

Brown

The teacher-to-teacher initiative was created by the U.S. Department of Education to provide the latest strategies and research on educational practices that work inside a classroom. Evaluative feedback done alone without descriptive feedback can actually hinder a student's ability to make adjustments and to really learn. For me, I love having things that I know I can do – I can do this and I can improve learning – I find that very empowering. This series features teachers from across the country presenting techniques that can be used with students of all ages. It's just one way the Department of Education is helping teachers get the support they need so no child is left behind.

Alright – today's topic – feedback, a powerful tool for raising student achievement. I'm in my 8<sup>th</sup> year of teaching in Montgomery County Public Schools. Montgomery County is located in Maryland and is a suburb of Washington, D.C. Prior to that I had another life – I was a registered dietician for many years, and really worked in federal government, private industry, and as a consultant – but all of my work was in education. I was educating adults. And I really found that my love was working with kids, and my interest has been in both math and science. That's where my college degrees were in. My expertise and my interest as an educator – and I am a teacher – I teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade students 6<sup>th</sup> grade math. My interest is looking at and bridging the gap between those purchased either science kits or text books and state standards. What I have found in my years of teaching is those purchased things are great – they're a good starting point – but if I was really going to get my kids to the state and get them ready for the state test those were not enough – there's a lot of gaps in there. And that's been what I've done over the course of the 8 years that I've been in Montgomery County schools – in addition to teaching, is looking at how can we supplement what we have to make sure those standards are being met. Today we're going to take a reflective look at feedback. But you've got to keep in mind that feedback is only one cog in a big system. It's only one part of the instructional system. So we're going to take a look at effective feedback and how it really does help students adjust what it is they're doing, to make improvements, and hopefully meet mastery of the standards. Effective feedback is one of the best ways for improving student achievement partly because it sends a message loud and clear that we believe all students can learn. The thought I hope to reinforce today – because I believe all teachers have this – or the thought I really hope you leave with today – is the idea, the belief that children can learn rigorous academic material at high standards given the time, the belief, the support, and the effort. I personally – and I'm not a U.S. Department of Education employee – but I personally believe that's really the heart and soul of No Child Left Behind. I have seen it, and I have lived it. For those of you who don't know, Montgomery County, Maryland, as I said a suburb of Washington, D.C., historically has been a very affluent, highly-educated area. Over the past 10 years the demographics of that county has changed significantly. The county has been scurrying to catch up with and align our county standards with the state standards, because of the change in the demographics. For the 3 years prior to this year, I worked at a very challenging school – really just outside of D.C. – and it was one of the lowest performing schools, not only in our county, but in the state of Maryland. In 2000 we had a school assessment program called the Maryland State Performance Assessment Program. It was performance tasked. And at that time, the school, for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students – they were performing at about 5% proficient in math. By the year – I know, scary, really scary – you think hey, it couldn't get any worse – it couldn't. By the year 2003 this school met AYP.

