**Providing High-Quality Written Feedback to Educators**

**The difference between observation notes, rationale, and feedback**

**Feedback**

Helps the educator improve their practice by identifying strengths (practices that they should continue) and areas for improvement (changes to their practice that they should prioritize).

**Rationale**

Helps the educator understand the reasoning for each component score (1-4) by providing evidence and an explanation that aligns with a performance-level descriptor.

**Observation Notes**

Helps the evaluator capture evidence of the teaching episode to determine scores, write rationale, and craft feedback. The observation notes should focus on the words spoken by the teacher and students, the actions by the teacher and students, and the appearance of the classroom.

**Qualities of Effective Feedback**

To be effective, feedback after observations should be:

* Prioritized
* Specific
* Actionable
* Have a supportive tone
* Be given as soon after an evaluation/assessment as possible

**Prioritized**

**While it is important that the *rationale* address all components of the rubric, positive and constructive *feedback* should be focused. Substantial feedback across all or many components is overwhelming to a teacher and does not indicate what is essential or where they should start. Prioritized feedback hones in on the ideas and strategies that are the most important for the educator to continue or adjust to move forward in their practice.**

*Examples:*

**Not Prioritized**

A teacher gets 1 sentence of feedback on all components of the rubric

A teacher gets significant feedback on most or all components of the rubric

**Prioritized**

* An observation receives 3s on all components of the rubric but the evaluator highlights the two that are making the biggest impact on student learning
* An observation receives a combination of 1s, 2s, and 3s, but the evaluator prioritizes feedback on the components that should be addressed first, even if it is not the lowest score

**Specific**

**Feedback should be clear, precise, and cite specific examples from the observation. The feedback should directly support the teacher’s practice in the rubric components.**

*Examples:*

**Not Specific**

“You have great classroom management…”

**Specific**

“You have an effective routine in place so that students know what to do when they finish work early…”

**Actionable**

**Effective feedback includes actionable next steps that the teacher may use to improve their practice in the immediate future. Actionable feedback provides resources or strategies to implement into practice and offers the teacher a clear picture of what this would look like in his/her classroom.**

*Examples:*

**Not Actionable**

In this lesson students didn’t know the purpose of the lesson based on the questions they were asking. Make sure the objective is clear to students.

**Actionable**

In this lesson it was unclear if students knew the purpose of the lesson based on the questions they were asking. Identify and communicate a clear lesson objective for students stating what they will be learning and why. Post the objective on the board so students can see it, introduce the objective at the beginning of the lesson and refer to it as needed throughout.

**Feedback Model:**

1. Open with **positive reinforcement**
2. Target **2-4 specific areas** of the teaching episode that you want to **encourage** the teacher to **continue** in their practice.
3. Be **specific** and **reference examples** from the rationale to make the feedback concrete.
4. Then offer **constructive feedback**
5. Hone in on **1-2 areas** to give prioritized and actionable feedback.
6. Explain why this is a priority to focus on and **suggest strategies or resources** the teacher could employ moving forward.

**Rationale and Feedback Model**

**Rationale**

Rationale for Domain 2:

2a: Patterns of classroom interactions were friendly, respectful and polite between teacher and students and student to student. Students felt comfortable taking risks as evidenced by their willingness to answer questions and actively participate in the activities. You continuously praised students and encouraged their efforts throughout with positive words and clapping and students routinely clapped for each other.

2b: You have established a positive culture for learning in your classroom as evidenced by the effort students displayed throughout the lesson. All students were actively engaged in the activity and began working as soon as you gave them the task. You conveyed to students how important the work was when you introduced the lesson and encouraged them by stating, “I know this work is challenging but you can all do this.”

2c: Students are well aware of the routines and procedures in the classroom. When you signaled you were starting the lesson, the classroom helpers retrieved the materials needed for the class and distributed them seamlessly. The transitions between activities were smooth and students responded to the 5,4,3,2,1 count quickly when you were bringing them back to the group.

2d: Standards of conduct have been established in the classroom and student behavior was entirely appropriate throughout the class. You continuously moved around the classroom to monitor student behavior and make sure students remained on task. When one group was off-task during the warm-up, a student from the group encouraged everyone to “get working.”

Rationale for Domain 3:

3a: You clearly stated the lesson objective and listed it on the board for students. You modeled the assignment for students in the introduction and provided clear directions both orally and on the board. The explanation of the content was clear and accurate and you connected it back to prior student knowledge when you asked them to do the “turn and talk” with their partner. You used a variety of academic vocabulary in the lesson and made sure students correctly understood the meanings by asking them to define the words that were unfamiliar.

3b: Almost all questions asked of students were low-level knowledge or comprehension ones that did not require them to think critically. Students were not required to explain their thinking or cite specific examples. On several occasions questions were asked rapid-fire and not all students were given an opportunity to answer them. With the exception of the opening activity students had no opportunities to discuss or build off of each other’s responses.

3c: The lesson had a clearly defined structure with a warm-up, modeling the activity and independent practice for students. The pacing of the lesson was appropriate and most students had the time needed to intellectually engage. Students were active participants throughout the lesson and the activity provided most students an opportunity to be challenged.

