

Improving Student Learning through Descriptive Feedback

Descriptive feedback is non-evaluative information given to learners to show how they are progressing in relation to criteria and/or to their learning goals. Descriptive feedback is the main outcome of formative assessment and enables reflective thinking for students and teachers.

Descriptive feedback is the key to successful assessment for learning. Students learn from assessment when the teacher provides specific, detailed feedback and direction to each student to guide his or her learning. Feedback for learning is part of the teaching process; the part that comes after the initial instruction takes place. It is the vital link between the teacher's assessment of a student's learning and the action following that assessment.

To be successful, feedback needs to be immediate and identify the way to move forward. It should not simply tell learners whether their answers are right or wrong, or simply provide evaluative feedback in the form of grades and short, non-specific comments of praise or criticism.. Evaluative feedback affects students' senses of themselves and tells them how they stand in relation to others and offers very little direction for moving forward. Feedback for learning, on the other hand, is descriptive and specific. *Descriptive feedback makes connections between students' thinking and the learning that is expected.* It addresses lack of understanding and provides the student with the next steps and an example of what good work looks like. Feedback for learning provides evidence that confirms or challenges an idea that a student holds. It gives recognition for achievement and growth, and it includes clear directions for improvement. It encourages students to think about, and respond to, the suggestions provided to them and it focuses on both quality and learning.

Assessment for learning involves all learners (students, teachers and parents) in ongoing dialogue, descriptive feedback, and reflection throughout our journey in education.

Sources:

Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, (MECY)

Independent Together Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community, MECY

