Lesson 6

Using Feedback in the Classroom

Key Words

acceptable
clarifying
comprehensive
constructive
conviction
criteria
flexible
jargon
modify
objectivity
preconceived
rapport
reinforce

What You Will Learn to Do

- Use feedback to enhance learning in the classroom

Linked Core Abilities

- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Describe the purpose of feedback in the classroom
- Explain four ways that feedback can be effective
- Identify the five characteristics or conditions of effective feedback
- Identify the basic ground rules and tips for giving effective feedback
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

In traditional courses individualized comments from instructors to their students are often limited to grades on papers, quizzes, exams, and the final grade; however, comments of this sort come well after instructors have evaluated learners on their course work. Such after-the-fact feedback often contributes little to learning because it is too late for learners to take corrective action. On the other hand, the most important task you have as an instructor may be to provide information that learners can use to improve themselves during the course. Such feedback guides learners while they can still take corrective action.

This lesson examines how you can give objective, **acceptable**, **constructive**, **flexible**, and **comprehensive** feedback.

Definitions and Applications

In general, feedback is any information about the results of a process. When you use a computer, for instance, you feed in the information and get back feedback. In the social sciences, feedback is the information that returns to the source of the process so as to **reinforce** or **modify** it. For example, if a coach finds that the football team is weak in defense tactics, the coach schedules the team for more tackling practice. In psychological **jargon**, feedback is called the *knowledge of results*.

In the classroom, feedback can be defined as information that learners receive from their instructor about their performance, information that may cause them to take self-corrective action and guide them in attaining the goals of the course more effectively.

Learners can receive feedback from at least five sources: themselves, the learning task, fellow cadets/students, the instructor, and from the school/cadet battalion.

Feedback is generally given for informational and/or motivational purposes. Informational feedback is generally responsible for correcting the errors that the learner commits and should always be motivating. Motivational feedback motivates the learner to try harder but does not always provide information. A pat on the back or a word of encouragement may motivate a learner but will not necessarily point out the errors in the learner's performance.

Giving Feedback to Learners

The purpose of giving feedback in the classroom is to improve learner performance. In its most effective form, it provides constructive advice, direction, and guidance to learners in their effort to raise their performance levels. Learners must understand the purpose and role of feedback in the learning process; otherwise, they may reject it and make little or no effort to improve. Feedback can also be used as a device to reinforce learning. Although all feedback cannot be used in this manner, the instructor should take every opportunity to use feedback as a means of **clarifying**, emphasizing, or reinforcing instruction.

Key Note Terms

acceptable – capable or worthy of being accepted, adequate, satisfactory

constructive – promoting improvement or development

flexible – ready to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements

comprehensive – covering completely or broadly

reinforce – to strengthen by additional assistance, material, or support

modify – to make basic or fundamental changes to give a new orientation to or to serve a new end

jargon – technical terminology or language created for a particular profession, such as computer science, that may seem strange or outlandish to outsiders who do not understand it

Key Note Term

clarifying – to make understandable

Characteristics (or Conditions) of Effective Feedback

Effective feedback stresses both learner strengths as well as suggestions for improvement. The most significant characteristics, or conditions, of effective feedback are **objectivity**, acceptability, constructiveness, flexibility, and comprehensiveness. Each of these characteristics is briefly explained in the following sections.

Objectivity

Effective feedback focuses on the learner and the learner's performance; it should not reflect the instructor's personal opinions, likes, and biases. For example, if the learner makes a speech and expresses views that conflict with your beliefs, you should give feedback on the merits of the speech, not on the basis of the agreement or disagreement with the learner's views. To be objective, feedback must be honest; it must be based on factual performance; not performance as it could have been or as you and the learner wish it had been.

Acceptability

Learners usually accept feedback when you give it with **conviction** and sincerity. Usually, you have the opportunity to establish **rapport** and mutual respect with learners before the need for giving feedback arises. If there is no such opportunity, your manner, attitude, and knowledge of the subject must serve instead.

Constructiveness

You must be straightforward and honest; you must also respect the learner's personal feelings. Feedback, then, is pointless unless the learner profits from it. Praise just for the sake of praise has no value; however, unless the only goal is to motivate or improve self-concept.

Effective feedback reflects your consideration of the learner's need for self-esteem, recognition, confidence, and the approval of others. Ridicule, anger, or fun at the expense of the learner, have no place in constructive feedback.

