



Feedback Strategies for Coaches and Administrators

Introduction

“We all need people who will give us feedback,” writes Bill Gates. “That’s how we improve.” Yet the quality and amount of feedback provided to teachers is disappointing. A 2009 study of 12 districts found that 75% of teachers “received no specific feedback about how to improve their practice,” and only 43% actually used feedback to improve instruction.¹ Another teacher survey from 2016 revealed equally discouraging data.²

Why isn’t teacher feedback better?

The short answer: Imparting meaningful feedback is difficult. Richard Elmore, a professor of graduate education at Harvard, asserts that “the knowledge and skill required to [give quality feedback] is beyond both the experience and practical knowledge of the people charged with supervision.”³

To offer support, this guide surfaces key elements of effective feedback—the kind that accomplished principals, coaches, and consulting educators use to positively influence instruction. Furthermore, it addresses these key questions.

How do you...

- Align feedback with a teacher’s reflective capacity?
- Ensure that all stakeholders share the same definition of effective instruction?
- Use feedback language that teachers won’t resist?
- Solicit meaningful feedback from colleagues, inexperienced observers, and students?
- Resuscitate a school’s feedback culture when it’s institutionally comatose?

Beyond answering these questions, this guide introduces the reader to well-supported feedback models, protocols, and scripts.

What’s in the guide?

Introduction	2
Feedback Strategies for Administrators and Coaches	4
▪ Prerequisites for Feedback:	5
› Observation Models	5
› Creating a Common Teaching Vocabulary	5
<i>Resources: Popular Feedback Models; Observation Accuracy</i>	5
▪ Feedback Guidelines	6
› Say This, Not That	6
› Nuanced Feedback	7
› Use Language That Motivates	8
<i>Resources: Warm, Cool, and Hard Commentary</i>	8
How Teachers Can Assume Agency in the Feedback/Evaluation Process	9
▪ Soliciting Feedback	10
<i>Resources: Resources: Soliciting Feedback from Colleagues and Students</i>	10
▪ Feedback Do’s and Don’ts	11
▪ Endnotes	12

About the author



Todd Blake Finley, PhD, is a tenured professor of English Education at East Carolina University. He blogs and serves Edutopia (George Lucas Education Foundation) as an assistant editor. He has

taught elementary and 7-12th grade English. He lives in North Carolina with his wife (a 5th grade math teacher), daughter (a film major at CCNY) and two poorly trained dogs: Moose and Cocoa. He was selected as one of the Top 12 Global Teacher Bloggers of 2014 by Cathy Rubin in the Huffington Post. His education blog is Todd's Brain - www.todd-finley.com.



FEEDBACK STRATEGIES FOR COACHES AND ADMINISTRATORS

Prerequisites for Feedback: An Observation Model and Common Language

► Observation Models

To improve teaching, regular observation and feedback are a must-do. In most cases, educators who view their school's established evaluation system as merely compliance-driven and punitive overlook the chance to embrace a well-designed feedback process—one that includes data collection via observation and feedback that corresponds with established competencies.

The popular walk-through model, where the administrator unobtrusively visits the class for 2-15 minutes and then provides written or oral feedback on “[look-fors](#),” is an efficient feedback method. Several variations of this observation approach are summarized in the [Classroom Walkthrough Models MATRIX](#). In contrast to walk-throughs, [Classroom Instructional Rounds](#) involve more steps and multiple classroom visitors who collectively provide feedback during a debrief session. Even in schools lacking the resources for walk-throughs or instructional rounds, however, teachers are likely to receive substantial observation-based feedback from administrators during their formal evaluations.

► Creating a Common Teaching Vocabulary

Does the fifth-grade teacher's view of “effective instruction” mirror her colleague's understanding? Probably not without collaboration and training. The first order, then, is for faculty and administration to adopt and learn a teaching framework. Insight Education Group's [Instructional Framework for CCRS](#), as one laudable example, describes five core instructional practices that help students meet College- and Career-Ready Standards. Furthermore, these core practices promote more coherent feedback that encourage faculty to target a common set of exemplary practices. Other indicators of powerful practices can also be used, such as [11 Look-Fors](#) or the student-centered [6 Deeper Learning Competencies](#) (see p. 4).