By the year 2004 they were maintaining and still improving. Now there are a lot of things that go into making those changes. The county came in when we were about to be reconstituted by the state and started a lot of initiatives – not only with our school, but with other schools who were not too far behind us, which do factor in... And we could have whole workshops on all of the different things that have taken place. Today our focus is just going to be on the one small part which is feedback and the collaboration of the teachers. Let me tell you a little bit about this school and why that change in such a short period of time is, to me, what I think very significant. First off, it is a Title I school of about 500 students, grades Pre-K through grade 5, and it's a very diverse community. There were about 63% of the students that were Hispanic, 24% of the students were African – really from Africa – African-Americans, and 12% Asian, and less than 1% white – very diverse community. The mobility 30%, and free and reduced meals – we had 90% of the students who qualified. A very challenging school – but look at the results – look at the results just in 3 short years. There was a very dedicated staff who was very eager to look at the fact and take on this belief that all students can learn rigorous academic material. All those teachers really believed that. And it really meant that there was a lot of reflection on the part of a teacher. One of the most interesting – to me – statistics of this group was that we had about 30% of the students who were in English language learner support programs. 75% of those kids went home to families that speak no English. But in 3 years big changes were met and we can talk about all those, but today our focus is providing feedback that students can understand and make adjustments in their learning in order to improve their performance. By the time you leave today, this is what I hope we all get through. I hope that we've identified two types of feedback and looked at them – evaluative and descriptive. That we will look at and review the research related to feedback and student achievement. That you'll have an opportunity to practice giving some descriptive feedback to some actual student work – and it is descriptive feedback that's matched to the standards. And then reflect on what you've learned today or how you maybe pulled up some things that you hadn't thought about for a while. And then identify what the next steps are for you. Activity – on your own, using the Marriott scratch pad, or whatever that's in front of you – I want you to list 5 words – the 5 words that roll off the top of your head when you hear the word feedback. Think about feedback – feedback you've given – or feedback that you've received. Okay – with your table – share your list – each of you share your list – and then you need to come to a consensus on the 3 words that you think best describe feedback. Well, I learned a lot just going around – seeing how people work – and I'll provide some feedback. Really good discussions going on, talking about it, some critical thinking going on about what words – you really wanted to narrow it down to your 3 best words – that's critical thinking. This is a great activity to do with the kids – you know, go from 5 words, then you have 5 times 4 or however many kids are in your group – set of words – narrow it down to 3 of your best – a lot of discussions going on. What we ended up with was actually the green group actually has 2 words here – they couldn't narrow it down – but precise or specific, relevant, immediate, we have number/letter grades, positive, negative, improvement, communication, constructive. Good job going through that activity. I'm going to actually come back to our list towards the end of our session. In education there are basically two types of feedback – descriptive and evaluative. And from what I can tell from your responses, a lot of us have a really clear understanding of the descriptive feedback. That is the information that we, as teachers, provide to our students that is specific to what the students are learning, it is timely, and it's constructive in order for them to make adjustments in what it is they're working on so that they can make improvements. Evaluative feedback tells the teacher and the student where they

are in relation to others, such as norm/reference type tests, or where they are in relation to a set standard, such as criterion reference tests. In evaluative feedback you usually see that given as a letter grade, a number, a percentile – those types of things. Both types of feedback are very important – both descriptive and evaluative feedback. They both have specific purposes and can be very useful. In standard-based education, we rely on evaluative feedback to measure students' achievement in relation to set standards. However, historically in education we've relied too heavily on evaluative feedback. And the current research – and I am going to be talking about research – shows that evaluative feedback done alone without descriptive feedback, can actually hinder a student's ability to make adjustments and to really learn, whereas descriptive feedback helps that student figure out what it is they're doing wrong and make those changes. Black and Willam, who we're going to talk about, have suggested that we need to shift our emphasis from the giving of grades to the giving of advice. So, what is descriptive feedback? What does it look like? What does it sound like? I need to share just a personal little story here. Feedback right now is very near and dear to my heart. My oldest just turned 16 a couple of weeks ago. I have had that wonderful, yet hair-raising experience of teaching her how to drive. So, feedback is very critical, and how, and what type of feedback I give. Feedback needs to be specific so that the performance can be improved. It also needs to be easily understood, and directly related to the learning. In the case of my daughter, I have kind of a windy driveway – really wide, but a windy driveway – very narrow garage, and I have a mini-van. It's kind of hard to get that mini-van out that narrow thing and then be able to go down this little windy driveway. We've hit the side of the garage many times. We end up going perpendicular to our driveway many times. So my feedback is – I want to be positive here, Emily – it's real important once you get through that garage door, that you then straighten out the wheels and curve down the driveway appropriately, so that we're not hitting the mailbox. Okay – feedback – we need to provide exemplars – samples. In other words, the students need to know what success looks like. Again – with the driving situation, it's important I'm modeling good driving – even when I'm in a hurry and I really feel like racing, I'm going the speed limit. And lastly, it needs to be related to the performance, or the work, and not be personal or sarcastic. And I know that's really tempting. So, Emily – great! You've got this driving down two-lane highways down pat. You're really doing a nice job with this – you're staying centered. Now, when you get on a four-lane highway, it's still important that you stay in your lane. We have come millimeters close to cars coming in the other direction, and I'm trying to keep calm. I have to make sure that it's not personal, and she's not going to feel bad about this. And I need to tell you, I'm very tempted to say “Do you want to get us killed?” It's really hard. But that's what we do as teachers all the time. How many times do you feel like you've taught something over and over again – why is it that you're not getting this? We go there, because it's hard. But it's real important that if you stick to these four things, and you're really doing a good job of providing descriptive feedback. So, why descriptive feedback? The purpose of descriptive feedback is to provide opportunities for the learners to make adjustments and improvements towards mastery. I'm going to be talking later about the research, but one of the most important things that we can do is to provide descriptive feedback. The research has showed if we really want to improve learning, we need to be providing descriptive feedback – that's the best thing we can do. I mean it's really – we're going to see – and from what I can tell you got the idea and we can do this. To me, I love having things that I know I can do. I can do this and I can improve learning. I find that very empowering. Well, this is the one thing that has the hugest impact. But let's take a look at John Saphier and Robert Gower's classification of these. Descriptive

