



Feedback that Feeds

Connecting What We Think and What We Say

Peggy D. Bennett, Ph.D.
Oberlin College Conservatory of Music
peggy.bennett@oberlin.edu

- How can we accept and deliver criticism in ways that intend to “do no harm?”
- When we know how to offer “feedback that feeds,” we choose comments that help a child, parent, administrator, or co-worker grow rather than wither.
- And, when we understand how to speak with peaceful yet powerful messages, we offer our selves and others healthy ways to build social integrity and personal authenticity.

A Teacher's Creed

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Nonmaleficence | Do no harm |
| 2. Beneficence | Do good |
| 3. Autonomy | Promote self-determination |
| 4. Justice | Promote just, fair treatment |

(Kitchener, 1984)

5 Ways to Offer Feedback That Feeds

1. Be willing to reframe how we see others' behaviors
2. Become a beneficent observer
3. Shift feedback to observations and conversational comments, rather than compliments or criticisms
4. Be impeccable with our words
5. Speak assertively with peacefulness and powerfulness

7 Perils of Praise

1. Habitual, empty responses
2. Embarrassment
3. A sense of superiority
4. A sense of inferiority
5. Competition (structural, intentional)
6. Misplaced “pleasing” of the teacher
7. Rankism

“Knowledge does not make one good. The lack of it does not make one bad.” (Charles, 1985, p. 55)

“Not wanting to appear to be a ‘teacher’s pet’ may cause some students to disobey or misbehave to counteract the risk of being embarrassed by praise in front of their classmates.” (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, p. 196)

5 Examples of a Shift in Feedback

Perilous Praise	Problem	Constructive Information
"I like the way..."	Focus on teacher approval	"Tina is sitting tall, ready to listen." "I hear singers singing all the words!"
"What a smart boy you are!" "You are such a good girl!"	Focus on students' knowledge, ability, or character	"You sure were thinking!" "Your behavior is helping us study."
"Very good!" "Much better." "Excellent!"	Unfocused, automatic responses carry little meaning or information	"Your voice sounded so clear and light that time." "We could hear every sound of every word when you clapped the rhythm."

(Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, p. 199)

"We can show interest in students without an evaluation or judgment. We can describe behavior and performance with a neutral tone. We can encourage without causing self-consciousness and without statements whose veracity may be in question. We can evaluate without causing undue embarrassment or disappointment, and evaluate in such a way that students become more aware of our expectations and their own achievement. We can avoid overuse and misuse of praise by expanding our repertory of verbal responses. (Bartholomew, 1993, p. 43)

"In place of flattery, we can provide information. In place of insincerity, we can give encouragement. In place of manipulation, we can nurture the seeds of independence and initiative." (Bennett & Bartholomew, 1997, p. 200)

References

- Bartholomew, Douglas R. (1993). Effective strategies for praising students. *Music Educators Journal*, 80(3), 40-43.
- Bennett, Peggy D. (1988). The perils and profits of praise. *Music Educators Journal*, 75(1), 22-24.
- Bennett, Peggy D. & Bartholomew, Douglas R. (1997). *SongWorks 1: Singing in the education of children*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Charles, C. M. (1985). *Building classroom discipline: From models to practice*. New York: Longman.
- Harmin, M. (1994). *Inspiring active learning: A handbook for teachers*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Kitchener, K.S. (1984). Intuition, critical evaluation and ethics principles: The foundation for ethical decisions in counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 12(3), 43-55.
- Lama, Dalai (1998). *The art of happiness*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Ruiz, Don Miguel (1997). *The four agreements*. San Rafael, CA: Amber-Allen Publishing.
- Rusk, Thomas. (1993). *The power of ethical persuasion*. New York: Penguin Books.

Peggy D. Bennett is a certified mediator and certified life coach.

<http://peggydbennett.com>

<http://www.oberlin.edu/library/digital/songworks/index.html>

<http://musicadventures.org>