RESOURCES:

Popular Feedback Models

- National School Reform Faculty's [Tuning Protocol Guidelines](#)
- Learner-Centered Initiatives' [Peer Review Process](#): Using Warm and Cool Feedback
- Teacher Leaders' [Coaching Cycle and Coaching Continuum](#) (For Differentiating Feedback)

Observation Accuracy

- [“Teaching Performance Feedback With Video: 21st-Century Tools and Tips”](#) by Todd Finley
- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [“Ensuring Accurate Feedback from Observations”](#)
- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's [Gathering Feedback for Teaching](#) (reviews observation instruments)

Feedback Guidelines

While there is no single right way to provide feedback, the field has gained several insights into strategies for providing feedback that create the growth-minded culture most likely to support teacher development.

Say This, Not That



Although it might feel counterintuitive to feedback providers, the first thing they should say during a debriefing session is nothing. “Turn off your walkie-talkie, sit down, be quiet, and listen for at least ten minutes,” advises Richard Elmore. “Then the first words out of your mouth should be a question to which you do not know the answer.”⁵ Only interrupt in order to keep the discussion focused on student learning: **When did deep learning occur? What evidence leads you to that conclusion?**

Escalating accountability measures are no excuse for administrators to neglect feedback on individual teacher’s personal improvement targets. Vanessa Valencia, an assistant principal in Colorado, made her district’s evaluation requirements more personal and growth oriented by printing out each teacher’s instructional goals on a single cheat sheet. Valencia writes, “Being able to say, ‘I know you’re working on _____, have you thought about _____?’ has been a huge timesaver and relationship builder.”⁶

Nuanced Feedback

Most administrators, like Valencia, understand that feedback should be timely, actionable, specific, and related to agreed-upon learning outcomes. But even when it meets those criteria, feedback can still backfire when unsuccessfully calibrated to a teacher’s abilities. Robyn Jackson, author of [Never Underestimate Your Teachers](#), explains how to determine when to use four main types of feedback and with whom:

1. **Diagnostic feedback** describes why a lesson has not succeeded and clarifies the teaching principles that will support improvement. *Best for teachers lacking key concepts that would help them understand why a lesson hasn’t worked.*
2. **Prescriptive feedback** provides specific directions about what to do differently. *Best for teachers who have just bungled part of their lesson and need a specific course correction.*
3. **Descriptive feedback** narrates the teaching performance in detail, including what did and didn’t work. *Best for teachers who reflect effectively and deeply understand fundamental elements of instruction.*
4. **Micro-feedback** adjusts or “tweaks” successful lessons. *Best for superb teachers who just aced a lesson.⁷*

Another exceptional tool for customizing feedback is the [Continuum of Self-Reflection](#), described in Pete Hall and Alisa Simeral’s [Building Teachers’ Capacity for Success](#). For each stage of reflection, the authors detail how feedback providers can [propel teachers to the next level along the continuum](#).



Use Language That Motivates

Not all teachers embrace criticism like a gift-wrapped pony. “Let’s be real. . .feedback, more often than not, is received as criticism and that does not help us learn!” writes Dr. Tony Sinanis. Therefore, it is important for administrators to lace their advice with some linguistic sugar so the feedback goes down easier. Switch up your pronouns by moving between 1st person (“I...”), 2nd person (“You/Your...”), and 3rd person (“He/She/They...”).

- Use 1st person for **praise**: “I like how you introduced the lesson with a dilemma to build interest.”
- Use 2nd person to **personalize the positive**: “You maintained 100% participation in the first activity.”
- Use 3rd person to **challenge an element of the performance**: “When the dismissal bell rang, they packed up their book bags before homework was explained.”⁸

Don’t judge, **describe**. Descriptive feedback is more motivating and helpful than bland evaluations. A teacher will learn more from “Nobody in the corner group looked at their assignment sheet until you walked over” than from “Good job with your group monitoring.”