feedback – and that would be “these L’s look like V’s.” Again, if it’s in the case of handwriting that’s going to be pretty specific. I don’t see supporting details in this thesis. The pianissimo was louder than the forte. The first sentence tells the reader the main idea. The two adjectives don’t have gender agreement with the noun. Your back foot is not coming high enough to clear the hurdle. And, the lab report is missing the explanation of the chemical reactions. Let’s go through the second list, which they call non-descriptive. I saw somebody called it useless feedback. Might be B+, messy, you can do better, excellent, watch your P’s and F’s, add a conclusion, reread the assignment, think about the position of your body, and you aren’t using what you know about adjectives. I heard somebody at this table say “well, how do we know what they know about adjectives.” And yet I know I’ve been guilty of giving something out like that because hey, I taught it, you know it, I’m not teaching – that same idea – you know this! But this doesn’t really help the student. Does that mean some of these aren’t appropriate? Yes, we’re still giving out letter grades in Montgomery County – we haven’t moved away from that yet. So, there’s going to be a letter grade, but there’s got to be feedback to let that student know why it’s not an A, or what they could do to improve. Do you see where some of these evaluative, we said, if they’re used alone without any descriptive feedback they can actually hinder learning? Messy, watch your P’s and F’s – I don’t know what you’re talking about. As it turns out here, that links to your pianissimo is louder than your forte – which one’s more specific. Think about the position of your body – non-descriptive – yet, if we said your back foot is not coming up high enough to clear the hurdle – much more – I know what you’re talking about when you’re talking about the position of my body. Add a conclusion – some students – I’ve got a conclusion there – may not be clear. But, if you said this lab report is missing an explanation of the chemical reactions, it’s more specific. So, let’s move into that research. Now, my group this morning told me to go through – in their evaluation, said I needed to go through the research faster, so I’m going to try to do that with you. Alright, I’m taking their feedback and trying to apply it and see if I can do a better job. We’ll start with Ken O’Connor. He’s the author of “How To Grade For Learning.” If you’re not familiar with this book and you’re really, really committed to standards-based education and how you look at student work, this is an excellent resource. His key message is that feedback has to be concise and clear, but most importantly it must be linked to a standard. His research started from a personal experience. His daughter, at the time, was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade – came home with a writing assignment – “I can’t write” – because her writing assignment had a big F at the bottom of the page – circled – nothing else, other than the F. And the reason she got the F was because she didn’t follow the directions to fill the whole page. The writing itself was fine, but she didn’t follow the directions. So Mr. O’Connor decided to make this his lifelong challenge – to really look at standards, and grading and reporting. He has some good advice, and I’m just going to highlight the ones that really stuck out and work for me. The first is to think of yourself as a coach. And that’s where I come into that practice stuff. Some assignments are literally to give the kids opportunities to practice and for you to give feedback as you go around the room and look at their work – whether it’s working with manipulatives or it’s written work. But, that’s that practice time, just like if you were a coach you’d give your kids time to do drills and practice. Sometimes you need to work in those times for those formative assessments – those things that you really want to look at and gauge where they are in terms of the standards. He also suggests that we use feedback as motivation, and that’s where that idea of encouragement comes in. If you give a paper back to a student that says 7 out of 10, doesn’t necessarily give them a whole lot of information. They can go down the 10 things and see where he put the X on them and know which ones they got wrong,

