachers to analyze student data and identify areas for focusing additional instruction. http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php

The National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning has published an article called The Instructional Conversation: Teaching and Learning in Social Activity. The authors discuss the use of modeling, providing feedback, contingency management, directing, questioning, explaining, and task structuring in classroom activity settings. http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/ncrcdsll/rr2.htm

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