Flexibility

You should always remain flexible in giving feedback by avoiding mechanical, predetermined techniques and **preconceived** opinions regarding content, subject matter, and learner capability. Instead, you should consider

- **The actual content of the learner's effort**
- **What actually happens during an activity**
- **The observed factors that affect performance**

Comprehensiveness

Comprehensive feedback need not be extremely long nor must it treat every detail of the learner's performance. As an instructor, you must decide whether you can achieve the best results by discussing a few major points or a number of minor

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Key Note Term

objectivity – dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations

Key Note Terms

conviction – a strong persuasion or belief

rapport – a relationship, especially one of mutual trust

Key Note Term

preconceived – to form (as an opinion) prior to actual knowledge or experience

points. You should base your feedback either on what areas need improvement or on what areas you can reasonably expect the learner to improve.

Feedback includes both strengths and weaknesses. Only you can determine a proper balance between the two. It is a disservice to learners to dwell on the excellence of their performance and neglect areas that need improving (or vise versa).

Ground Rules and Tips for Giving Feedback

There are some basic ground rules for giving feedback so it is constructive and helpful to the learner. These rules are as follows:

- **Establish and maintain rapport with learners as shown in Figure 12.6.1.**
- **Cover the major strengths and weaknesses. Try to be specific; give examples if possible.**
- **Avoid trying to discuss everything. A few well-made points may be more beneficial than numerous but inadequately developed points.**
- **Try to avoid comments with "never" or "always"; most rules have exceptions. Your feedback may be incorrect or inappropriate for certain situations.**
- **Do not criticize something that cannot be corrected.**
- **Do not criticize when you cannot suggest an improvement.**
- **Avoid being maneuvered into the unpleasant position of defending feedback. If the feedback is honest, objective, constructive, and supported, no defense should be necessary.**
- **If part of the feedback is written, it should be consistent with the oral feedback.**

To ensure the learner takes your feedback in the most constructive manner possible and use it in a positive way, the following tips can be helpful.

- **Reinforce correct performance by letting learners know what they are doing well. Your encouragement and support will mean a great deal to your learners.**
- **Make sure to base your feedback on the evaluation criteria.**
- **When you see someone doing something differently than you would ordinarily do it, consider whether it matters. Ask yourself questions such as:**

Key Note Term

criteria – a standard on which a judgment or decision is based
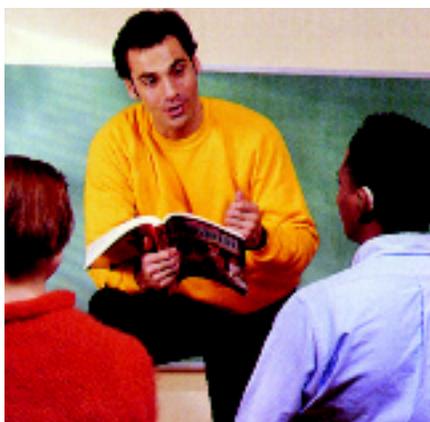

Figure 12.6.1: Do you think this instructor has rapport with the learners?
Courtesy of Ken Karp.

- Will it work the way they are doing it?
- Is this a better way?
- Will it cause problems for them later?
- Is it safe?

- Allow for individual variations. Consider the learner's openness to suggestions before recommending changes that are not based on the criteria.
- Identify incorrect performance as early as possible. Give feedback as soon as you see the incorrect performance.
- Try to provide feedback in the most constructive way possible. Help learners understand how to do a task correctly; do not just tell them what they are doing wrong.
- Be aware of the learners' sensitivity to correction, especially in front of other people (generally avoided whenever possible). Keep your voice down when providing individual feedback. Avoid the temptation to point out one person's mistake to the whole group as an example.
- Give feedback less often as learners' progress.

Conclusion

It is important to realize that feedback need not always be negative or destructive. In fact, positive feedback is almost always seen as warmer and more sincere than negative feedback given in identical ways.

As a potential instructor, coach, and counselor in JROTC, you must be able to give effective, positive feedback. By improving the way that you give feedback, you are improving the future performances of your teammates and classmates.

This lesson concludes the chapter, "Teaching Skills." Through this chapter, you have learned how to develop and use lesson plans, how to deliver instruction, where Thinking Maps® and graphic organizers can be useful in your classroom, and how important feedback is to keeping your students on track.

Chapter 12

Lesson Review

Lesson Review

1. Why feedback is generally given?
2. What are the characteristics of feedback covered in this lesson?
3. Choose one tip for giving feedback and discuss it.
4. Define the term *criteria*.