3d: Students were aware of the criteria for their assignment and several students pulled the rubric out of their folder to refer to it during independent practice. You questioned students as a group and individually throughout the lesson to determine their understanding of the content. At one point no student could answer your question and you went back to the original example and went through it with students again to be sure they understood. Most feedback to students was specific and helped to affirm their responses or push them further in their explanations.

**Feedback**

*Positive Reinforcement:*

1. This lesson shows you have established a positive culture for learning. Your students demonstrated a strong effort and consistent commitment to learning the material. Additionally, your enthusiasm for the content, and insistence that all students learn the key concepts added to the positive culture (2b).
2. In this lesson classroom procedures and routines were executed consistently by students which helped to maximize instructional time. It was clear that students knew what was expected of them. Transitions were smooth and you were able to call students quickly back to attention when transitioning between activities with your verbal cue (2c).
3. In this lesson you use voice and presence to maintain authority and convey caring for students. Students were well behaved throughout the lesson. Students followed directions the first time and demonstrated a clear understanding of behavioral expectations and rules through their actions throughout the class. Interactions in the classroom were positive throughout the lesson (2d).

*Constructive Feedback:*

During your lesson most questions asked were either knowledge or comprehension questions, students were not challenged to explain their thinking and had very little opportunity to discuss their ideas with each other. Challenge students to think critically and engage in discussion with their peers throughout the lesson. In order to do this you should prepare questions that require higher-order thinking such as analyzing, synthesizing or evaluating when prepping your lesson. In addition, have students explain their answers when appropriate and allow students to challenge each other’s responses in order to promote student dialogue. Attached is a link to several resources on Bloom’s Taxonomy that could help you to create your questions: <http://www.bloomstaxonomy.org/> Ask yourself: “How do I create opportunities for students to think critically and challenge each other’s thinking?”

**The power of high-quality feedback**

*Below are four recent articles about providing feedback to educators that we found interesting:*

1. While many principals believe that conducting classroom walkthroughs helps them “build a more positive instructional culture, gauge the school climate, and demonstrate the value they place on instruction” a recent study shows that classroom walkthroughs are actually negatively associated with student achievement. This is because walkthroughs rarely result in high-quality feedback to teachers on their instruction[[1]](#footnote-1). The article makes a point to articulate that “these results do not imply that walkthroughs cannot be useful.” If walkthroughs are used to give high quality feedback to teachers or to inform a broader school improvement strategy (like professional development or other human resource practices), then they can be beneficial, though they are rarely used as such.
2. Another recent study by Myung and Martinez[[2]](#footnote-2) examined the impact of post-observation feedback for teachers. Many educators reported that feedback feels like something done *to* them, not *for* them. Most principals say the goal of post-observation conferences is improvement, but “until teachers experience professional support from their principals they will assume observations are being used solely to judge them.” Most teachers interviewed said they received a summary of what happened in the lesson and a rating on the district’s evaluation rubric, “neither of which helped inform their teaching or guide their improvement.”
3. “While one goal of the new evaluation systems is to garner information about teachers for human-capital management decisions—such as identifying and dismissing teachers who are ineffective—an important aspect of the system is to specify strengths and weaknesses in instruction and help teachers improve their professional practice. This second goal may be more powerful and critical than the first, at least in terms of truly improving the quality of teaching and overall education for all children. Heather C. Hill and Corinne Herlihy, both of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, in a set of recommendations for policymakers stress that, “The reform of the teacher evaluation system will see its chief success not through carrots and sticks, but through providing teachers with information about their performance and the means for improvement.” Those who study expert performance in many fields find that high-quality feedback helps the novice become competent and eventually skilled, but it is important to remember that it is the quality of the feedback that matters[[3]](#footnote-3).”
4. In this article[[4]](#footnote-4), Jill Berkowicz and Ann Myers posit that high-quality and frequent feedback can serve as professional development. They write: “This is truly a call on leaders to attend to the work of continuous improvement of instruction through the supervision process even in the face of dwindling professional development funding. The best resource for professional development is ongoing professional feedback...not criticism, but skilled meaningful, targeted feedback… we can develop and reinforce professional development that is purposeful and results in teachers who continue to grow and change in order to meet the needs of all students, always. That is what a highly qualified highly effective leader does - develop highly qualified, highly effective teachers. It is leadership in action.”

1. Effective Instructional Time Use for School Leaders: Longitudinal Evidence from Observations of Principals” by Jason Grissom, Susanna Loeb, and Benjamin Master in *Educational Researcher*, November 2013 (Vol. 42, #8, p. 433-444), <http://stanford.io/1i9wS4P> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Strategies for Enhancing the Impact of Post-Observation Feedback for Teachers” by Jeannie Myung and Krissia Martinez, July 2013, a policy brief from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (spotted in *Journal of Staff Development*, December 2013),

   <http://commons.carnegiefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/BRIEF_Feedback-for-Teachers.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “High-Quality Professional Development for Teachers” by Jenny DeMonte, July 2013, a policy brief from The Center for American Progress. <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/DeMonteLearning4Teachers-1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/leadership_360/2014/02/feedback_as_professional_development.htmln> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)