Giving Feedback

On the March 18th **Time Ideas** blog, I found an interesting article by Annie Murphy Paul titled, **Four Ways to Give Good Feedback**. Paul poses that how we offer feedback can really make a difference. I've added my comments considering teachers' application with students and administrators' and instructional coaches' use with staff.

I've grouped Paul's first and third guidelines together:

1. Supply information about what the learner is doing, rather than simply praise or criticism.

3. Orient feedback around goals.

Paul cites John Hattie and Helen Timperly in "**The Power of Feedback**". (Entire article available here.) *"Feedback is most effective when it provides information on exactly what the learner is doing right, and on what he or she is doing differently (and more successfully) than in previous attempts. Three questions that feedback can help answer: "Where am I going?" (That is: What is my goal?) "How am I going?" (That is: What progress is being made toward my goal?) and lastly, "Where to next?" (That is: What actions must be taken to make further progress?)"*

Teachers: I've become increasingly convinced that most classrooms need clearer goals for students to understand why their effort is needed and worth the cost that effort requires. While many classrooms post learning objectives or "I can statements," I sense they are frequently unclear or unimportant to the learners. I find students setting goals to raise their scores yet they can't describe what the work/product would look like that would earn the desired score. I believe clearer goals might drive more specific feedback from teachers and perhaps cause students to question

the feedback they receive assisting the teacher in sharpening the helpfulness of the feedback.

Coaches: A key element of coaching pre-conferences should be clarifying of the goal the teacher is looking to reach. The observation can produce feedback on current student behaviors and their alignment with the teachers' desired learning outcomes. Feedback can also inform the teacher on his/her actions and their impact on students. This feedback might provide information of which the teacher was unaware. Often teachers' initial changes are not evident in positive student responses. The coach's feedback is vital here as reinforcement to the teacher. A coach catching and sharing the first glimpses of desired change in students supports the teacher's effort.

2. **Take care in how you present feedback.**

Paul cites Edward Deci, who identified several conditions under which feedback may actually reduce learners' motivation:

When learners sense that their performance is being too closely monitored, for example, they may disengage from learning out of feelings of nervousness or self-consciousness.

Learners can interpret feedback as an attempt to control them.

Feedback can reduce learners' engagement if it creates an uncomfortable sense of competition.

Teachers: I believe the more the student "owns" the goal the less negative impact these concerns pose. As schools we have been guilty of controlling with feedback more than empowering. Grades and points often are used to give feedback on how closely the student's behavior aligns with the teachers' desired management rather than the student's goal. I often struggle with the best ways to provide feedback during group work as I find my observing presence can stifle the conversations of the students. Students providing growth

oriented feedback to each other can ease some of the sense of competition. Connecting individual goals to team goals is a strategy I've seen teachers use to counter competition.

Coaches: As I read Paul's review of Deci's concerns, I thought about teachers' comments about "walkthroughs." While many administrators describe it as a coaching activity, teachers often describe it as supervision. "Feedback to control me more than to support me." I've seen that view change when teachers are involved in creating a walkthrough focus with their particular goal in mind. The math department wants observers to note student voice in math classrooms or the third grade teachers want input on students' independent reading while the teacher has guided groups. Peer coaching among PLC members can provide non-threatening feedback.

4.**Use feedback to build metacognitive skills.** (The ultimate goal of feedback, in other words, should be to teach learners how to give feedback to themselves.)

Teachers: As students have understanding and practice with rubrics they develop the ability to provide their own feedback. The ability to assess one's own work builds empowerment.

Coaches: Quality Coaching tends to extend beyond the actual time spent with a coach. A coach's questions and feedback tend to be pondered during the planning, execution, and reflection of lessons for days and even weeks afterwards.