but it doesn't really give them information that makes them feel motivated and encouraged. I no longer grade my math quizzes for my kids. They can figure out their score. All I'm interested in is that they meet mastery on the specific task that we're working on. So, my idea is I give them feedback on the ones they don't have right and talk to them about how they can improve, tell them what they're doing great in the things, and then it's up to them to either track me down for a retake, or have some practice time – I always give that for everything we do. So I then feel like it's more motivating and they take ownership of their learning. And the one thing that I thought I liked personally is he suggests that we need to teach ourselves and our students that mistakes are not failures – that we can learn from mistakes. From the last ??? TIMS study – TIMS 3 – it was reported that Americans view mistakes as failures, whereas the Japanese and Chinese, who are scoring much higher in math, really view mistakes as opportunities or an index to the things they haven't learned yet. And I know personally that I need to teach myself that, and I really do start my year trying to teach the kids that same thing. Okay, Marzano, Pickering, Pollock – they are the authors of *Classroom Instruction At Work – Research-Based Strategies For Increasing Student Achievement*, and basically most of their work is just that. They do the research, they translate it into practical strategies that we can use as teachers. Their key message on feedback is that it generally produces a positive result if teachers manage the form the feedback comes in. What that means is you're looking at both evaluative and descriptive feedback, understanding that they both have specific purposes and are very useful, but that you understand how and when you're using them to help your students. You have to know and have a clear intent on what type of feedback that you're using. Davies – author of *Making Classroom Assessments Work* – as you can see I rely heavily on Davies' work – I love this book. If you haven't looked at that – excellent book! And looking at both descriptive and evaluative feedback, and the uses of both of them. But her key message in all of her research is that specific feedback – specific, descriptive feedback – that focuses on success and points the way to improvement has the most powerful and positive effect on student learning. In other words, it's really – we talked about the positive versus the negative – but if the focus can really be on those things that you can do to improve, and those things that you're doing right, it's going to have the biggest impact on student learning. Black and Willam – these two researchers are out of King's College in London, and they did this huge, colossal literature research. They looked at 10 years of assessment research done internationally and summarized the results from all of this research, and they came up with lots of recommendations. They're the group, that through all this research, really found out that the most important thing that we can do to improve learning is descriptive feedback – the most important thing. They also suggest that we have to provide and build in opportunities so that students can apply and learn the feedback, and to have time to try it again. So if descriptive feedback helps students make adjustments and it's so critical to improving student achievement, what are the implications for me as a teacher? What is it that I have to do? Well, I'll go back to Black and Willam, and what it really requires us to do is to build in those opportunities for students to use that feedback and to make adjustments and try again. So where do we start? Rick DuFour has these four guiding questions. I love these guiding questions. I actually keep them posted over my work area, because I need to remind myself all the time. First is what do we want students to know and be able to do? How will we know if students have learned it? What do we do if they haven't learned it? What do we do if they have learned it? In thinking about these and breaking them down, what it really means is – the first thing is we have to use Franklin Covey's idea of begin with the end in mind. You have to know what the standard is. You have to be able to interpret – understand exactly what is meant in that standard. We have to