Even better, offer data-based feedback that highlights a gap in a teacher’s self-perception.

- Example of **advice**: “You need shorter transitions.”
- Example of **description that highlights a gap**: “The first transition lasted two minutes. The second lasted 8.5 minutes.”

Simply describing the classroom data empowers the teacher to draw his or her own conclusion and take action as needed.

RESOURCES:

Warm, Cool, and Hard Commentary

- [“Teacher Confessions: Five Classroom Observations Gone Wrong...and One That Rocked”](#) by Don Rescigno
- National School Reform Faculty’s [Feedback Provided During Protocols](#)
- [“Evaluation Feedback: 4 Things Every Teacher Needs”](#) by Nicholas Provenzano



HOW TEACHERS CAN ASSUME AGENCY IN THE FEEDBACK / EVALUATION PROCESS

WHEN A SCHOOL CULTURE DOESN'T PROVIDE FEEDBACK THAT A TEACHER NEEDS, WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Paul Mielke, a principal in Wisconsin, recommends that teachers “generate data about their own teaching, identify their own areas of focus, and establish their own improvement goals...”⁹ Educators who produce spreadsheets during an evaluation session and highlight how they are making data-based decisions are prized by administrators—or should be. Other items to bring to a performance appraisal:

- Samples of representative student work
- Charts that highlight regular formative assessment results
- Performance task examples
- Video of classroom highlights
- Class demographic information
- Student feedback (collected through exit tickets, questionnaires, or a classroom suggestion box)

► Soliciting Feedback

Teachers needn't wait for official, scheduled observations. They can invite the principal for a classroom visit any time they want an administrator's perspective. Writes Wisconsin elementary teacher Pernille Ripp, “If I don't invite [my principal] into the class when I need her ideas, then I will not grow, and growing is what we all need to do every day, every opportunity.”

Another critical tool for securing feedback is the professional learning community (PLC), a small teacher cohort that shares expertise to improve student performance. Inviting members of the PLC to observe your class has the advantage of being instructive to both the visitor and teacher receiving feedback. PLC meetings can also be used to collectively analyze student artifacts, interpret student data, and think deeply about instruction. The School Reform Initiative offers a number of helpful group protocols for PLCs to exchange feedback, such as ATLAS, based on the work of Project Zero at Harvard University, and Peer Coaching, a valuable format for collecting meaningful feedback from an inexperienced coach.

For schools that cannot afford substitutes to manage classroom duties for observing teachers, video recording devices enable observation and feedback to occur when convenient. And as schools explore the best ways to implement systems of observation and feedback, they might also consider leveraging video to minimize logistical challenges associated with teachers observing each other. Besides being more efficient, video enables the observing and observed teachers to view instruction together—a powerful dynamic that focuses analytical conversations on video evidence that both parties can view and re-watch from a mutual perspective.

RESOURCES:

Soliciting Feedback from Colleagues / Video Use

- [“Critical Friends: A Process Built on Reflection”](#) from the University of Washington
- [“What? So What? Now What?”](#) by Gene Thompson-Grove
- National School Reform Faculty's [Feedback Carousel](#)
- Center for Educational Policy Research's [“The Best Foot Forward Project: Substituting Teacher-Collected Video for In-Person Classroom Observations”](#) (Harvard University)

Soliciting Feedback from Students

- [“The 10 Best Classroom Tools for Gathering Feedback”](#) by Katie Dunn
- [“Exit/Entry/Tweet Slips”](#) (feedback templates) from the National Behavior Support Service

FEEDBACK DO'S & DON'T'S



Do...

- › Focus on growth targets and next steps.
- › Confirm the lesson objectives and teacher's improvement goals.
- › Identify how the feedback or evaluation report is being used.
- › Record video of teaching performances.
- › Encourage risk.
- › Base feedback on standards.

