

Making Feedback Culturally Responsive: Giving “Wise” Feedback

For Feedback to be effective, students must act on it. We have to engage our students’ willingness to act on our feedback. By looking closely at their work to understand what they get and identify where they need help, we are listening to our students. Our feedback can communicate to them that we have heard them, and they will be more likely to trust us enough to follow our advice for that sometimes difficult next step. One of the challenges the ally teacher has to confront in the learning partnership is how to give feedback so that it doesn’t shut the student down emotionally or create anxiety.

Research by Cohen and Steele (2002) found that students of color often did not receive timely, actionable feedback from their teachers either because the teacher didn’t want to hurt the student’s feelings or he didn’t want to be perceived as prejudiced because he was pointing out errors to a student of color. Cohen and Steele identified two types of feedback students got. One was effective and the other wasn’t. The ineffective feedback they called “cushioned feedback.” The teacher downplayed the severity of the errors and provided little if any information the student could use to improve his performance. Delpit (1995) talks about this as a common point of disconnection in cross-cultural communications. She points out that “helpers” from the dominant culture who are trying to give feedback become more indirect and less precise in their communication in a misguided attempt to equalize a racial, linguistic, or socioeconomic power difference. It backfires because the student interprets the vagueness as an attempt to hide the truth.

Cohen and Steele recommend an approach they call **wise feedback**. It’s different from the typical sandwich feedback model – start with positive feedback, then give the negative or hard feedback, and end with a positive observation or encouragement. Wise feedback is a way of giving feedback that reassures students that they will not be stereotyped or doubted as less capable. Cohen and Steel (2002) suggest that to be helpful. The teacher has to convey faith in the potential of the student while being honest with the student about the gap between his current performance and the standard he is trying to reach. While delivering negative feedback, the wise educator adds three specific elements to her feedback:

- An explicit holding of high standards. This helps the student understand that their mistakes are not necessarily a sign of (perceived) low capability but rather a sign of the high demands of the education program or academic task
- A personal assurance to the student that he is capable and can improve with effort.
- Specific actionable steps to work on.

The Asset-Based Feedback Protocol

1. Begin with a check-in. Have a few minutes for reconnecting. Ask about the student and what is going on in their life – how they are feeling.
2. State explicitly the purpose of your meeting and affirming your belief in the student’s capacity as a learner. Give evidence by citing progress and growth in other areas.
3. Validate the student’s ability to master the learning target while acknowledging high demands of the task. Have the student analyze the task with you. Identify the easy parts and the harder parts.

4. Deliver feedback that is specific, actionable, and timely. Restate what the final goal is and what the mastery looks like and then show the student where they are in relationship to the goal.
5. Create space for the student to react to what they have heard and how they feel about it.
6. Give the student specific actions to take to improve; new strategies, instructions on what to tweak during the execution of the task. Give feedback and action steps in writing if possible. Provide some way to track progress.
7. Ask the student to paraphrase what they heard you say- - what is wrong, what needs to be fixed, and how to go about fixing it.
8. Offer emotional encouragement and restate your belief in them. It is important not to skip this part, even if the student seems uncomfortable. They are taking it in even if they are playing it cool.
9. Set up a time to follow up and check progress.

Hammond, Z. Jackson, Y., Alpert, D. Greenberg, K. Schroller, A. Hill, K. (Eds), *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain* (1st Ed.), Citing excerpts from *Establishing Alliance in the Learning Partnership*. Corwin: California. (2014). (pp. 104-105).