know the specific indicators. Second, you have to know what the product is that you're looking for. And then you have to set the criteria for that. If this is what we consider mastery, what's involved in that? What is specifically needed to get this? And then what's minimum and what's irrelevant. And then once you've got the standard – once you have the tools – once you have the criteria for measuring that – now you're ready to look at student work. Now you need to analyze the student work in comparison to your set of criteria and see where your kids fall and determine where the gaps are – where your students are in relation to that standard. And then lastly that information that gives you. What am I doing to do? Do I need to go back and re-teach? Do I need to differentiate? Yes, usually. And then is it time that we move on? Alright – we started with a warm-up activity and we agreed that there were two standards that were actually being addressed. Now, the task that I gave you is from the Maryland School Assessment Program and it is a public release item. I work in the state of Maryland, so that's why I'm using the Maryland state guidelines or standards. But obviously we all know No Child Left Behind lets each state set their own standards. So when you're doing this work you're going to be using your own state standards. The specific learning objectives that we were working at we said was number relationships or computations was the standard. But we were specifically looking can they compare fractions and can they use equivalent fractions? Sorry – put them in the proper order. Then we also were looking at the process of math. You know, can students demonstrate what it is they know and communicate that? So can they then explain how they did the work that they did? Now, for a brief constructive response which is the type of task that you had, we have a 0, 1, 2 scoring rubric that would be used for this if it was a state test item – which this is, but it's a public released one. But since my focus here is on getting students to mastery, I just want to highlight what it means to be mastery, what it means to get a 2, the response demonstrates a complete understanding and analysis of the problem. That means there's got to be evidence that the student has applied some kind of reasonable strategy – that the student has either explained or justified, depending on the problem, their response, and that it's clear, it's well-developed, and it's logical. I spend a lot of classroom time working on that particular area. The connections – if they made connections – have to be clear, and there has to be – if necessary – supportive information is given – some kind of evidence. We now have the standard, we now have an assessment item, and we now have the criteria for scoring them. Now we're ready to look at some student work and start giving descriptive feedback. If you will look at handout #3 you will see a sample of a complete response, which in this case in the state of Maryland would be considered a 2, so this student is meeting standard. Okay, at the bottom of the page you're going to see a box where I put in descriptive feedback. Do I provide descriptive feedback like this all the time? No way. I will tell you a little trick I do. If I wanted to give descriptive feedback like this, and I'm finding the same mistakes on many of my students' work, I use labels. And I type up in nice green pretty font – something that's going to get their attention – the same message and I stick it on everybody's – if they're all making the same mistake. That means I need to do something with my teaching – I know that – but I also want to give each kid some direction on that particular item. And they love seeing the sticky notes. But if I had to write – do I do that all the time – no way. This is a lot, but I'm doing that for the purpose of giving you all lots of information. So, the first thing we're going to do is tell the student yes, you did a great job – you got those 3 fractions in the right order. Then we're going to say why they did it. What is it that you did that made that work, and that is he used the equivalent fractions and put them all into 8<sup>th</sup>'s and then you're able to put them in order. Anybody have comments on that? Now, I know you're going to look at these and say “why in the world did that person get meeting standard?”

because everybody's got different levels of how they see and do standards. Especially if you're teaching at the middle school and high school level, you're probably thinking "no, I want my students to know a lot more than that. They need to be further along in that grade" – I know you all are thinking that. But really this is what is meeting standard in the state of Maryland right now as we see it. So we can argue over what the scores are, but for right now let's just work with what we've got. The second one is a sample of what's called a minimum response, so this student is scoring a 1. Again, we're giving them credit for having them in the right order, even though it's kind of hard to figure that out, but they did use equivalent fractions to simplify  $5/4$ 's and  $13/8$ 's into equivalent mixed numbers. But what they need to do is then express the number – all of them – with the same denominator, just like you said you did. We need to show them how to do that. Okay, next one – this is considered an irrelevant response. Take a look at what the student wrote – I know equivalent fractions are fractions that you can make into another type of fraction. For example,  $2/10 = 1/5$ , or  $19/8 = 2$  and  $3/8$ . That is what I think an equivalent fraction is. Excellent answer, but definitely not responding to the task. I know the student knows something. They've got a good understanding of equivalent fractions, but they haven't worked with the specific problems they have in front of them. They've not said why, how they got them in the right order. I've been talking a lot about that descriptive feedback – the specific feedback – that we provide to students. That isn't all of it. It also is the type of questions you ask them to guide them to where they need to go. So it may not always be that you're telling them what it is. A lot of times you want to be asking them a question. In closing, before we move on – I want to talk about what we did learn. I want to come back to what we started with. Are there more words that you would add to words about feedback? We had precise, specific, relevant, immediate, negative, positive, number/letter grades, improvement, communication, constructive – any ones you want to take off? Any words you want to add? Yeah, we want to avoid that, don't we? Let's get rid of that one. It's out there. Details – it has to be detailed. (Inaudible) And the formatives are based on the standard. You know where they're going. This can be both evaluative and descriptive – absolutely. The last page of your handouts has a list of all the people that I referenced throughout – all of these. If you're really interested in improving your skills as a teacher, any one of these are the ways to go as a first step, and then build on all of them.

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