Don't...

- › Offer feedback that is confusing or vague.
- › Deliver criticism in writing before discussing the issue with the teacher.
- › Cover too many issues.
- › Suggest next steps that are too challenging.
- › Tense up during the debriefing.
- › Evaluate. (Feedback should "describe what you did and did not do."¹⁰)

Endnotes

1. (2009). The Widget Effect | TNTP. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <https://tntp.org/publications/view/the-widget-effect-failure-to-act-on-differences-in-teacher-effectiveness>.
2. (2016). Teachers' responses to feedback from evaluators - Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/central/pdf/REL_2017190.pdf.
3. (n.d.). The Instructional Core. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from http://www.fpsct.org/uploaded/Teacher_Resource_Center/Instructional_Practices/Resources/20091124152005.pdf.
4. (n.d.). The Instructional Core. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from http://www.fpsct.org/uploaded/Teacher_Resource_Center/Instructional_Practices/Resources/20091124152005.pdf.
5. (2010). Improving The Instructional Core - Mountaintop Leadership. Outline by Mary Jane Pope Albin. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <http://mountaintopleadership.wikispaces.com/file/view/School+Improvement+Elmore+outline.docx>.
6. (n.d.). Five tips to become a more productive principal | CTQ #CTQCollab. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <https://www.teachingquality.org/content/blogs/schoolleadershipblog/five-tips-become-more-productive-principal>
7. (2014, October 22). Four Ways to Give Effective Feedback to Teachers | ASCD Inservice. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <http://inservice.ascd.org/four-ways-to-give-effective-feedback-to-teachers/>.
8. (n.d.). Providing Meaningful Feedback - Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/MeaningfulFeedback-June2013.pdf>.
9. (November, 2012). Keeping Improvement in Mind - ASCD. Retrieved July 23, 2017, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov12/vol70/num03/Keeping-Improvement-in-Mind.aspx>
10. (n.d.). Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback.pdf - Teacher-Technology-Toolkit. Retrieved July 24, 2017, from <https://teacher-technology-toolkit.wikispaces.com/file/view/Objectives+and+Feedback.pdf>.

"Nobody becomes a transformational teacher on their own. That achievement can occur only when schools commit to the process of giving (and receiving) meaningful feedback. When feedback occurs frequently, supports educators' improvement goals, and engages them in the process, only then do teachers value the process enough to integrate it into their daily practice."

- Todd Blake Finley

About Us



*Dr. Michael Moody and
Jason Stricker - Co-founders*

"As career educators, we're passionate about changing the status quo on how educator feedback and collaboration are done in our schools today.

We know from research and our daily work with schools, districts and states nationwide since 2000 that educator effectiveness systems aren't necessarily making educators any more effective.

Unfortunately, observations and evaluations have become more often acts of compliance than processes to improve performance. Educators have become more disillusioned and aren't getting the feedback they need and trust.

But we're out to change that."

Insight ADVANCE provides a suite of products that supports educator observation, coaching and calibration—through the power of video and in-person—to permanently impact how all educators involved in teacher growth are supported.

*Experience for yourself
how the power of video
can change the way your
educators receive and
give feedback.*

[Schedule Demo](#)



"Our teachers are excited about using ADVANCEfeedback and video, more than anything, it removes the 'gotcha' piece of teacher evaluation. Video shows us clearly what is and isn't working. The product helps to create a rubric-based, growth-focused dialogue between, the teacher and administrator." - Kathryn Procope, Principal in Washington, DC

The Insight ADVANCESuite



ADVANCEcalibrate®

Create personalized video-based training experiences for observers to improve inter-rater reliability.



ADVANCEfeedback®

Provide high-quality, targeted feedback to promote educators' growth—with video or in a live setting.



ADVANCElearn™

Reinforce professional growth for teachers, coaches and school leaders through personalized e-learning experiences and embedded resources.