INSTRUCTIONAL FEEDBACK

Introduction

Instructional feedback is a low-intensity strategy for providing precise information to students about academic, social, and behavioral performance with the purpose of clarifying misunderstandings, confirming concepts, fine-tuning understandings, and restructuring current schemas (Butler & Winne, 1995). Instructional feedback is used after students have a beginning understanding and are working toward mastery, with the purpose of helping students get from their current level of performance to the expected level of performance. Students must have an opportunity to practice what is learned from the feedback and apply it to a particular assignment or behavior.

As an illustration, picture a teacher presenting a new concept to the whole class. She provides an anticipatory set activating prior knowledge, states the learning objectives, introduces the concept, models it, checks for understanding, does some guided practice, and provides clear directions for independent practice so students can increase fluency with the new concept. These students will need immediate feedback as they begin independent work, feedback that will confirm what they are doing is correct and encourage them to continue and try harder concepts, and/or feedback that will fine-tune their understanding and correct mistakes before incorrect procedures and habits are solidified. The teacher provides this instructional feedback while actively supervising independent work (as opposed to on a final assessment), facilitating high levels of accuracy.

In principle, instructional feedback should focus on the process and not necessarily the product. When an error is detected by the teacher, she should find a small success to praise and then remind the student to use the process taught. For example, "Kathy, I like how you are keeping your decimals aligned as you work this problem. Now, please write the mnemonic for the process we learned today, and cross off each step as you go. This will help ensure you keep the steps in order." Then the student is given time to process this feedback and practice more, with the teacher ready to provide additional instructional feedback. "Kathy, good work using the mnemonic, it helped you solve the problems correctly by yourself." Kathy's misunderstanding was clarified by directing her back to the support process where she could be independently successful. She is praised for her effort, not just for getting the answer right.